

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences
Archaeology and Ethnography Institute

DETAILED SCIENTIFIC REPORT

**Excavation of early Bronze Age Soyuqbulaq II
kurgan KP 409.3 SCPX pipeline**

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1 SUMMARY

The report provides information regarding the outcome of archaeological excavations carried out July 17-26, 2017 in the kurgan dating to the early Bronze Age, located in Soyuqbulaq village of Aghstafa district at KP 409.33 of the SCPX gas export pipeline corridor. The structure of this kurgan-type monument, the discovered archaeological samples, burial traditions and other issues were studied as a result of the excavations. Researchers established that a single body was buried in the kurgan. The structure of the burial chamber, the finds and radio-carbon tests revealed that the kurgan back to the early Bronze Age (the late 4th millennium – early 3rd millennium BCE).

Finds of worked stone also indicate a much earlier occupation on this terrace of the Acheulian Palaeolithic period.

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2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 SITE DISCOVERY

The Soyuqbulaq kurgan located at KP 409.33 of the SCPX route, was discovered on June 15, 2017 by S. Najafov, the supervising monitor for Cultural Heritage, during the inspection of the scraping of the upper fertile layer of soil in the pipeline corridor. The territory was encircled by a fence sized 7x7m. On June 17, 2017, the area was examined by S. Najafov and James Gallison, an archaeologist invited by BP. The territory was regarded as a zone under archaeological risk and the operation of machinery there was forbidden. Initially, the Soyuqbulaq kurgan was registered and listed among the monuments in the SCPX corridor where archaeological excavations would be carried out in compliance with the agreement reached by the IoAE and BP (SCPX).

2.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The Soyuqbulaq kurgan dating to the early Bronze Age is located at the N-8523826; E-4576645 coordinates in the territory of the Aghstafa district east of the Soyuqbulaq village at KP 409.33 of the SCPX route. As for the relief, this is a plain area that has been used for sowing for many years.

2.3 TIMING OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

An archaeological expedition group of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Azerbaijan National Sciences Academy carried out excavations in the Soyuqbulaq kurgan July 17-26, 2017, overseen by PhD in History, Prof. Najaf Museyibli, with the participation of the Institute's employees, PhD in History, senior research fellow Dmitry Kirichenko and senior laboratory assistant Seymur Farmanli. An archaeologist representing BP (SCPX) contributed to the excavation work as an observer.

3 RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

3.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The Soyuqbulaq kurgan is located in the territory of Aghstafa district east of Soyuqbulaq village at KP 409.33 of the SCPX route. This is a plain area, which has been used for sowing for many years. The upper layer of the entire area of the pipeline corridor was scraped and removed due operation of machinery when the monument was discovered. No other kurgans or archaeological monuments were encountered while the surrounding area was being examined, which indicates that there was no intensive habitation in this territory during the early Bronze Age.

3.2 OUTCOME OF EXCAVATIONS

As a 30-40cm thick layer of soil was removed by pipeline construction machinery during discovery, no information is available regarding the initial diameter of the kurgan cover. The dimensions of the cover's remaining square-shaped section equalled 7.8m north to south and 9m east to west, the height of the remaining part is 50cm. The kurgan cover was comprised of densely piled river rocks. A scraper-type tool of a red coloured stone (Inv 1) was found amid the covering rocks during the examination of the monument conducted by S. Najafov. This is of Palaeolithic age.

The excavation work began by dividing the kurgan cover into east and west sections with a 50cm wide stratigraphical wall running north to south. Furthermore, stones in each of the sections were cleaned in parts and removed. The stones in the east section were relatively sparse. Obsidian splinters were found in the central part at a depth of 10-15cm.

In the west section, burnt furnace remains sized 60x60cm were discovered in the south while the stones in the upper layer were being cleaned. The burnt layer was not thick and the fire evidently did not linger on for a long time. There is no proof that the firing activity in this area occurred at the same time as the construction of the kurgan cover.

A manual hatchet (Inv 2), was found amidst the cover rocks in the north part of the west section. In addition, two chopper-type tools made of river rocks (Inv 3, 4) were discovered in the middle section of the kurgan cover. These objects can be identified to the Acheulian period of the Palaeolithic Age.

These working tools of Palaeolithic date appear to have been thrown into the kurgan cover alongside other stones. Most likely, there were remains of an open-type Palaeolithic-era camp in that surrounding area. However, it was impossible to trace any signs of such a camp following disturbance from agricultural cultivation and pipeline construction.

In general, open-type Palaeolithic-era camps are characteristic of Azerbaijan's western regions, in particular, the Aghstafa district, they are also known in areas further to the west in Georgia.

Pottery vessel sherds were found at a depth of 10-15cm at the south edge of the west section. The crumbled quickly due to sand admixture in the clay composition. The outside surface of these fragmented pottery items is red-pink, while the inside surface is pitch black. Several obsidian splinters were discovered at the same depth in the west part of this section.

Traces of a burial chamber began to appear after a 15-20cm thick upper layer of stones was removed from the west section's kurgan cover. A pile of fine, soft soil amid the river rocks in this area was dark and differed from the surrounding hard and light coloured soil. The chamber, which was orientated in the northeast to southwest direction, was sized 3.8x2m at this depth. The chamber was surrounded by dark gravelly soil, while on the inside it was full of large rocks and had soft soil.

A pottery vessel that was broken into pieces was found at the southern corner of the burial chamber at the same level with the ancient area surface after the remaining 50cm high section of the kurgan cover was removed. The area around the vessel was reinforced with rocks. The black-red coloured vessel had sand admixture in the clay composition. It broke apart easily since it was slightly baked (Photo 3).

Dimensions of the burial chamber were successfully estimated after it was cleaned up completely. The chamber was 2.85m long and 2.2m wide. There is an entrance to the chamber, i.e. a "dromos", from the southwest direction. The dromos, which is 1.3m wide, stretched 90cm toward the burial chamber. The chamber's depth is 1.2m.

A human body was found at this depth in the chamber's northeast part. The body was laid down on the left side, with the head slanted southward, while the arms and legs were folded (Photo 4).

A bronze knife (or a small dagger) type tool (Inv 10) was found alongside the skeleton, in addition to three thin crescent-shaped items made of a bronze wire (perhaps, these served as embroidery for clothes or ornaments) (Inv 11). Ochre was found in the south corner on the chamber's floor.

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

Stone: Stone samples include obsidian items and Palaeolithic Age tools discovered in the kurgan cover.

Ceramics: A fragmented vessel was the only pottery found in the area. The vessel's outside surface was black, while the inside surface was red. Since the vessel was baked at unstable temperature, the colour of its cylindrical neck's outer surface is light brown. The edge of the vessel's rim slightly curves outward.

Metal items: Such samples include a knife-type tool and three little crescent-shaped items made of a thin wire.

4.1 SUMMARY OF TYPES AND NUMBER OF ARTEFACTS

The archaeological finds discovered in the Soyuqbulaq kurgan of the early Bronze Age could be attributed to the following types:

working tools: these include tools made of stones of different types and obsidian, as well as a bronze knife. The latter could have been used as a weapon as well.

household items: these include one fragmented clay vessel.

4.2 DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC ARTEFACTS

The bronze knife (Inv 10) found during the archaeological excavations is one of the rare finds for the historical period in question. The item, made using a thin bronze strip was narrowed down on both sides. The knife could have been used both in the household and as a weapon in battles.

4.3 RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE EXCAVATION

The structure of the Soyuqbulaq kurgan of the early Bronze Age, the features of the discovered archaeological samples and burial customs were determined during the excavations. The kurgan cover was comprised of piled stones. The burial chamber has a structure that is typical for that period. Thus, the burial chamber has a dromos, which is a traditional entrance on one side.

5 ANALYTICAL RESULTS

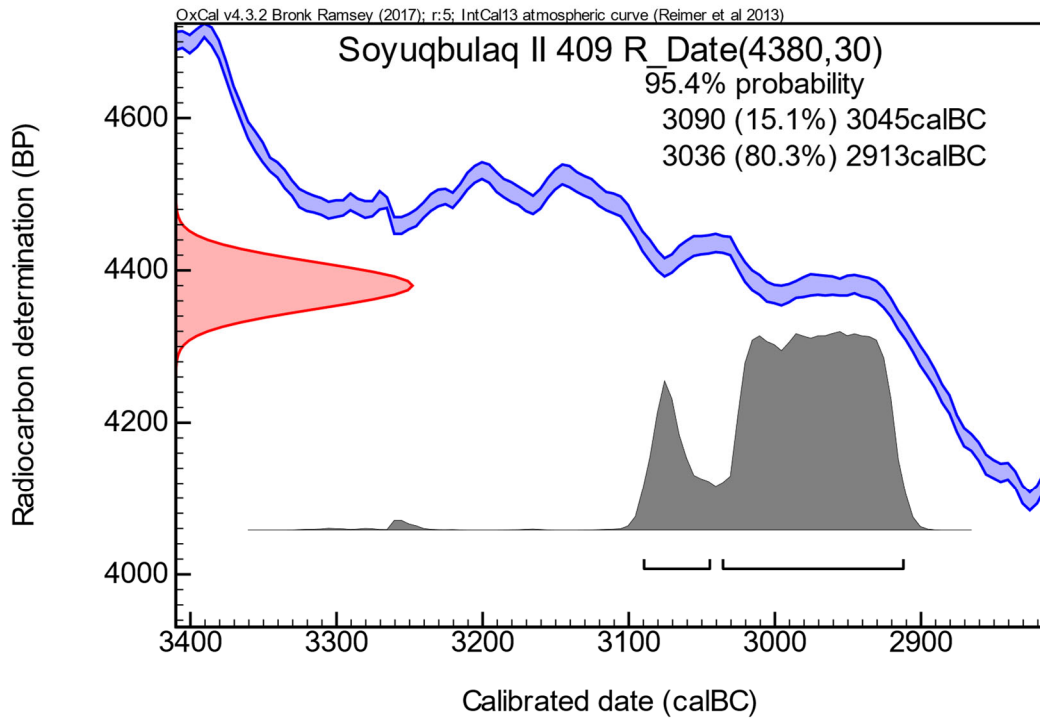
The excavation of the Soyuqbulaq kurgan were successfully completed. As a result of the excavations scientific information was collected as much as possible concerning this monument, the relevant historical period, archaeological materials and burial customs. The conducted research allows obtaining certain data about the burial traditions observed by the region's residents in the beginning of the Bronze Age.

5.1 PERIOD AND CHRONOLOGY

The chronology of the Soyuqbulaq kurgan of the early Bronze Age was defined using both the archaeological and radio-carbon methods. Thus, large burial chambers with a dromos started to become widespread in the region in the beginning of the Bronze Age. The archaeological materials, including pottery and the mentioned bronze knife, which were found in the burial chamber, are characteristic of this period.

A radio-carbon test conducted upon a tooth derived from the human skeleton found during the excavation indicated that the item dates to the late 4th millennium and the early 3rd millennium BCE, which complied with the historical peculiarities of the archaeological samples found in the burial chamber.

The sample radiocarbon determination is 4380 +/- 30 BP (Beta 483546). This is calibrated using the Oxcal programme as 3036 to 2913 calBC.



6 DISCUSSION

6.1 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The archaeological excavations conducted on the site of a ditch to be drilled for the pipeline in the future were designated for rescue purposes. The kurgan was located entirely in the pipeline corridor and was therefore excavated completely. Comprehensive information was obtained regarding the kurgan structure as a result of the excavations. Although an insignificant number of archaeological samples were found during the excavations, the finds allowed scholars to make certain scientific conclusions.

7 APPENDICES

7.1 INVENTORY

No.	Description
1	High two-sided scraper of red flint-stone. Photo 8.
2	Hatchet of an andesite-type rock. Photo 6.
3	Chopper of a river rock. Photo 5.
4	Semi-circular chopper of river rock. Photo 7.
5	Board-shaped knife-like tool of flint-stone. Photo 11.
6	Small plate of a river rock with one barbed edge.
7	Flat nucleus remainder of obsidian. Photo 12.
8	Four obsidian splinters. Their barbed edges were used as tools. Photo 12.
9	Fragmented ceramic vessel. Its colour is black on the outside and red on the inside.
10	Knife-like tool of bronze. Photo 9.
11	Three crescent-shaped items made of a thin bronze wire. Photo 10.

7.2 REFERENCES

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7.3 PHOTOGRAPHS



Photo 1. Condition of kurgan prior to excavations. View to south.



Photo 2. Half section excavation of kurgan cover. View to northwest.



Photo 3. Kurgan chamber. View to east.



Photo 4. Burial in base of burial chamber. View to southeast.



Photo 6. Stone tool. Palaeolithic Age. Inv 2



Photo 5. Stone tool. Palaeolithic Age. Inv 3



Photo 8. Stone tool. Palaeolithic Age. Inv 1.



Photo 7. Stone tool. Palaeolithic Age. Inv 4



Photo 9. Bronze dagger. Inv 10.



Photo 10. Bronze items. Inv 11.



Photo 11. Tool made of flint-stone. Inv 5.



Photo 12. Tools made of obsidian. Inv 7 and 8.