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**Zayamchay Report
On Excavations of a Catacomb Burial
At Kilometre Point 355 of
Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and South Caucasus pipelines Right Of Way**

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ABSTRACT

This Report describes excavations of a catacomb-type burial located at Kilometre Point (KP) 355 of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Right Of Way (ROW). Excavations revealed that the burial was robbed and grave goods were stolen by thieves in ancient times. The finds recovered from around the catacomb burial consist of pottery shards and worked stone objects. The pottery is of early Iron Age date 9th century, B.C. However this cannot be considered as reliable dating evidence as pottery shards could be brought in from a settlement site located nearby. So the date of the catacomb burial remains unknown.

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I. Introduction

- ***Description of the BTC and SCP Archaeology Programme***

Archaeological excavations in connection with the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) pipelines were conducted prior to, and during the construction of these pipelines. These excavations generally were carried out within the 44m wide pipeline corridor from 2001 to 2005. The archaeology programme consisted of five phases of which the first four phases constituted field investigations:

Phase I – actual and potential archaeological sites were visually identified during walkover or baseline surveys during the selection of the pipeline route.

Phase II – the sites that were identified during Phase I as archaeologically potential were tested by digging test pits and conducting small-scale trial excavations.

Phase III – small and large-scale excavations were carried out within the BTC ROW.

Phase IV – small and large-scale excavations were carried out within the SCP ROW.

In addition to these, all the construction activities were monitored by watching brief archaeologists.

In general, during the core Phase III and Phase IV archaeological excavations were carried out at 40 sites with thousands of artefacts discovered. None of these sites had been previously known to archaeological science.

Phase V – preparation of scientific reports on the archaeological excavations carried out during the previous phases.

- ***Discovery of the Site***

The site was located at KP 355 of the BTC ROW and represented a low mound overgrown with weeds. Phase I visual survey did not reveal the presence of any cultural material on the mound. However the site was included in the list of potential archaeological sites to be tested by small-scale excavations.

During Phase II a small test pit of 1m by 1m on one side of the mound was opened up. The test pit was easily dug in the soft soil which indicated that the mound was artificial. At a depth of 60-70cm small pottery shards were seen. This material was of late Bronze-early Iron Age date. It was assumed the site was possibly a kurgan burial and a decision was made to carry out full-scale excavations during subsequent stages.

Excavations at the site were carried out between 1 August and 15 August, 2005 under the guidance of Safar Ashurov and participation of Anar Agalarov, both from the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography (IOAE). The work was supervised by the BTC archaeological representative Richard Moore.

II. Field and Office Methods

- ***Field Methods***

Excavations on the mound were initiated employing methods and techniques commonly used for kurgan excavations. The mound measuring 23m in diameter west-east and 20m in diameter north-

south was divided into four sectors and numbered clockwise beginning with Sector 1 from the north arrow.

However, in the course of excavations it became apparent that the mound was not a kurgan but represented a catacomb burial. It appeared that a kurgan mound originally erected over a catacomb grave later eroded and became almost flat under the impact of different factors.

- *Office/Laboratory Methods*

The finds recovered from the site were thoroughly processed at the BTC Ganja Guest House. Photographs of artefacts were taken and drawings were made where relevant. The plan and profile of the catacomb burial were drawn. (Plate I).

- *Archive Disposition*

All the processed pottery material was handed over to the Museum of History and Local Studies in Shamkir. The items were numbered and labelled with indications of the site name, year of excavation and inventory number of the find. Currently the pottery finds are on permanent display in the museum.

III. Excavation Results

- *Site Description*

The burial site is located between Bayramli and Duyarli villages at KP 355 of the BTC ROW at the following coordinates: E8575328; N4533481. An old settlement site called ‘Sari Reme’ or ‘Yatag Remesi’ of late Bronze Age to early Iron Age date lies in close proximity to the north of the burial. Between the burial and this settlement site there is a wide and deep dried-up river bed. Cultural deposits are clearly seen in some sections of the river bed ravine walls. A large area, approximately 500m to the west towards the Zayamchai River is occupied by the Bronze Age cemetery of Zayamchai excavated in 2003 as part of the BTC project. Antique Period pottery is encountered in some places on the north-east of the burial site. This allows presupposing the presence of Antique Period burials in the area some of which have been destroyed during construction of water canals and other engineering facilities. A trackway and a water ditch run parallel to the south of the site. Beyond the trackway and ditch is a large and flat arable land. The site and surrounding ground is overgrown with weeds.

- *Description of the Grave*

The 15-20cm topsoil layer at the excavation site had already been stripped by machines during site preparation for pipelines construction (Photo 1). The upper soil layers of the site were easily dug and contained occasional pottery shards and charcoal. At 40cm depth a wide strip of river deposits were exposed in Sectors 2, 3 and 4 suggesting this was a former river bed.

The soil in Sector I was soft and easy to dig and appeared to be made-up ground. A pit-like structure was exposed at a depth of 30cm in this sector. The top of the feature measured 1.25m in diameter. The pit-like structure was constructed of 30cm thick mud walls. Because of intensive heat the interior of the structure was fire-reddened (Photo 2). There were small chunks of plaster inside the feature. Further cleaning revealed varied pottery pieces and fragments of stone tools (Photo 3). The majority of the pottery was mouth fragments of large storage jars.

Below a depth of 35cm the ground was more easily dug. The loose, ash- and charcoal-rich soil layer contained only small pieces of animal bone. When the pit-like feature was deepened to 55-60cm, excavation revealed a 40cm diameter opening (dromos) blocked up with two stones from the pit side (Photo 4). The dromos fill consisted of a layer of burnt soil. When this soil was carefully removed it turned out that the dromos extended 80cm in a slightly slanting north-east direction and ended in a burial pit. The burial pit was at 40cm depth from the bottom of the pit-

like structure and measured 1.7m in length by 1.5m in width. The burial pit was also constructed of clay and heavily fire-affected. The pit fill contained burnt soil and ash-rich substrate (Photo 6). A few stones were cleaned at the bottom of the burial pit. One of the stones was 53cm in length and resembled a human figure. Both the pit-like section and the burial pit itself were badly damaged by grave robbers.

It is most probable that there was a mound (kurgan) over the catacomb. However, with time the mound eroded and mixed up with the surrounding ground. Sector 2 yielded crushed remains of a complete jug in the area adjacent to the catacomb grave. The jug could possibly have belonged to the catacomb burial. Since Sectors 3 and 4 appeared to be archaeologically sterile, excavations in these sectors were stopped at 20cm depth.

This is a fairly good description of the excavation, however the interpretation over rides the objective description of the site. The fact that this could be a utilitarian furnace or kiln associated with the adjacent settlement rather than a grave is not considered. The presence of a kurgan mound is purely speculative, and it may be that a natural mound was utilised to site a kiln.

Kiln	Catacomb
Fired clay structure Openings to allow raking of the furnace Ashy deposits Typical location for a high fire risk feature outside settlement	Excavator's interpretation Known feature type in the area Evidence matches other excavated examples (some comparable examples would be good)
No waste products mentioned (were they present?) Insufficiently small rake holes Type of kiln not known (pottery, bread, metals) What are the stones filling the main pit?	No body remains No evidence of the period of construction of a grave (known examples cover Bronze Age through to late Antique period) Robbing episode could be of any date No explanation of why the dromos area should be re-formed after robbing Unusual feature in the area (more common north of Caucasus?) What are the stones filling the main pit?

• *Description of Finds*

Pottery

Fragment of a jug-type vessel with an incurving rim. The transition from neck to body is clearly felt. The area below the rim is girded with two bulgy strips. The central part of the body is banded with one bulgy strip. The shoulder and the spaces between these strips are decorated with net-shaped patterns applied by a polishing technique. The pot was thrown on a potter's wheel. (Plate II.2).

Fragment of a small bowl-type pot with a neck tapering up to the mouth. The rim is girded with a line thumbed externally. The body is slightly globular. The colour is black-brown (Plate II.1).

Fragment of a wide-mouthed bowl-type vessel with an upright neck and rim. The neck is 3cm long and decorated with two parallel thumbed lines. The colour is black (Plate II.4).

Fragment of a yellow-brown cylindrically-shaped pot tempered with coarse sand. The body widens down to the base measuring 10cm in diameter. There is a 2cm wide vertical hole in the centre (Plate II.3).

Fragment of a thick-walled (2cm) storage jar tempered with coarse sand. There is a 5cm wide knob applied to the body. The knob is decorated with deeply incised vertical lines – five lines on one the side and one on the other. The space between them is filled with X-like criss-cross lines (Plate II.8).

Mouth fragment of a grey-brown storage jar. The walls are 2cm thick. The 6.5cm thick rim is about 28cm in diameter. There are obvious traces of soot on its external surface (Plate II.7).

Fragment of a grey mud-walled storage jar. The neck is banded with a narrow and thin bulgy strip (Plate III.2).

Fragment of a grey storage jar eroded in the interior. The rim is 8cm thick; the walls are 2.5cm thick. The lower part of the neck is decorated with combed patterns (Plate III.1).

Mouth fragment of a black-brown storage jar tempered with coarse sand. Wall thickness - 2.5cm, rim thickness - 6cm. Fire-blackened (Plate III.4).

Mouth fragment of a black-brown storage jar. Wall thickness - 3cm, rim thickness - 7cm. The interior is eroded by fire. The mouth and shoulder area is decorated with combed wavelike patterns (Plate III.3).

Rim fragment of a grey, thick-walled jug-type vessel. The pot tempered with sand was well fired. The shoulder is decorated with horizontal notches. Appears to have been thrown on a potter's wheel.

Fragment of a brown, well-fired jug-type pot tempered with sand and grit. The pot had a wide body, narrow neck and slightly bulging everted rim.

Fragment of a well-fired, thick-walled jug-type pot tempered with sand and grit. The rim is upright and slightly outcurving. The shoulder is decorated with a notched pattern. The surface is soot-blackened. Thrown on a potter's wheel.

Fragment of a well-fired, thick-walled jug-type pot tempered with sand and grit. The rim is slightly bulgy and outcurving. The surface is soot-blackened. Thrown on a potter's wheel.

Base fragment of a black, well fired, thick-walled ceramic pot. The base diameter is about 11cm.

Fragment of a chestnut-brown, thick-walled ceramic object made of high quality clay tempered with sand and grit. The surface is combed with a wide-toothed potter's comb. The small size of the fragment did not give any clue as to the function of the object.

Fragment of a wheel-thrown, thick-walled, sand-tempered pot with a narrow and long neck and everted rim. The pot had a flat ribbon-shaped handle on either side of the shoulder. There is a through hole drilled close to the handle juncture.

Stone Objects

Elongated-shaped object chipped out of white limestone. The tip is broken. There is a half-drilled cone-shaped hole on one side of the stone. Length - 4cm, width - 2.5cm, thickness in the centre - 2cm (Plate II.6).

Elongated-shaped object made of white river-washed stone. The object has a through hole, probably for suspension. Length - 7cm, width - 3cm, thickness in the centre - 1.6cm (Plate II.5).

Pestle made of a river stone, half-broken. One end is flat with clear pounding marks. Length - 10cm, diameter at the break - 6.5cm (Plate III.5).

Quern made of black river-washed stone. The lower part and one end are broken. The surface is flat. Length - 40cm, width - 21cm, thickness - 7.5cm (Plate III.6).

Two fragments of a boat-shaped quern made of a light grey white stone. Length - 36cm, width - 21cm, thickness - 7.5cm (Plate III.7).

Padstone made of thick elongated-shaped limestone. There are three depressed cavities on the flat side, two are shallow, the one in the centre is deep (Photo 9).

Elongated-shaped padstone chipped out of red limestone. There is a deep circular hollow in the centre of the flat side. Diameter of the hollow - 10cm, depth - 5.3cm (Photo 10).

Kiln-shaped counterweight made of white limestone. The object measuring 2.5cm in diameter has an 8mm suspension orifice in the centre.

IV. Analytical Results

- ***Interpretation of Excavation Results***

Catacomb graves as a type are little understood in Azerbaijan. Burials of this type were frequently recorded during excavations at the Mingechevir settlement site. Those graves date to the 2nd century, A.D. Unlike Azerbaijan many such graves were excavated and studied in neighbouring Dagestan. The earliest catacomb burials excavated in Dagestan are of Bronze Age date (first half of the 3rd millennium, B.C.). Catacomb burials have also been excavated in current Western Azerbaijan and these were dated to the late 2nd - early 1st millennium, B.C.

To date, there is no consensus among investigators with regard to the origin of catacomb graves. A group of researchers relate this phenomenon to the tribes of south-eastern Europe; another group of researchers assert that the appearance of catacomb graves in the Caucasus was caused by the migration to the Caucasus of tribes from Mesopotamia and Anatolia. In order to accept the latter assumption the presence of much earlier catacomb graves in Azerbaijan should be verified. So far, however, no catacomb graves similar in date and grave goods to those unearthed in Dagestan and areas north of it have been discovered in Azerbaijan. Those researchers who assert that the structure of catacomb graves resembles the structure of ancient dwelling houses are possibly making a correct assumption. Catacomb graves seem to replicate the shape of circular domed houses with attached rectangular support structures commonly constructed in the early Bronze Age period.

- ***Dating***

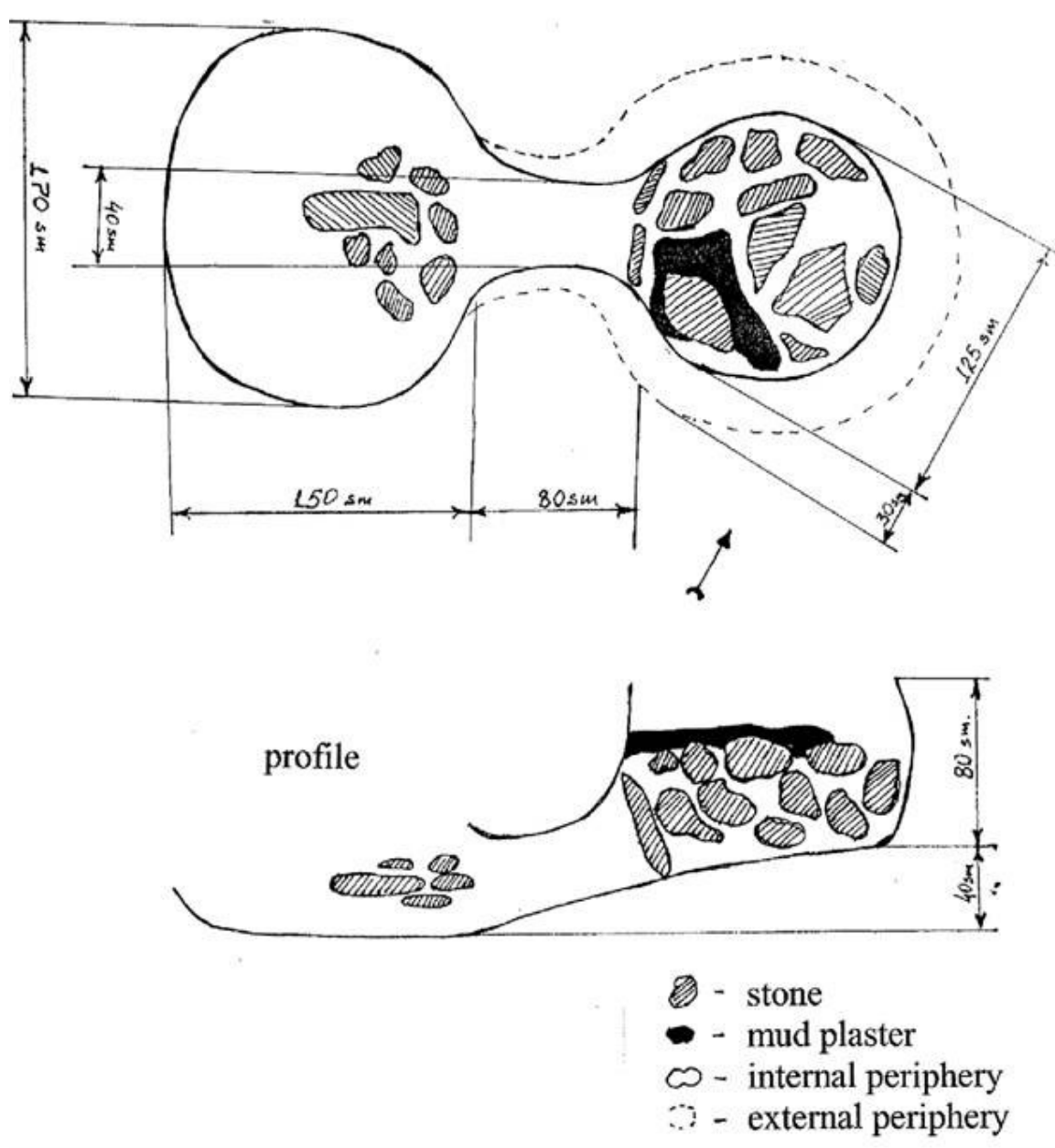
Since the catacomb grave was badly damaged and exposed to robbery at some point in time it is very difficult to draw any definite conclusions about its date and provenance. Small quantities of pottery recovered from around the catacomb burial are dated to the early Iron Age, i.e. 9th century, B.C. However this cannot be considered as reliable dating evidence as pottery sherds could be brought in from a settlement site located nearby.

- ***Recommendations Regarding the Protection of the Site or Future Research***

Visual inspection of the surrounding land identified several locations that could possibly represent catacomb graves. Future large-scale excavations in the area will no doubt enable scholars to voice more precise scientific opinions about the nature and date of these burials.

V. Illustrations

Plate I



KP 355. Site Plan.



Photo 1. View of the excavation site.



Photo 2. View of the top of the catacomb burial.



Photo 3. View of the catacomb pit section.



Photo 4. View of the opening to the burial pit.



Photo 5. Entrance to the burial pit.



Photo 6. Burial pit.



Photo 7. Post excavation view of the catacomb.



Photo 8. Catacomb profile.

Plate II.

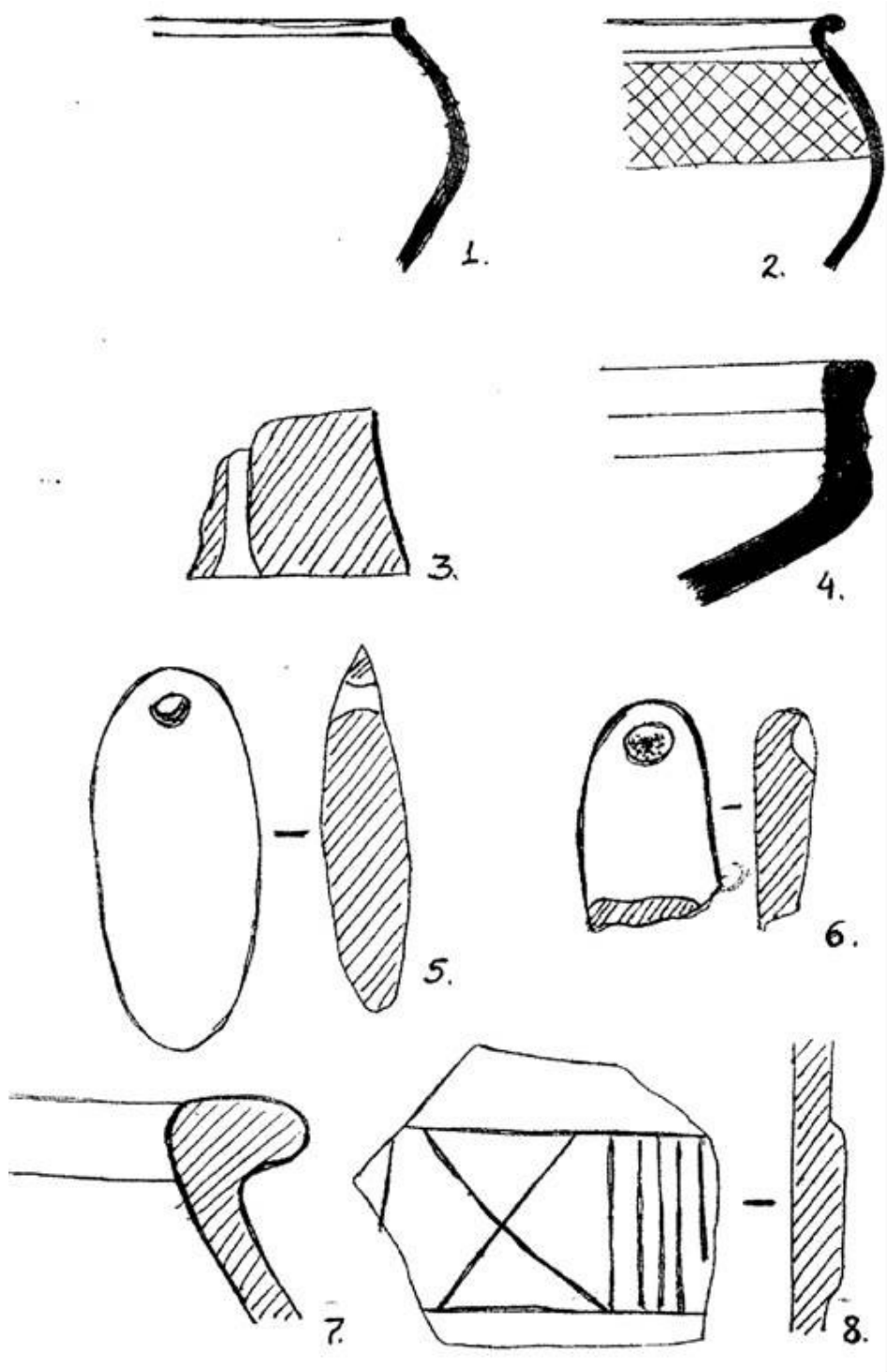


Plate III.

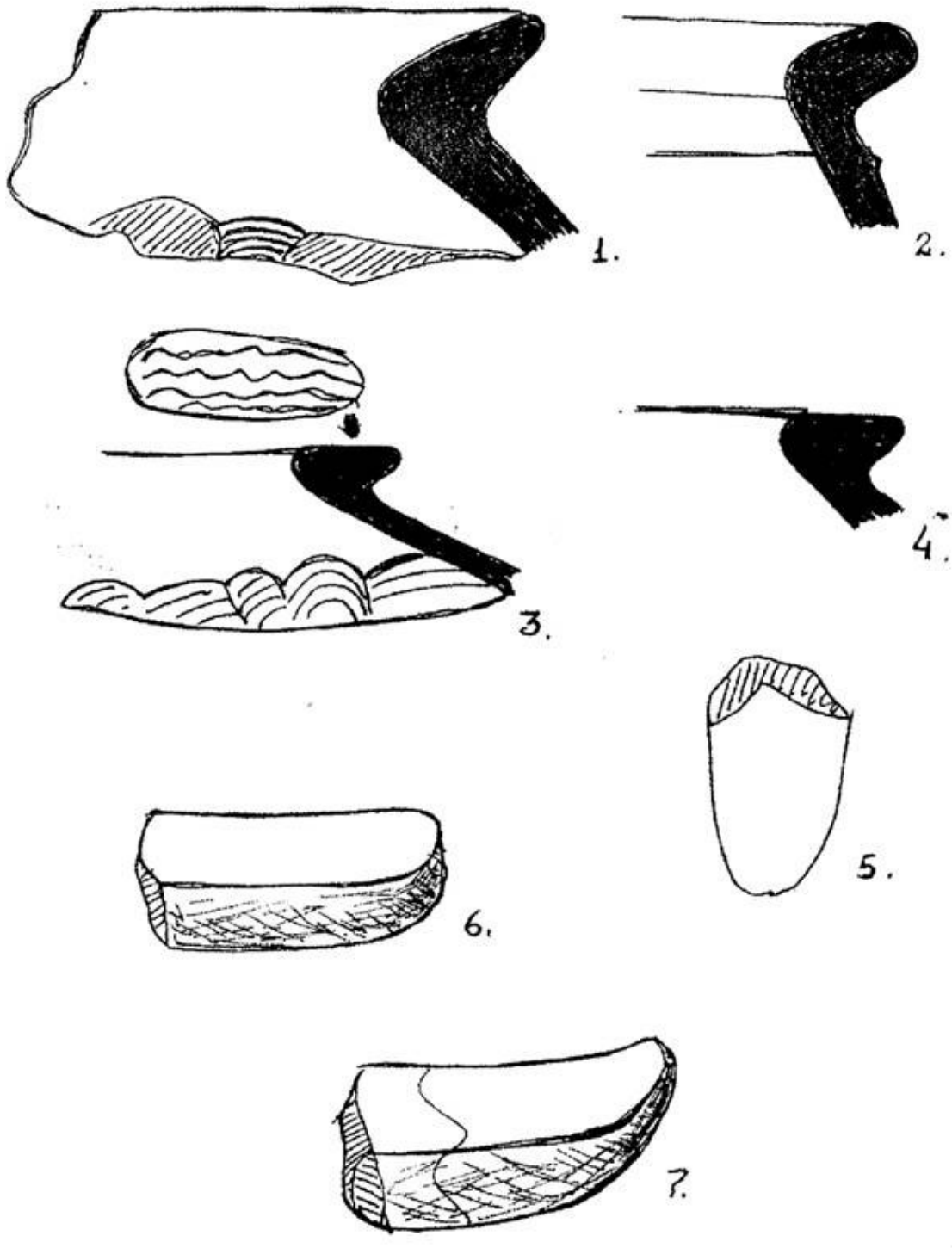




Photo 9. Padstone.



Photo 10. Padstone.

VI. Inventory of Artefacts

	KP	Type of Site	Material	Finds	Grave No.	Comment
1	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
2	355	catacomb	ceramic	bowl fragment	1	
3	355	catacomb	ceramic	kheyra fragment	1	
4	355	catacomb	ceramic	object	1	
5	355	catacomb	stone	tool	1	
6	355	catacomb	ceramic	jar fragment	1	
7	355	catacomb	stone	tool	1	
8	355	catacomb	ceramic	jar fragment	1	
9	355	catacomb	ceramic	jar fragment	1	
10	355	catacomb	ceramic	jar fragment	1	
11	355	catacomb	ceramic	jar fragment	1	
12	355	catacomb	ceramic	jar fragment	1	
13	355	catacomb	stone	pestle	1	
14	355	catacomb	stone	handstone	1	
15	355	catacomb	stone	padstone	1	2 fragments
16	355	catacomb	stone	padstone	1	
17	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
18	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
19	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
20	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
21	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
22	355	catacomb	ceramic	pot base	1	
23	355	catacomb	ceramic	object	1	
24	355	catacomb	stone	counterweight	1	
25	355	catacomb	ceramic	jug fragment	1	
26	355	catacomb	stone	quernstone	1	