

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences
Archaeology and Ethnography Institute

COMPREHENSIVE SCIENTIFIC REPORT
Excavations at Əmirarx necropolis at KP181.9 SCPX pipeline

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1 SUMMARY

The report provides information on the progress of archaeological excavations carried out between the 3rd and 7th of January, 2017, in the Əmirarx village of Aghdash district. The Əmirarx necropolis was discovered during construction works at KP181.900 of the gas export pipeline corridor of the SCPX project, as well as the revealed remains of tangible cultural heritage. Jar burials, as well as extensive burial goods, were discovered there during the archaeological excavations. Actual archaeological data that sheds light on the religious beliefs, economic activities and domestic life of the residents of this ancient settlement was obtained at the site. Analysis of the archaeological content, enabled researchers to establish that a necropolis with jar burials dating to the ancient time period existed in the area in the 2nd-1st centuries BC.

The site was identified during trench excavation to pass under the existing BTC and SCP pipelines. Initial topsoil clearance had not identified the burials due to the extreme depth (over 1 metre) of soil covering the burials. Due to the method of discovery, all the burials were damaged to some degree or other. It is possible that additional graves had been removed by mechanical excavation without being observed. The cemetery almost certainly extends beyond the excavation area.

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2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 DISCOVERY OF THE SITE

The Amirarx necropolis, located in KP181.900 on the SCPX route, was recorded during the second stage. Since the area of the monument is used for sowing crops and does not differ from the surrounding territory in terms of its relief, it is difficult to identify a necropolis there visually. Some ceramic items found above ground are the only evidence of a potential archaeological area. Initially, the Amirarx necropolis was registered in compliance with the agreement reached by the Archaeology and Ethnography Institute (AEI) and BP (SCPX) and listed among the monuments in the SCPX corridor where archaeological excavations would be carried out.

2.2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The Amirarx necropolis is located in the territory of Aghdash district at coordinates N-403254.5; E-0472266.8, about 550-600m from Amirarx village, on the left-hand, south of the Baku-Gazakh highway in KP181.900 of the SCPX route. The area has a plain relief.

2.3 TIMING OF THE EXCAVATIONS

An archaeological expedition group of the Archaeology and Ethnography Institute of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences carried out archaeological excavations at the Amirarx necropolis between the 3rd and 7th January, 2017, overseen by PhD in History, senior research fellow Vagif Asadov, with the participation of the Institute's employees, junior research associate Jeyhun Aliyev and senior laboratory assistant Farhad Farmanov. BP (SCP) Cultural Heritage Monitor Anar Aghalarzade contributed to the excavation work as an observer.

3 OUTCOME OF THE EXCAVATIONS

3.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The Amirarx necropolis is located in a plain area. The monument is located at coordinates N-403254.5; E-0472266.8. The necropolis has a general title and in terms of administrative division is part of the Amirarx village of Aghdash district. The settlement is situated about 550-600m from Amirarx village, on the left-hand side, south of the Baku-Gazakh highway in KP181.900 of the SCPX route. The area has plain relief. This plain territory has been used for sowing crops for many years.

While walking around the necropolis area and the surrounding territories it is possible to see numerous ceramics samples above ground. The tangible cultural remains discovered in the mentioned areas are mainly significant in terms of the archaeological evaluation of those areas. However, overall, these ceramics samples resemble the typical samples dating to the ancient period. Thus, the Amirarx area is generally considered as a single archaeological zone. The discovery of numerous ceramics samples of a wide variety dating

to the ancient times in this territory allows making a conclusion that life was burgeoning in these areas during that period.

The location of the settlement is very conducive for a habitat. Suitable soil reserves and sources of water for farming are available around the settlement. Perhaps animal husbandry played a major role in the farming activities of the local residents. However, the available artefacts prove that there had been very suitable conditions for sowing there as well.



Photo 2. General view of site on discovery.

3.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF DISCOVERED GRAVES

Jar burials emerged in the area during trenching operations. Unfortunately, these graves were significantly damaged due to the use of heavy machinery. Nevertheless, a decision was made to research the remains of the burials.

It is noteworthy that jar burials were one of the most widespread types of graves in Azerbaijan's territory in the researched period. During such burials large household jars were used and the body was placed inside along with grave goods. Large pottery vessels were lined up around the buried jar. Unfortunately, the area of the necropolis sustained considerable damage while the excavation area was filled with ground water, which significantly complicated researchers' efforts. However, it is beyond doubt that the burial customs were fully observed there, which was also the case in other jar burial necropoleis. Since dividing the excavation area into squares was unfeasible, the research activities were conducted on the basis of the discovered burial jars.

It is worth mentioning that graves at the Amirax necropolis were buried to a significantly greater depth, unlike the other jar burial necropoleis examined during the laying of the pipeline.

Grave 1. Fragments of a burial jar emerged at a depth of 1.8m below the ground. Most of the jar was scraped by heavy machinery. Only some of its orifice and body fragments remained undamaged. These fragments stretched over a distance of up to 1m in the north-south direction. The jar's narrow orifice was inclined westward. The finds included small vessel fragments and parts of a human arm. Another vessel's fragments and traces of burnt clay covering an area of 90x50cm were encountered 70cm west of these remains. Researchers concluded that these are parts of the same grave. There was an iron-made ingot fragment among the finds (Photo 5).

Grave 2. A household jar placed upright was discovered at a depth of 4.5m below the ground. Bones of cattle were found near the jar. The fact that the area the jar was located in was filled with ground water complicated researchers' efforts. The jar body diameter was 55cm (Photo 6).

Grave 3 This grave emerged at the depth of 3.8m. The grave was completely dilapidated. Small vessel fragments, human and animal bones were encountered along with the burial jar fragments. The diameter of the area covered by the jar pieces was 1.2m (Photo 7). Fired bricks and clay fragments mixed with coal were found to the north-east of those items, while traces of a bonfire were seen to the north-east and south (Photo 8).

It is noteworthy that coal pieces were found in almost all of the researched jar graves, which indicates that a fire was lit while performing the burial tradition. Presumably, a fire burning during the burial ceremony was to keep away the evil forces [11, p. 9].

Grave 4 Only a part of this burial jar remained intact (fragmented). It was covered by mud as its surrounding area was flooded by ground water (Photo 9). Vessel fragments and an entire pitcher were discovered in the grave.

Grave 5 This jar grave emerged at a depth of 3.8m. The grave was completely dilapidated and only fragments were found (Photo 10). Tiny bone fragments and pieces of ceramic vessels were scattered in the surrounding area (Photo 11).

Grave 6 Parts of a large household jar and other ceramic vessels were discovered at a depth of 2.1m at the edge of the excavated area. Sparsely scattered vessel fragments and parts of a human shoulder and a rib emerged as the grave was being uncovered. The items occupied an area of 1.3x0.6m (Photo 12).

In total, six dilapidated jar graves were recorded at the Amirarx necropolis. Unfortunately, it was impossible to entirely trace back the burial tradition observed at this necropolis. Analysis of material obtained from the graves and the parallels drawn lead us to a conclusion that these sites date to the 2nd-1st centuries BC.

3.3 ARTEFACTS

Ceramics A small number of pottery samples were obtained during the excavations carried out at the Amirarx jar burials. These included large ceramic vessels lined up around most of the graves, as well as fragments of small vessels placed inside the burial jars. The colour of the vessels is pink and light pink. The surfaces of some of these vessels were covered with whitish engobed coating. The clay is either clean or has fine sand admixture in its composition. Though most of the vessels were made by hand without using a potter's wheel, they are of very high quality, well baked and made in line with a refined artistic taste.

It is worth mentioning that fired bricks began to be used and roofing tiles of the ancient type began to be made in the cities of the Caucasus Albania during the researched period under the impact of the ties forged with the ancient civilization; money emulating Greek coins and

antique clay vessels started to be made as well [10]. Most likely, the vessels used while observing the burial tradition at the Amirarx necropolis were products of craftsmanship of a large city (perhaps, Samunis), located near the settlement in the necropolis area. For example, the availability of a great number of stoves dating to the same time period in Mingachevir indicates that it was one of the centres of pottery production in the Caucasus Albania [2, p. 32-33].

The ceramic vessels discovered in the excavation area are almost the same as the Beyimsarov and Yaldili materials in terms of their shape and content. These samples can be traced to the 2nd-1st centuries BC based on their typological features.

Pottery vessels and fragments played a key role among tangible cultural samples recorded during the excavations. These mainly include fragments of large household jars and medium size pitchers. The artefacts show the cuisine and domestic culture of the people who lived in that period. Most of these vessels were made very skilfully. Their surfaces were decorated with model and scratched patterns. The vessels are of good quality. The items, which are attributed to the Yaloylutepe culture, have round orifices with petals and grooves [15, 16]. This indicates the good artistic taste of the craftsmen, who mostly made them by hand.

Household jugs and pitchers As a rule, they are narrow or wide and flat (Photos 13, 14) bases, pear-shaped (15), convex (16-17) or elongated (Photo 13) bodies, narrow (Photo 16) or broad (Photos 17-18) necks transforming directly into the body (Photo 16) or a wide shoulder (Photos 17-18), as well as orifices that are bent sideways (Photos 18-20). There are often chain-like model stripes throughout the orifice area of the jugs (Figure 4; Photos 17; 21-22). An entire vessel was also found while researching the Amirarx necropolis. It was a big pear-shaped pitcher with a petaled orifice area. The front of the orifice area is depressed from the sides, forming a groove. The low neck transforms directly into the body. The body goes straight down after expanding till the middle part. There is a semi-circular handle in the back connecting the orifice area with the upper part of the body. The handle has a round cross section. The base is wide and flat. The clay composition is clean. The colour is pink. The height is 31cm, while the neck is 6.2cm high and the body diameter is 23cm (Photos 3, 23).

Metal items One iron fragment was found during the archaeological excavations.

Glassware items No glass items were discovered during the excavations.

3.4 GENERAL ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Overall, the archaeological excavations carried out in the necropolis area were partly successful. Certain information was collected during the excavations with regard to various facets of the economic life and craftsmanship of the residents of the ancient settlement, as well as their religious views.

The great number of graves found as a result of the excavations allows making certain conclusions concerning the demographic situation in the densely populated area.

4 DISCUSSION

When the outcomes of the archaeological excavations are summarized and the results of the work are further put on open discussion, the scientific views and final conclusions of the report author are grouped. These scientific results have been confirmed by the observations of other research fellows involved in the archaeological excavations.

4.1 INTERPRETATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS.

The archaeological excavations conducted on the site of a ditch to be drilled for a pipeline in the future were designated for rescue purposes. The research conducted in the excavation areas allows making a conclusion that the length of the necropolis in the pipeline corridor exceeds 80m and the archaeological excavations were probably conducted in the central and northern sections of the monument.

The jar burials, ceramic vessels, iron-made items and tools discovered at the necropolis are attributed to the 2nd-1st centuries BC based on the typological and analytical methods. Evidently, there was a rural settlement near the necropolis in the mentioned period.

5 INVENTORY

No	Type	Description	Grave	Dimensions
1	base	Base fragment of a large household jar. The base is narrow and flat. The body broadens sideway and upward from the base. The wall is thick and thickens further downward. The jar has an elongated body. The clay composition is clean. The clay colour is light pink.	Grave 1, Photo 13	base diam 22cm wall thickness-1.5-2.5
2	neck	Neck fragment of a large vessel. The orifice is broad. The orifice element is bent sideways. A chain-like model stripe extends along the orifice area. The low and broad neck smoothly transforms into the wide shoulder. Patterns of diagonal notched lines are visible on the neck. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The colour is light pink. The wall is thick.	Grave 2, Photo 17	neck h.- 5cm wall thickness -0.9cm
3	neck	Neck fragment of a medium size vessel. The orifice element was thick and bent sideways. The orifice area is flat. A chain like stripe extends beneath it. The wall is thick. The low and broad neck transforms smoothly into the wide shoulder. The clay composition is clean. The colour is pink.	Grave 3, Photo 18	neck h.-5cm wall thickness -1.7cm
4	pitcher	A large pear-like shaped pitcher. The orifice area has a petal-shaped pattern. Its front part is depressed from the sides, forming a small groove. Its low neck transforms directly into the body. The body broadens till the middle and then descends straight down. A semi-circular handle connecting the orifice area with the upper part of the body is attached on the rear side. The handle cross section is round. The base is broad and flat. The clay composition is clean. The colour is pink.	Grave 4, Figure 3, Photo 23	height-31cm neck h.-6.2cm body d.-23cm
5	neck	A large pitcher neck fragment. The orifice element bends sideways. The orifice area is flat. The neck transforms smoothly into the shoulder. The wall is thick. Below the orifice area it's girdled by a chain like stripe. The surface is slightly polished. The clay composition is clean. The colour is yellowish-pink.	Grave 5, Photo 19.	neck.h.-8cm wall thickness -1.5cm
6	rim	Rimsherd of a medium size pitcher. The rim bends sideways. A chain like model stripe extends along the orifice area. Its broad and low neck transforms smoothly into the slanting shoulder. The wall is thin. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The colour is light pink.	Grave 6, Photo 21	neck h.-2.5cm wall thickness-0.5cm
7	base	Large jug base fragment. The base is flat. The clay composition is clean. The colour is light pink.	Grave 1, Photo 14	base d.-23cm wall thickness -1cm
8	body	A large household jug body fragment. Its orifice is narrow. The orifice area is round. The orifice element transforms directly into the body. The wall is thick. The clay composition is clean. The colour is light pink.	Grave 2, Photo 15	wall thickness - 2.1cm
9	rim	A medium size pitcher's rimsherd. The orifice area is flat. A chain like stripe extends along the orifice area. Its broad and low neck transforms smoothly into the slanting shoulder. The wall is thick. The clay composition is clean. The colour is light pink.	Grave 3, Photo 22	neck th.- 3.6cm wall thickness -0.9cm
10	neck	A large vessel neck fragment. The neck transforms smoothly into the shoulder. The wall is thinning downward. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The colour is light pink.		wall thickness -1.3-2cm
11	neck	A neck fragment of a medium size vessel with a broad neck. The orifice area is broken. The neck transforms smoothly into the slanting shoulder. The wall is thick. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The colour is light pink.		wall thickness -1cm neck h.-3.8cm
12	neck	Neck fragment of a medium size pitcher with an elongated body. Its orifice is narrow. Its low neck	Grave 6,	neck h.-1. 6cm

No	Type	Description	Grave	Dimensions
		transforms directly into the body. It's roughly made. The clay composition is clean. The colour is light pink.	Photo 16	wall thickness -1cm
13	neck	Neck fragment of a medium size pitcher type vessel. The broad orifice element opens slightly sideway. The rim is flat. The low and broad neck transforms smoothly into the shoulder. The wall is thick. The surface is covered on both sides with whitish engobed coating. The clay composition is clean. The colour is pink.	Grave 6, Photo 20	neck h.-3.1cm wall thickness -1cm

6 APPENDICES

6.1 References

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6.2 ILLUSTRATIONS

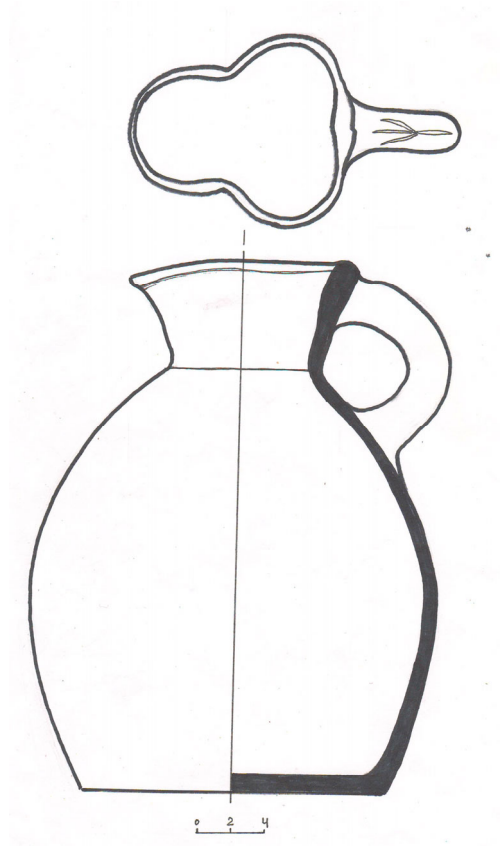


Figure 3. Pitcher with grooved orifice, Grave 4.

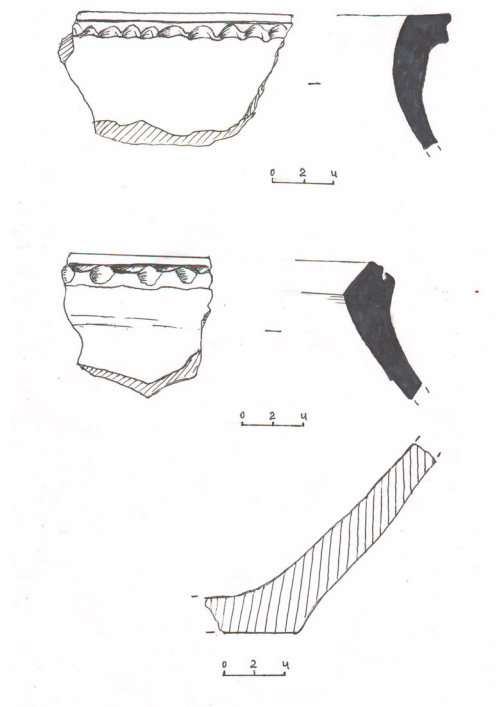


Figure 4. Fragments of jug rims.

6.3 PHOTOS



Photo 5. Jar grave 1. View to southeast.



Photo 6. Jar grave 2. View to northeast.



Photo 7. Jar grave 3. View to east.



Photo 8. Grave 3, bonfire site.

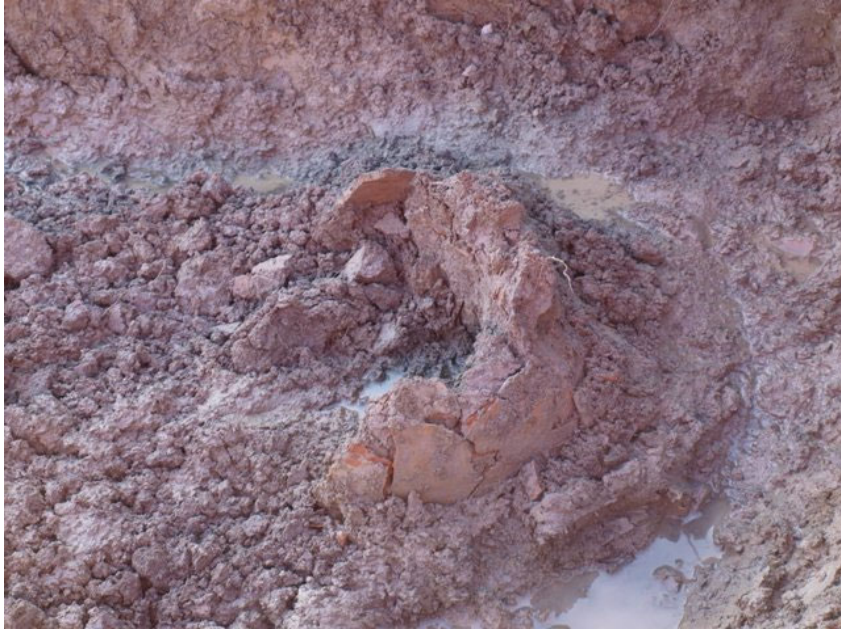


Photo 9. Jar grave 4.



Photo 10. Jar grave 5. View to southwest.



Photo 11. Ceramic vessel fragments.



Photo 12. Jar grave 6. View to north.



Photo 13. Vessel base.



Photo 14. Vessel base.



Photo 15. Fragment of vessel with pear-shaped body.



Photo 16. Fragment of vessel with elongated body.



Photo 17. Fragment of vessel with convex body.



Photo 18. Fragment of vessel with convex body.



Photo 19. Fragment of vessel with orifice bent sideways.



Photo 20. Fragment of vessel with orifice bent sideways.



Photo 21. Fragment of vessel with patterned orifice area.



Photo 22. Fragment of vessel with patterned orifice area.



Photo 23. Pitcher with petaled orifice.