

**Azerbaijan National Sciences Academy
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography**

**COMPREHENSIVE SCIENTIFIC REPORT
Excavations in Gazyan necropolis at KP 149.8 SCPX pipeline**

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1 Summary

The report provides information on the archaeological excavation carried out on March 22-23, 2017 at the Gazyan jar burial necropolis, which was discovered in Ujar district Gazyan village at KP 149.840 of the gas export pipeline corridor of the SCPX project. Jar graves and ceramics samples were discovered during the archaeological excavations. Archaeological data that sheds light on the burial traditions of the residents of this ancient settlement was obtained on the site. According to the analysis of the archaeological content, it was established that the ancient necropolis dates to the period of Caucasian Albania, i.e. 2nd-1st centuries BC.

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2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Discovery of the site

The Gazyan jar grave necropolis, located at KP 149.840 of the SCPX route, was recorded during the fourth stage. One jar grave was partially damaged while digging the pipeline trench and the work was immediately suspended. Jar graves had not been discovered in this area previously during the laying of the BTC and SCP pipelines, about 30m to the north. This territory was recorded as a zone at archaeological risk after jar fragments were found in the area located at KP 149.840 of the SCPX route. The area was examined by BP Cultural Heritage representative Muzaffar Huseynov. A board with a relevant notification was installed in the area and conducting excavations was agreed upon with project staff.

2.2 Brief description of the site

The archaeological site is located about 250 metres southwest of the Ujar district's Gazyan village on the left-hand side of the Baku-Gazakh highway amidst sowing areas. The area has plain relief. Firm areas that have soil with clay composition have been used as pastures for many years [1, p. 1].

Researchers concluded that the Gazyan graves date back to the period of the Caucasian Albania. In 2017, remains of several graves were discovered during the implementation of the South Caucasus Pipeline Expansion Project and research was conducted upon two jar graves. Scientific analysis was done upon these graves and certain conclusions were made.

The Gazyan jar burial necropolis is located at the E8728231 and N44883725 coordinates, 8 metres above sea level.

2.3 Who carried out the excavations and when

The archaeological excavations were conducted in the area on March 22-23, 2017. The excavations were overseen by PhD in History Muzaffar Huseynov, a senior research fellow and BP representative for Cultural Heritage, and carried out with the participation of research fellow Jeyhun Aliyev, an ANSA IoAE employee and David Maynard, BP archaeologist.

3 OUTCOME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

3.1 General description of the site

The necropolis is situated in a plain territory with even relief. There are also relatively sloping, low hills in some areas. The territory is used as a sowing area and hayfields. Though there is no fertile black soil in the area, it has been used for sowing crops and the soil layer located at the initial depth of 30-40cm is suitable for this purpose. The latter is followed by yellow coloured soil stratum with sand and clay composition, which causes accumulation of ground water.

The Gazyan jar graves are located in an area that is part of Azerbaijan's Central Aran region. Central Aran is comprised of six administrative districts, namely, Hajigabul, Kurdamir, Ujar,

Aghdash, Mingachevir and Yevlakh. This region has had relatively favourable natural-geographic and climatic conditions for human habitats since the ancient period. It is for this reason that various historical and archaeological monuments dating back to the ancient period and the Middle Ages are located in this region. Dozens of archaeological monuments located in this region have been recorded and researched, including rural and urban residential areas and cemeteries dating back to the early Iron Age, the ancient and medieval periods.

The Yaldili jar grave necropolis located in the Yevlakh district is the most comprehensively studied monument in Central Aran traced back to the ancient times (mid-1st millennium BC-3rd century AD). A significant number of monuments attributed to the Caucasian Albania are available in the region as well.

The Gazyan jar graves were placed side up with the rim facing westward. One of the jar graves was discovered at a depth of 2 metres (Photo 1). Three ceramic vessels were found on the opposite side. The vessels were made in line with an exquisite taste. These include a big pitcher, a vase and a jar. The large pitcher's mouth was covered with a flat limestone (Photo 2). Bone fragments that belonged to an underage child were found in the jar grave. The bones were in poor condition since the grave was located in a very watery area.

Parts of another jar grave were discovered 2 metres to the west of the mentioned grave. The grave was completely damaged during the trenching operations and only certain parts of the burial jar are available (Photo 4).

According to the analysis conducted upon the archaeological materials found at both jar graves, a conclusion may be made that they date back to the latest ancient period and the archaeological samples were produced with a refined taste.

The Gazyan jar grave which is inclined in the east to west direction is comprised of a large burial jar. The burial jar was made of well-baked, red coloured clay with fine sand admixture. The rim is funnel-shaped and bent outward. This section was decorated with rather indented, simple patterns prior to baking. The jar's part extending from the rim to the section that goes into the body was damaged during the excavations carried out in the pipeline corridor. Therefore, the direction of the human skeleton and the way the dead body was buried inside the jar is not known. However, the pelvic and leg bones were intact. The length of the jar was 110cm, while the body diameter equalled 100cm and the base diameter was 30cm (Photos 1-3).

3.2 Description of the archaeological finds

Jar graves were accidentally discovered in the vicinity of the Ujar district's Gazyan village. Each of the artefacts, found at KP 149.840 during archaeological excavations conducted in the SCPX pipeline corridor, is of special importance. These vessels include a big pitcher, a vase and a jar. The remaining samples include fragments of pottery vessels. A lid, part of the burial jar was found as well. There was also a pitcher with a convex body and a narrow neck broadening toward the rim. It narrows toward the base from the convex body. The bottom of the base is flattened. It was made using clay mixed with small gravel. The jar's length was 110cm, while the body diameter equalled 100cm and the base diameter was 30cm (Photo 3).

A half-part of a burial jar lid was found as well. The round-shaped, thick walled item's surface was covered with whitish engobed coating and painted in reddish colour. There are indented, grooved lines on the surface. The lid's handle is torn off. It was made inaccurately. There is sand admixture in the clay composition. The colour is pink. The wall thickness is 2cm and the diameter is 31cm.

The rim of one of the pitchers found around the jar grave is thin walled. The neatly made, pink coloured pitcher is of high quality and has fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The height is 25cm, while the mouth diameter is 8cm, the neck diameter is 6.5cm, the body diameter is 18cm, the base diameter is 10.5cm and the wall thickness is 1cm.

Another ceramic vessel is a very refined, brown coloured vase. The vessel is of high quality and has fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The vase's wide rim has welt on the outside. There is a little auricle-shaped protrusion in the rim.

The fragments of the clay vessels clearly indicate that all of these samples were made perfectly on a potter's wheel and some of them were polished on the outside and covered with thin engobed coating. Most of the discovered fragments of pitchers, jars and boilers had a clean clay composition and thick walls, and were baked at a stable temperature.

3.3 Analysis of the results of field work

A total of 10 artefacts were found. Three of the vessels were in satisfactory condition, while the other samples were pottery fragments. All of the archaeological finds were packaged and submitted to the Archaeological Fund of the ANSA Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography where they are currently stored.

Overall, the archaeological excavations carried out in the necropolis area were very successful. Valuable information concerning different facets of the spiritual culture of the residents of this ancient settlement was collected during the excavations.

There were no above the ground signs of the burials, that emerged accidentally during soil work, in a manner similar to many others that have been discovered to date. Therefore, we may conclude that jar burials were one of the most widespread types of graves in the Azerbaijani territory in that period [6, p. 41; 4, p. 25]. It would be erroneous to say that this long-standing burial tradition (6th century BC – 8th century AD) spread to Azerbaijan from Iranian territory and thereby link this jar burial custom to Zoroastrianism, given that it was the predominant religion in Iran at the time. The tradition of burying dead bodies in jars was followed long before Zoroastrianism, from the 4th millennium BC in regions around the world, including Azerbaijan [2, p. 20-27]. This burial custom merely complied with one of the core canons of Zoroastrianism, i.e. the belief that the sacred "soil should not be polluted with a corpse", which led to the use of ceramic jars. This could be considered one of the reasons that this popular tradition took hold in the Iranian territory in that period.

Large household jars were used during burials. The dead body was placed inside along with burial equipment. The burial jars had round and thick orifices, low necks, slanting shoulders, convex bodies narrowing downward, as well as flat bases [7, p. 100]. Large pottery vessels were lined up around the jar during burials. Different foods were often put inside those vessels. Some scholars explained this practice with the belief that the spirit goes outside the burial jar from time to time to consume food [5, p. 32].

Relatively small ceramic vessels, ornaments, various weapons and other items were placed inside the burial jars as well. The bulk and variety of burial equipment changed over time. The dead were buried side up at Gazyan, just like in nearly all of the other jar grave necropoleis. Although inconsistency was frequently traced in the direction of the graves at such necropoleis, some necropoleis with graves placed in the same direction were encountered as well. This consistency is evident at the Gazyan necropolis, which is also the case at the Mingachevir jar burials.

A burial jar found at the necropolis was placed in the northeast-southwest direction. The skeleton found inside was in poor condition. However, it was presumably positioned in the same direction as the burial jar (with the head slanted toward the jar mouth and the legs inclined toward the vessel's base). Most likely, the dead body was tightly folded and buried in the jar on the left side.

It is noteworthy that pieces of charcoal were found in almost all of the researched jar graves, which indicates that a fire was lit while performing the burial tradition. According to S. Gaziyeu, a fire burning during the burial ceremony kept away the evil forces [4, p. 9]. The research conducted at the Gazyan jar graves showed that all the rules of the burial custom were followed during the burials carried out at this necropolis.

Analysis of the archaeological materials obtained at the graves, as well as the comparisons drawn and the observations regarding the burial customs conclude that these samples date back to the 2nd-1st centuries BC, i.e. the period of the Caucasian Albania.

4 ANALYTICAL RESULTS

4.1 Identifying period and chronology

The Gazyan jar burial is similar in its nature to the studied Yaldili (KP 219), Samadabad (KP 211), Nematabad (KP 213), Bayimsarov (KP 206), Ramal (KP 169) jar graves in the BTC, SCP and SCPX corridors. The research of those monuments allows us to identify the characteristic features of the region's burial traditions that existed in the ancient period. The similarity between the monuments is clearly seen both in the burial traditions revealed during the excavations and in the discovered mass pottery samples. For example, the pottery found at the Gazyan jar burial is identical to pottery from the Samadabad, Yaldili and Ramal jar graves. As for the area located outside the pipeline corridor, the ceramics items found in the Gazyan necropolis area have very similar features with the artefacts obtained during excavations conducted as part of the construction of the Mingachevir Hydro Power Plant.

The research upon the Gazyan jar burial indicated that all relevant customs were followed during burials conducted in the jar graves at this necropolis. The analysis of the archaeological materials obtained from these graves, draw parallels and observation of the burial traditions suggested that these samples date to the 2nd-1st centuries BC, i.e. the period of the Caucasian Albania.

5 DISCUSSIONS

When the outcomes of the archaeological excavations are summarized and the results of the work are further put on open discussion, the scientific stance 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 excavations.

5.1 Interpretation of excavation and office work

The Gazyan jar burial is similar to the Yaldili, Narimankand, Samadabad, Bayimsarov and Ramal jar graves researched in the BTC and SCP corridors. The research of those monuments allows us to track down the characteristic features of the region's burial monuments dating back to the period from the 4th century BC to the 3rd century AD.

The archaeological excavations conducted at the trench dug for the pipeline were aimed at rescue purposes. Radiocarbon tests were not run due to the fact that the artefacts obtained during the excavations coincided with the tangible remains found in the previous time periods in terms of their shape and content.

6 INVENTORY OF ARTEFACTS

Inv No.	Item	Description	Location	Dimensions
1	burial jar	Brown coloured burial jar made of clay with small gravel admixture. The jar has a spherical body and a narrow base. The rim is bent outward in semi-circular shape.	Jar grave 1	jar length -110cm body diameter-100cm base diameter-30cm
2	pitcher	Pitcher with a convex body and a narrow neck that broadens toward the rim. The body narrows toward the base. The bottom of the base is flattened. The rim has thin walls. The pink coloured, neatly made item is of high quality. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition.	Jar grave 1	Height-25cm orif.d.- 8cm neck d.-6.5cm st.d.- 18cm base d.-10.5cm wall th.- 1cm
3	jar body fragment	Big jar with a thin walled body. There is a tape-shaped handle with a round cross section upon the body. There are two finger-pressed dots on one of its edges. The vessel, which has a convex body, is shaped as a pear. The pink coloured item was made neatly. The clay composition is clean.	Jar grave 1	wall th.-1cm handle wid.-3.2cm handle th.-1.8cm handle len.- 11cm
4	lid	Half-part of a burial jar's round-shaped lid. The wall is thick. The surface is covered with whitish engobed coating under reddish paint. Indented, grooved lines were drawn over the lid. The lid's handle came off. The pink coloured item is roughly made. There is sand admixture in the clay composition.	Jar grave 1	wall th.- 2cm diameter- 31cm
5	base	A burial jar base fragment. The base is narrow. The pink coloured ceramic jar's bottom is smooth. The wall is thick. The sample is of high quality. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition.	Jar grave 2	wall th.- 1.6cm base d.- 18cm
6	vase	A very refined, brown coloured vase. The sample is of high quality. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The mouth is wide. The rim area has welt on the outside. There is a small auricle-shaped protrusion in the rim area.	Jar grave 1	base d.- 12cm orif.d.- 21cm height - 14cm
7	jar rim	A rim fragment of a large jar. The flat rim is decorated with model chain-like patterns. The rim is thick walled compared to the body. The colour is pink. The jar is neatly made. The upper surface is covered with white engobed coating.	Jar grave 2	orif.d.- 28cm wall th.- 2cm
8	rim fragment	A rim fragment of a large pitcher. The mouth is slightly bent sideway. The neck is narrow but broadens toward the body. The colour is pink. The body wall becomes thinner toward the orifice. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition.	Jar grave 1	orif.d.- 18cm wall th.- 0.7cm
9	jar handle	A jar fragment with a tape-shaped handle that has a semi-circular cross section. There is an indented pattern on one of the edges. Two parts of this vessel were found. The clay composition is clean. The colour is pink.	Jar grave 1	handle len.- 12cm width – 3cm thickness – 2cm
10	pitcher	A pitcher with biconic shape. The mouth is bent sideway. The neck is narrow but broadens in the shoulder part. The body gradually narrows toward the base. The base has a heel.	Jar grave 1	height - 14cm orif.d.-9cm neck d.-7cm st.d.-10cm base d.-7cm
11	pitcher	A medium size pitcher. The lower part is broken. The mouth broadens sideway widely. There is a tape-shaped handle in the back connecting the rim with the shoulder. The low neck smoothly expands and goes into the shoulder. The entire shoulder area is decorated in some parts (12cm away) with papilla-shaped model protrusions. The body narrows downward from the shoulder. There are traces of soot nearly throughout the upper surface. The base is narrow and heeled. The colour is brown. There is sand admixture in the clay composition.	Jar grave 1	height -20cm orif.d.-5cm neck d.- 4cm st.d.-25cm handle th.-1.5 handle w.-2cm base d.- 4cm

7 APPENDICES

7.1 REFERENCES

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7.2 PHOTOS



Photo 1. View of Gazyan jar grave 1 on discovery.



Photo 2. Gazyan jar grave 1.



Photo 3. Gazyan jar grave 1 after cleaning.



Photo 4. Fragments of burial jar, Grave 2.