

Azerbaijan National Sciences Academy
Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography

SHORT SCIENTIFIC REPORT
Excavations in Bəşirli soil graves
at KP 262.4 SCPX pipeline

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2018

1 SUMMARY

The report provides information on the progress of archaeological excavations carried out on November 30, 2016 at Bashirli, Goranboy district, at KP 262.480 of the SCPX gas export pipeline. Soil graves dating to the early Iron Age were discovered as well as tangible cultural heritage remains.

The soil graves were discovered in the area during the archaeological excavations. Actual archaeological data that sheds light on the burial traditions followed at this necropolis was obtained on the site. Tangible cultural samples found around the bodies in the graves included pottery, metal items and jewellery. According to the analysis of the archaeological content, it was established that the graves date back to the 9th-8th centuries BC.

Contents

1	SUMMARY	1
2	INTRODUCTION	2
2.1	SITE DISCOVERY	2
2.2	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE	2
2.3	WHO CARRIED OUT THE EXCAVATION AND WHEN.....	2
3	OUTCOME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS	2
3.1	GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE.....	2
3.2	GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF OCCUPATION LAYERS	3
3.3	DESCRIPTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS	3
3.4	ANALYSIS OF THE OUTCOMES OF FIELD WORK.....	3
4	ANALYTICAL RESULTS.....	4
4.1	IDENTIFYING PERIOD AND CHRONOLOGY	4
5	INVENTORY	5
6	APPENDICES	6
6.1	REFERENCES	6
6.2	PHOTOS	7

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 SITE DISCOVERY

The Bashirli soil graves, located at KP 262.480 of the SCPX route, were recorded during the fourth stage of the archaeology program. The monument is situated on a hill on the left bank of the water canal supplying Bashirli village. A part of the hill was removed with the use of machinery, since the pipeline corridor crosses the foothills. No evidence of the grave was seen before construction, or during initial topsoil stripping. During pipeline trenching, the soil grave was partially damaged and the operations were immediately suspended. Archaeological excavations were further planned in the area. Conducting these excavations was agreed upon between the IoAE and BP (SCPX) prior to undertaking the excavation work [1, p. 1].

2.2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The Bashirli soil graves of the early Iron Age are situated on a hill on the left bank of the incoming water canal in the Goranboy district's Bashirli village at KP 262.480 of the SCPX route. While removing soil in a part of the hill with the use of machinery, the mentioned Iron Age-era grave was damaged due to the use of excavators. Therefore, a decision was passed to research this soil grave immediately on the spot to prevent further damage or outside interference. The determined coordinates of the grave are as follows:

KP 262.48, N 40 43 24.0, E 046 36 24.3

Low hills dominate the relief in the area. Sloping black soil areas have been used as pastures for many years [1, p. 1].

2.3 WHO CARRIED OUT THE EXCAVATION AND WHEN

The archaeological excavations were conducted at the Bashirli soil graves on November 30, 2016 by BP (SCPX) representative for Cultural Heritage, PhD in History, senior research fellow and associate professor, Muzaffar Huseynov. BP (SCPX) Cultural Heritage representative, PhD in History, senior research fellow, Shamil Najafov, contributed to the excavation work as an observer.

3 OUTCOME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

3.1 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The burial dating to the early Iron Age is situated on a hill on the left bank of the incoming water canal in the territory of the Goranboy district's Bashirli village at KP 262.480 of the SCPX route. A part of the hill was scraped and removed with the use of machinery, since the pipeline corridor crosses the foothills. The above-mentioned grave was found in this very part of the hill. However, the grave, which was not identified beforehand due to the lack of any signs of it above the ground, was further damaged by machinery. In order to prevent further damage and outside interference by rural residents, discussions were held by other Cultural Heritage representatives and BP executives on studying this soil grave immediately on the spot and a decision was made to retrieve it by conducting archaeological excavations. The excavations were carried out at the grave on November 30, 2016.

The area around the grave was cleaned up without wasting time. Its dimensions and potential availability of other graves in the surrounding area were determined. Researchers concluded that an underage child had been buried inside. No other graves were encountered nearby. The child's grave was sized 1.4 x 1.1 metres. A total of 11 ceramic vessel fragments [Photos 4-10], one bronze needle and a bronze awl [Photos 11-12], a set of large, white coloured beads [Photo 3] and 14 small sets of agate, light red coloured beads [Photo 13] were found in the grave. The child's skeleton was completely damaged due to the use of machinery. The obtained archaeological samples lead to a conclusion that the grave dates back to the early Iron Age, i.e. the 9th-8th centuries BC. The grave was discovered at the following coordinates:

KP 262.480, N 40 43 24.0, E 046 36 24.3

3.2 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF OCCUPATION LAYERS

The soil graves are located in hilly areas with black soil. Several little river rocks were found during the removal of the soil layer over the grave. The excavations were facilitated by the fact that the soil stratum was comprised of black soil. No occupation layers were encountered in the area since the burials had been excavated in raw soil.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

The artefacts obtained from the burial monument include pitcher-type vessels, ornaments such as beads and metal items, such as awls and a needle. A total of 28 artefacts were found, including 11 pottery samples, two metal samples and 15 jewellery items. The ceramic samples were broken, while the metal and jewellery items were in a satisfactory condition.

The finds included pottery, a bronze needle and an awl, as well as beads. There were vessels similar to jugs, pitchers and boilers among the ceramic samples. These vessels were of high quality and had fine sand admixture in the clay composition. Nearly all of the ceramic vessels were black coloured samples. As for the metal samples, the mentioned needle and awl were both in proper condition.

One of the 15 available sets of beads that served as an ornament was a large example made of a white coloured stone with soft composition. The other 14 were small and made of agate.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF THE OUTCOMES OF FIELD WORK

Overall, the archaeological excavations carried out in the monument area were very successful. Very valuable information concerning different facets of the spiritual culture of the residents of this early Iron Age-era settlement was collected during the excavations. Although there were no signs of some of the soil graves above the ground and they emerged accidentally during soil-related work, a great number of necropoleis dating back to the early Iron Age have been discovered to date. Therefore, we may conclude that soil graves were one of the most widespread types of burials in the Azerbaijani territory in that period. Research regarding this burial custom, which had been followed for a long period of time (13th-7th centuries BC), has allowed making very interesting scientific achievements. In addition to the soil graves attributed to the time period in question, relevant burial traditions were widely applied at the burial mounds and stone box graves.

Some changes were recorded during the archaeological researches carried out at the soil graves in the Azerbaijani territory at the beginning of the Iron Age, in comparison with the previous periods. Thus, more burial equipment began to be used, along with the increased dimensions of the graves. This was also the case in the researched Bashirli soil graves. Though a child had been buried in one of the graves, much grave goods were placed around the dead body.

The research conducted at the Bashirli graves showed that all the rules of the burial custom of that period 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, are grounds to conclude that these samples date back to the 9th-8th centuries BC, i.e. the early Iron Age.

4 ANALYTICAL RESULTS

It is worth mentioning that the archaeological excavations carried out in the Bashirli soil graves were successfully completed. Separate descriptions were provided on each of the obtained archaeological samples; dimensions of those materials were measured and their photos taken. Moreover, both similar and different features of all the samples in comparison with the archaeological materials found at similar necropoleis were determined.

The peculiarities of the monument's topography are grounds to determine the nature of the burial monument. The excavated graves were probably located in one section of the necropolis. The observations conducted in the surrounding area and the conversations with local rural residents indicated that tangible cultural samples, in particular, pottery fragments, are often encountered during household activities conducted in the vicinity. Most likely, the accidentally discovered archaeological materials emerge as a result of the dilapidation of the graves at the necropolis. The fact that the monument was discovered in the lowest part of the hill slope increases the likelihood of the upper part's use as a necropolis.

4.1 IDENTIFYING PERIOD AND CHRONOLOGY

The Bashirli soil graves are similar in their nature to the studied burials at the Tovuzchay and Hasansu necropolis 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 in the early Iron Age. 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 Bashirli soil graves is completely similar to the ceramic samples obtained from the Tovuzchay and Hasansu necropolis. As for the area located outside the pipeline corridor, the ceramics items found in the Bashirli graves have very similar features with the artefacts obtained from the Munjuglutepe necropolis in the Goranboy district dating back to the early Iron Age.

Research on the Bashirli grave indicated that all relevant customs were followed during burials conducted in the soil graves at this necropolis. The analysis of the archaeological materials obtained from these graves, the drawn parallels and observation of the burial traditions suggested that these samples date back to the 9th-8th centuries BC, i.e. the early Iron Age.

5 INVENTORY

No.	Item	Description	Dimensions
1.	jug	Base fragment of a grey-coloured jug. The vessel is of high quality. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition.	Diameter 16cm
2.	kheyre	Grey coloured kheyre. The vessel is of high quality. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. There is an auricle-shaped protrusion on one of the sides with a little hole in the middle. The base has a low heel. Photo 7.	orifice diam. 28.5cm height 8.5cm base diameter 10.5cm handle dimensions 3x2cm
3.	plate	Light black plate with fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The vessel is of high quality. The orifice area is inclined inward. The base has a little heel. There is a small, auricle-shaped handle on one of the vessel's sides. Photo 6.	height 6cm orifice diameter 20cm base diameter 9.2cm
4.	boiler	Medium size, black coloured boiler-type ceramic vessel. The base is oval-shaped. The boiler's neck area is bent inward. The orifice area is inclined outward in semi-circular shape. The simply made vessel's part connecting the shoulder to the neck is girdled by askew notched patterns. There is gravel admixture in the clay composition. The surface is covered with soot. Photo 5.	height 10cm orifice diam. 16cm stock diam. 18cm neck height 2cm wall thickness 0.5cm
5.	pitcher	Rim and neck fragments of a light black pitcher. The high-quality vessel has fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The orifice area, which is bent outward in semi-circular shape, has welt. Photo 8.	orifice diameter 16cm neck height 5cm
6.	pitcher	Pitcher of high quality with fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The vessel's part connecting the shoulder to the neck and rim are encircled by two protrusions. Photo 9.	orifice diameter 7cm stock diam. 22cm neck height 6.2cm
7.	jar	Jar-type vessel body upper part. The high quality, black coloured vessel has fine sand admixture in the clay composition. The neck part narrows first but then broadens toward the orifice. The rim is inclined outward. It is connected to the shoulder, which has a round cross section. Photo 10.	orifice diameter 5.8cm neck height 6.2cm handle height 7.1cm
8.	jug	Grey coloured base fragment of a well-made jug. There is fine sand admixture in the clay composition. Photo 4.	base diameter 16cm
9.	vessel	Fragments of a ceramic vessel made of black and grey coloured clay with sand admixture.	
10.	bronze needle	A dent was made in the back of this bronze needle to put it through a string, Photo 11.	length 14.7cm
11.	awl	Bronze awl, with curled head, Photo 12.	length 8.8cm
12.	bead	Bead of soft white coloured stone, Photo 3.	Diameter 2.1cm
13.	beads	14 little beads made of agate, Photo 13.	0.4-0.8cm

6 APPENDICES

6.1 References

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6. Shamil Najafov, Muzaffar Huseynov. *Burial monuments and customs at the Hasansu necropolis*. State and Religion. A collection of public opinions, 2011, p. 139-147.

6.2 PHOTOS



Photo 1. General view of grave.



Photo 2. General view of grave.



Photo 3. Stone bead (inv12)



Photo 4. Jug base (inv8).



Photo 5. Boiler (inv4).



Photo 6. Plate (inv3)



Photo 7. Kheyre (inv2).



Photo 8. Pitcher fragment (inv5)



Photo 9. Pitcher fragment (inv6).



Photo 10. Jar (inv7).

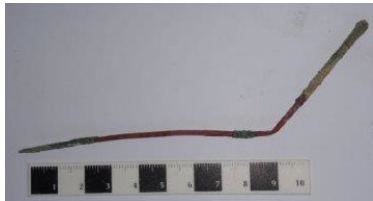


Photo 11. Bronze needle (inv 10).



Photo 12. Bronze awl (inv11).



Photo 13. Agate beads (inv 13).