

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences
Archaeology and Ethnography Institute

DETAILED SCIENTIFIC REPORT

**Excavation of Ashagi Ləki necropolis jar graves at
KP178.3 SCPX pipeline**

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1 Summary

The report provides information about the course of the archaeological excavations, carried out between the 14th and 19th September 2016, in Ashagi Laki, Agdash District. It discusses the necropolis of jar graves discovered at KP178.320, on the main export gas pipeline corridor on the SCPX project on the outskirts of the Ashagi Laki village together with the cultural material remains that were discovered there. During the archaeological excavations, jar graves, many ceramic products and metal finds were discovered. Based on the analysis of archaeological materials, it was established that the necropolis belonged to the period from the second century BC to the second century AD - ancient Caucasian Albania.

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2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Discovery of the site

Located at KP178.320, the Ashagi Laki necropolis of jar graves was discovered during the fourth stage. During pipeline excavation one of the jar graves uncovered was partially destroyed and as a result construction work was stopped. Following this discovery, archaeological excavations were carried out and a few additional burial tombstones were found along the ditch.

2.2 Brief description of the site

The Ashagi Laki necropolis of jar graves is located on the edge of the village in the Agdash District. In 2005, several jar graves were studied here as a result of archaeological monitoring conducted during the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. It was determined that these graves belong to the period of Caucasian Albania. In parallel with the area where the graves are located, the remains of several tombstones were discovered and three jar graves were researched during the expansion of the South Caucasus Pipeline in 2016. The monument is located 80 metres above sea level and is located approximately 500 metres southwest of Ashagi Laki village in Agdash District on the left side of the Baku-Gazakh highway, at KP178.320 on the SCPX route. The monument is surrounded by cultivated land on all sides. The terrain of the site is lowland [1, p. 2].

2.3 Who carried out the excavation and when

The Archaeological Expedition Group of the Archaeology and Ethnography Institute of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences carried out archaeological excavations at the Ashagi Laki necropolis of jar graves between the 14th to 19th September 2016 with the participation of the PhD in history, leading scientific worker and senior lecturer Anar Agalarzadeh and AEI employee and scientific worker Ahliman Abdurahmanov.

3 RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATIONS

3.1 General description of the site

The Ashagi Laki jar graves are in the northeast to southwest direction and consist of large-sized burial jars. There were 3 of these graves. The necropolis is at an absolute altitude of 5m above sea level.

Grave 1 is in the northwest to southeast direction and consists of large-sized jars (GPS: N-04489241; E-08702163). Most of the red burial vessels are well-baked from clay mixed with sand are damaged. Inside the jar, there are fragmented pieces of human bone and several fragments of earthenware vessels. The length of the jar is 160cm, its diameter 80cm with a base diameter of 30cm.

Grave goods consists of fragments of a bowl-type vessel, the shoulder of a pitcher-type vessel and the handle of an earthenware pitcher.

The bowl-type vessel is light red and is well baked from pure clay. The mouth edge is flat, while the shoulder part has protrusions. There are traces of rotation on the wheel on the surface. The diameter of the mouth is 21.3cm.

The pitcher-type vessel is made of pale green, pure clay. The parts of the vessel close to the shoulder and neck are decorated with ornaments. Before baking, concave patterns were made on the neck and wavy patterns were made below it. Similar wavy patterns also cover the shoulder. Red-yellow spots appeared on the surface of the bowl due to baking at unstable temperatures (Figure 6).

The handle fragment is round in cross section and is likely to belong to a pitcher-type vessel. It is well baked from red-coloured clay mixed with sand.

Grave 2 is in the east-west direction, and part of the jar grave was destroyed (GPS: N-0448947; E-08702160). The remaining length of the red jar is well baked from clay mixed with sand was 120cm, its diameter was 70cm, and the diameter of the base was 30cm. There are fragments of human bones in the grave. At the same time, two earthenware vessels and one iron sickle were placed inside the jar at the time of burial (figure 1).

One of the earthenware vessels (water vessel) is a flask-type vessel. The vessel with two handles has a narrow neck and a relatively wide mouth. The mouth edge is bent to the side. The handles are in the body part, are flattened and have cavities on the upper side. One side of the vessel is flat and the other side is oval-shaped. There are red spots on the surface due to unstable temperatures. Dimensions: The diameter of the mouth is 5.7cm, the height of the neck is 3.2cm, the length is 20cm, the width is 22cm, the diameter of the handles is 4.7cm (Figure 2).

Another earthenware vessel is a small-sized pitcher. It has a relatively narrow neck, an elongated body and a flat base. The mouth edge is bent outwards. The neck gradually flows into the shoulder. The mouth edge is connected to the shoulder by a circular handle. The surface is well polished. There are pale green, light-pink spots caused by unstable temperatures on the surface of the red vessel well baked from pure clay. Dimensions: 7cm in diameter, neck height 6cm, body diameter 15cm, height 17.2cm, and base diameter 7.5cm (Figure 3).

The iron sickle, or the fragment of a tool that was found, was strongly deformed. The tip of the tool is narrow and the body is relatively wide, while the end is sharply folded down. It is most likely that this end part was the place where a stick was inserted into the handle. The intact part of the find has a length of 17cm and a width of 2-4cm (Figure 10).

Grave 3 is in the northwest to southeast direction, and a large jar was used as a burial vessel (GPS: N-04489255; E-08702155). Although the structure of the skeleton inside is disrupted, the vessels next to it are relatively intact. The burial jar itself is red and is well baked from less sandy clay. The remaining length of the jar is 150cm, its width is 70cm and its base diameter is 40cm. The earthenware vessels inside consist of 3 pieces and are accompanied by vases, bowls and cups.

The vase-type earthenware vessel is well baked from red, pure clay and has a simple shape. It is relatively deep, and the mouth part is simple and uneven. There is a broken part of the legs on the bottom of the vessel. It is most likely that the legs were moulded after the vessel was made. This is proved by cavities inside the vessel. The surface is well-polished. Dimensions: The diameter of the mouth is 30cm, height 8cm (excluding the legs).

The second vessel is a small bowl-type vessel. It is relatively deep, and the mouth edge is simple and bent inside. Traces of rotation on the wheel are clearly seen inside. The base is flat-shaped. Its light red-coloured clay is clean and well-baked. There is a pale green-coloured thin layer of engobe on the surface of the vessel. Dimensions: The diameter of the mouth is 17cm, the height is 6.2cm, the diameter of the base is 7.5cm.

The pitcher-type vessel is also small. It has a narrow neck and balloon-shaped body. There is a trace of the handle in the shoulder part. It is most likely that the handle connected the mouth edge of the vessel and the shoulder part. The balloon-shaped body is completed with a flat base. Its red-coloured clay is pure and well baked. There is a pale green-coloured thin layer of engobe on

the surface of the vessel. Since the engobe is weak, it is peeling in most places. It is clearly seen that the pitcher is hand-made, but neatly prepared. Dimensions: The height of the neck is 5cm, the diameter of the body is 11cm and the diameter of the base is 6.5cm (Figure 8).

Although the jar graves have no superficial signs and were discovered accidentally only during excavations, we can say that jar graves were one of the most common types of graves in Azerbaijan at that time given that more than a hundred necropolises of jar graves have been discovered so far, [5, p. 41; 3, p. 25]. It is not correct to associate the custom of burial in jars with Zoroastrianism based on the fact that this funeral tradition, which existed for a long time (6th century BC – 8th century AD), came to Azerbaijani territory from Iran and that it was Iran's ruling religion at that time. The tradition of burying the dead in jars was practiced long before Zoroastrianism (from the 4th millennium BC) in different parts of the world. But the fact that this burial custom corresponded to one of the main tenets of Zoroastrianism, i.e. the use of earthenware jars to avoid defiling the holy land with corpses could be one of the reasons why such a custom became popular in Iran at that time. During burial in jar graves, large jars were used to place the corpse and grave goods inside them. Burial jars had a round and thick mouth, low necks, sloping shoulders, stout bodies that narrowed towards the bottom and flat bases [6, p. 100]. At the time of the burial, large earthenware vessels were placed around the jar. Many foods were often placed inside these vessels. Some scientists link the fact that food was placed in vessels in the belief that the soul periodically left the jar and ate [4, p. 32]. Small vessels, decorative items, various weapons, etc., were also placed in the burial jars. Over time, the size and range of the grave goods changed. As in other necropolises of jar graves, the jar graves in the Ashagi Laki necropolis were placed on the side in grave chambers. Although in many cases, instability was observed in the direction of graves in necropolises of jar graves, there are also necropolises where graves are facing the same direction. As in necropolises of jar graves in Mingachevir, we observe this stability in the Ashagi Laki necropolis. The burial jars found in the necropolis (except for some minor deviations) were in the east-west direction. Even though it was in a very poor condition, the skeleton inside the grave pit is thought to be facing the same direction as that of the jar (the head faced the mouth of the jar and the legs - the base). It is likely that all the burials in the jars were carried out in a tightly crouched position on their left sides. The fact that fragments of coal were found in almost all of the jar graves that were studied shows that bonfires were made here during burial ceremonies. According to S. Gaziyeu, the burning fire during the burial ceremony served to keep the evil forces away [2, p. 9].

The study of the Ashagi Laki jar graves showed that during the burial ceremony in this necropolis, all the customs of burial in jar graves were observed. Analysis of the archaeological materials obtained from these graves, analogies that were conducted and the observation of burial customs allows us to say that they belong to the second-first centuries BC, i.e., the period of Caucasian Albania.

3.2 General description of cultural layers

The upper layer of the grave monuments we mentioned was removed by construction equipment before the archaeological excavations began. Therefore, there is no information about the cultural layer that covered the grave equipment.

3.3 Description of artefacts

One of the artifacts discovered during the archaeological excavations is of particular importance. This find is a vessel with a grater. A "grater"-type vessel is yellowish and is well baked from pure clay. The mouth of the vessel is open for pouring liquids. In order to filter liquids, there are holes on the grater, and then to ensure that liquids are easily poured, a trough-shaped canal was made. The archaic handle has a zoomorphic shape. The handle connects the body and the mouth of the vessel and the upper part has a zoomorphic shape. The body is biconic and has symmetric molded button-shaped patterns on it. The body sharply flows into the base, and the lower part has a concave shape. The vessel is well polished. Dimensions: height 17cm, body diameter 13cm, base diameter 6cm and width 15cm.

3.4 General analysis of results

The archaeological excavations at the monument were generally very successful. During the excavations, very valuable information was collected on the various spheres of the spiritual culture of ancient inhabitants.

Although the jar graves had no superficial signs and were discovered accidentally only during work on land, we can say that jar graves were one of the most common types of graves in Azerbaijan at that time given that more than a hundred necropolises of jar graves have been discovered so far. [5, p. 41; 3, p. 25]. It is not correct to associate the custom of jar burials with Zoroastrianism based on the fact that this funeral tradition, which existed for a long time (6th century BC - 8th century AD), came to Azerbaijani territory from Iran and that Zoroastrianism was Iran's ruling religion at that time. The tradition of burying the dead in a jar was practiced long before (from the 4th millennium BC) Zoroastrianism in different parts of the world. However, the fact that this funeral tradition corresponds to one of the main tenets of Zoroastrianism, i.e. the use of an earthenware jar to avoid defiling the holy land with a corpse could be regarded as one of the reasons why such a custom became popular in Iran at that time.

During burial in jar graves, a large jar was used and the corpse and grave equipment were placed inside it. Burial jars had a round and thick mouth, lower necks, sloping shoulders, stout bodies that became narrower towards the bottom and flat bases [6, p. 100]. During the burial, large earthenware vessels were placed around the jar. Many foods were often placed inside these vessels. Some scientists say that food was placed in vessels because it was believed that the soul periodically left the jar for food [4, p. 32]. Smaller earthenware vessels, decorative items, various weapons and other items were placed in burial jars. Over time, the size and range of grave equipment changed. We can say that just like in other necropolises of jar graves, the deceased was placed on his side in the Ashagi Laki jar grave. Although instability was observed in the direction of graves in necropolises of jar graves, there are also necropolises where graves are facing the same direction. Just like in necropolises of jar graves in Mingachevir, we observe this stability at the Ashagi Laki necropolis too. The burial jars found in the necropolis (except for some minor deviations) was in the northeast-to southwest direction. Although it was found in a very poor condition, the skeleton inside the burial jar is thought to be facing the same direction as the jar (the head was facing the mouth of the jar and the feet - the base). It is believed that the deceased was buried in a tightly crouched position on his left side. The fact that fragments of coal were found in the jar grave under review is a sign that a bonfire was made during the burial ceremony here. According to S. Gaziyeu, the fire burning during the burial ceremony served to drive evil forces away [2, p. 9].

The study of the Ashagi Laki jar grave showed that during the burial ceremony at the necropolis, all traditions of burial in jar graves were observed. Analysis of the archaeological materials obtained from these graves, the analogies that were made, and the observation of the burial tradition allow us to say that it belongs to the second-first centuries BC, i.e. the period of Caucasian Albania.

4 ANALYTICAL RESULTS

4.1 Discussion

When submitting the results of the work for open debate by summarizing the results of the archaeological excavations, the scientific position of the author and the final results are summarized. These scientific findings were confirmed by the observations of other scientists involved in the archaeological excavations.

5 Inventory

No	item	Description	Grave	Size
1.	Jar	A burial vessel well baked from red clay mixed with sand. It is in poor condition.	Grave 1	Length 160cm, body diam. 80cm, base diam. 30cm
2.	Bowl	The vessel is light red and is well baked from pure clay. Its mouth edge is straight and shoulder is convex. There are traces of rotation on a wheel on its surface.	Grave 1	Mouth diameter is 21.3cm.
3.	Pitcher	The vessel is made from pale green clay mixed with sand. The shoulder of the vessel and its part close to the neck are decorated with patterns. Before the connection on the neck, there are transverse patterns with cavities and wavy patterns below. Such wavy patterns also cover the shoulder. There are red and yellow stains on the surface of the vessel caused by baking at unstable temperatures.	Grave 1	Wall thickness 5mm
4.	Handle	The handle fragment is circular in cross section and is believed to have belonged to a pitcher-type vessel. It is well baked from red clay mixed with sand.	Grave 1	Diameter 1cm
5.	Jar	A burial jar well baked from red clay mixed with small sand. It is in poor condition.	Grave 1	Remaining length of the jar - 120cm, body diam. 70cm, base diam. 30cm
6.	Flask	The vessel has two handles, a narrow neck and a relatively wider mouth. The mouth edge is bent to the side. The handles are on the body and are flat, while there are cavities on the upper side. One side of the vessel is flat, while the other part is oval-shaped. There are red stains on the surface caused by unstable temperatures.	Grave 1	Mouth diam. 5.7cm, neck height 3.2cm, length 20cm, width 22cm, handle diam 4.7cm.
7.	Pitcher	Relatively narrow neck, elongated body and flat base. The mouth edge is bent outwards. The neck gradually flows into the shoulder. The mouth edge and the shoulder are connected by a circular handle. Surface is well polished. There are pale green and light pink stains caused by unstable temperatures on the surface baked from red pure clay.	Grave 1	Mouth diam 7cm, Neck height 6cm, Body diam. 15cm, Height 17.2cm, Base diam. 7.5cm
8.	Iron sickle	The iron sickle, or the remains of a tool, are strongly deformed. The tip of the tool is narrow, its body is slightly wider and the end is bent downwards. It is very likely that this end was a place that flowed into a wooden handle.	Grave 2	The length of the intact part of the find 17cm, width 2-4cm.
9.	Jar	The burial jar is well baked from red clay or clay slightly mixed with sand. It is in poor condition.	Grave 3	The remaining length of the jar 150cm, width 70cm, base diam 40cm.
10.	Vase	The vase-type earthenware red vessel is well baked from pure clay. It has a simple shape. It is relatively deep, while the mouth is simple and uneven. There is a broken part of legs at the bottom of the vessel. It is very likely that the legs were moulded after the vessel was made. This is proved by cavities inside the vessel. Its surface is well polished.	Grave 3	Mouth diam. 30cm, height 8cm (except for the legs).
11.	Bowl	It is relatively deep, and the mouth edge is simple and bent inwards. Traces of rotation on the wheel can be clearly seen inside. Its base is flat. Its light red clay is pure and well baked. There is a thin layer of pale green engobe on the surface of the vessel.	Grave 3	Mouth diam. 17cm, height 6.2cm, base diam. 7.5cm
12.	Pitcher	It has a narrow neck and balloon-shaped body. There is a trace of the handle on the shoulder. It is very likely that the handle connected the mouth edge and the shoulder. The balloon-shaped body ends with a flat base. Its red clay is pure and well baked. There is a thin layer of pale green engobe on the surface of the vessel. Since the layer of engobe is thin, it is peeling in most places. It is clearly seen that the pitcher is hand-made and neatly produced.	Grave 3	Neck height 5cm, body diam. 11cm, base diam. 6.5cm

6 APPENDICES

6.1 References

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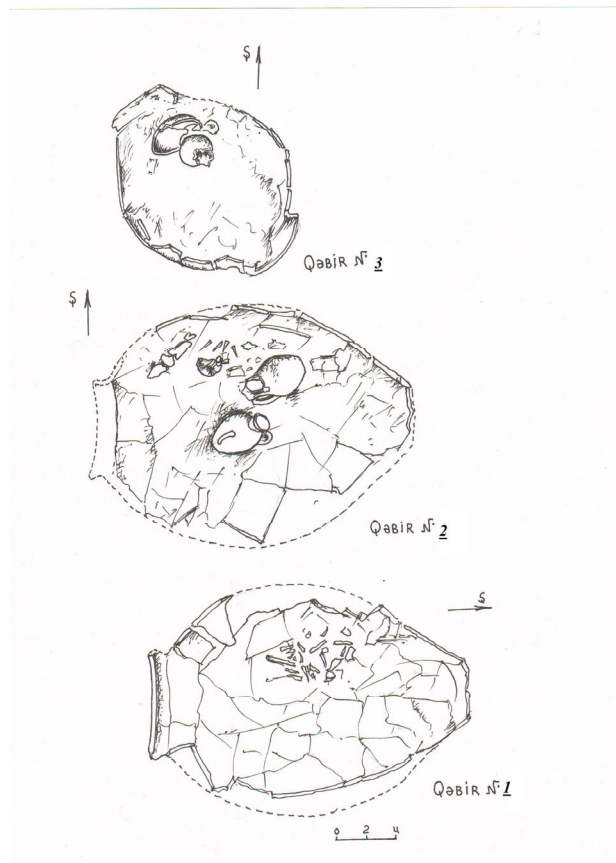
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6.2 Figures



6.3 Photos



Figure 1. Excavation of grave No 2.



Figure 2. Grave 2, Flask-type water vessel.



Figure 3. Grave 2, Earthenware pitcher with long neck.



Figure 4. Earthenware bowl.



Figure 5. Vessel with grater.



Figure 6. Grave 1, Fragment of pitcher.



Figure 7. Earthenware plate.



Figure 8. Grave3, Balloon-shaped pitcher.



Figure 9. Various earthenware fragments.



Figure 10. Grave 2, Iron sickle fragment.