

Summary of Faxrali excavations, 2014

SCPX Pipeline KP 267.4



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Contents

1. Summary 3

2. Settlement evidence 3

3. Cemetery..... 5

4. Interpretation 6

5. Surface Collection at Faxrali..... 6

6. References 7

Frontispiece: Beginning of excavation, December 2013. View to southeast.

Document history and status

Revision	Date	Description	Author	Checked	Reviewed	Approved
P01	29/2/014	Draft for peer technical review	DJM	MS		
P02	22/6/22	Edited for ADS	DJM	SB		

Faxrali Medieval settlement KP267.45

1. Summary

An excavation was conducted on an area with known medieval deposits on the SCPX pipeline. This revealed a sequence beginning with a cemetery with Christian traditions followed by a medieval settlement probably of the 9th to 11th centuries AD.

The Faxrali site was excavated between 10th December 2013 and 30th January 2014. The work was spread over a length of 136m by 4m along the route of the SCPX pipeline. The site was known from previous discoveries on the SCP and BTC pipelines which resulted in excavations in 2004 and 2005 (Figure 1).

The excavation opened up a total of 26 pits dug by hand, pits 1, 4-7, 9-21, 23-28, 31 and 36. All pits were 4m by 4m in size, except 11-17 which were 4m by 6m. Most pits were dug to a depth of 0.8m. Details of this work can be found in Nəcəfov (2018).

2. Settlement evidence

The BTC work in 2004 revealed three tandir ovens and a dense spread of pottery. Later work on the SCP pipeline in 2005 identified a similar spread of material that covered a smaller area (Taylor and Maynard, 2012, Jalilov and Kvachidze, 2007). The deposits, however, were deeper and more complex. These included ovens and remains of a post-hole structure associated with a deep pit. Possibly these were the result of partially roofed working areas.

The SCPX excavations revealed a number of small tandir ovens and deposits of ash probably from raking out ovens. No evidence of structures was found and the concentration of ceramic material was considerably less than in the previous examined areas.

Pottery fragments were found throughout the horizons excavated. These contained a number of tandir ovens with ash rake out material being common. The assessment of the pottery suggests a similar 9th to 11th century date as was found on BTC and SCP.

A fragment of an upper rotary quern stone was located. This is composed of volcanic rock, probably basalt. The source of this material is likely to be from volcanic deposits to the south west or west (Armenia or Georgia).

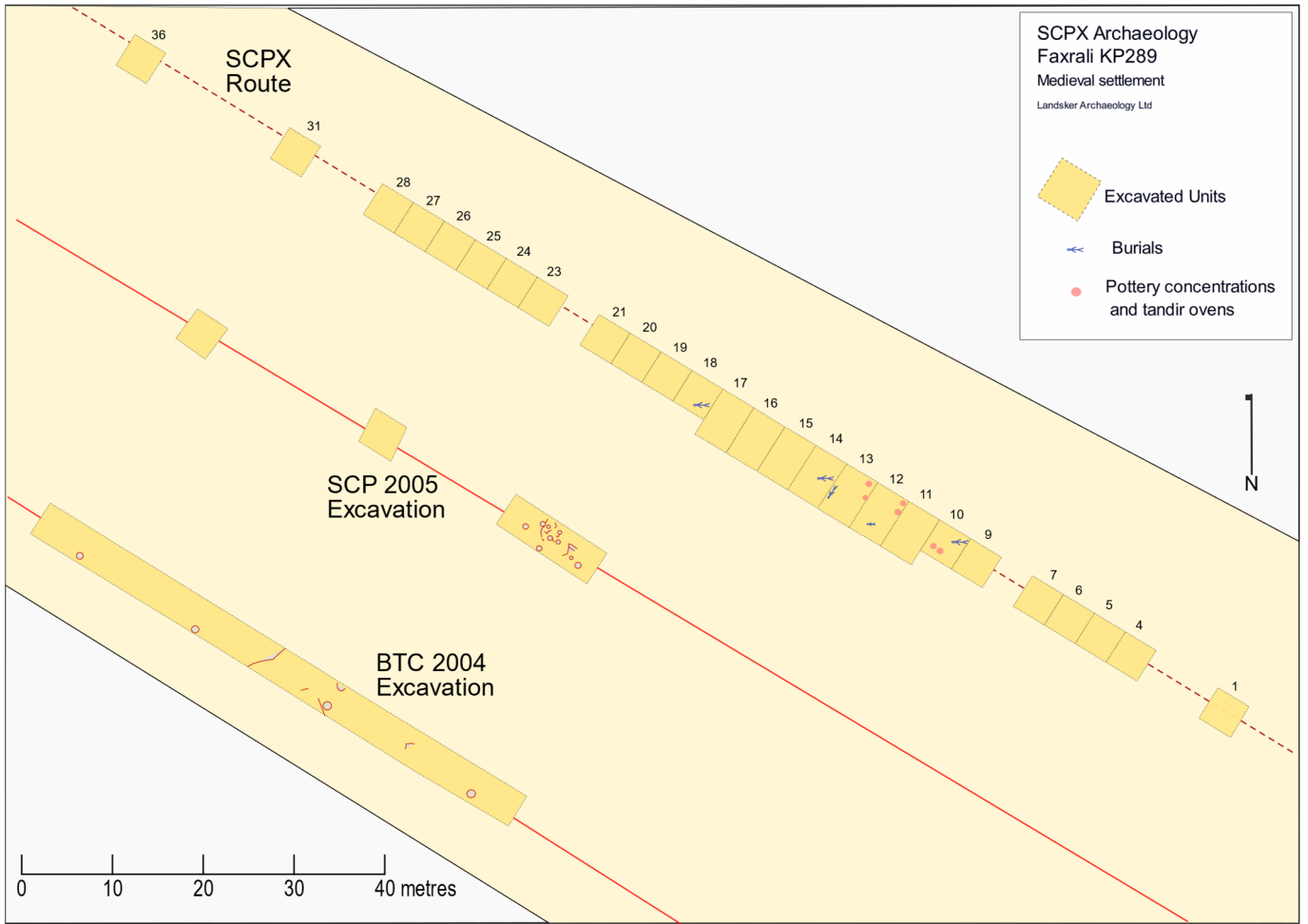


Figure 1: Faxrali excavations showing BTC, SCP and SCPX areas.



Figure 2: Pit 13 pottery vessels exposed. Looking to east.

3. Cemetery

Five human burials were located. All except one, lay on their backs with feet facing towards the east. One grave from Unit 13 lay in a very unusual position. This was face down with the legs and feet splayed outwards facing southwest. This fits with no known traditions and is a very unusual action. The fact that it lay in an established cemetery, although possibly at its margins, implies that it is of the same period as the rest of the cemetery. All the bone from the site was very fragmentary due to the influence of the soil, this also suggests that all the burials are of the same approximate age.

Burial	Unit	Description
1	13	Face down with legs splayed outwards, facing the southwest (Figure 3)
2	18	Lying on back with arms folded across chest, facing east
3	10	Lying on back with arms folded across chest, facing east (Figure 3)
4	14	Lying on back with arms folded across chest, facing east
5	12	Lying on back with arms folded across chest, facing east.

Of the five burials, one was a child approximately 0.5m long, while the others were adult.

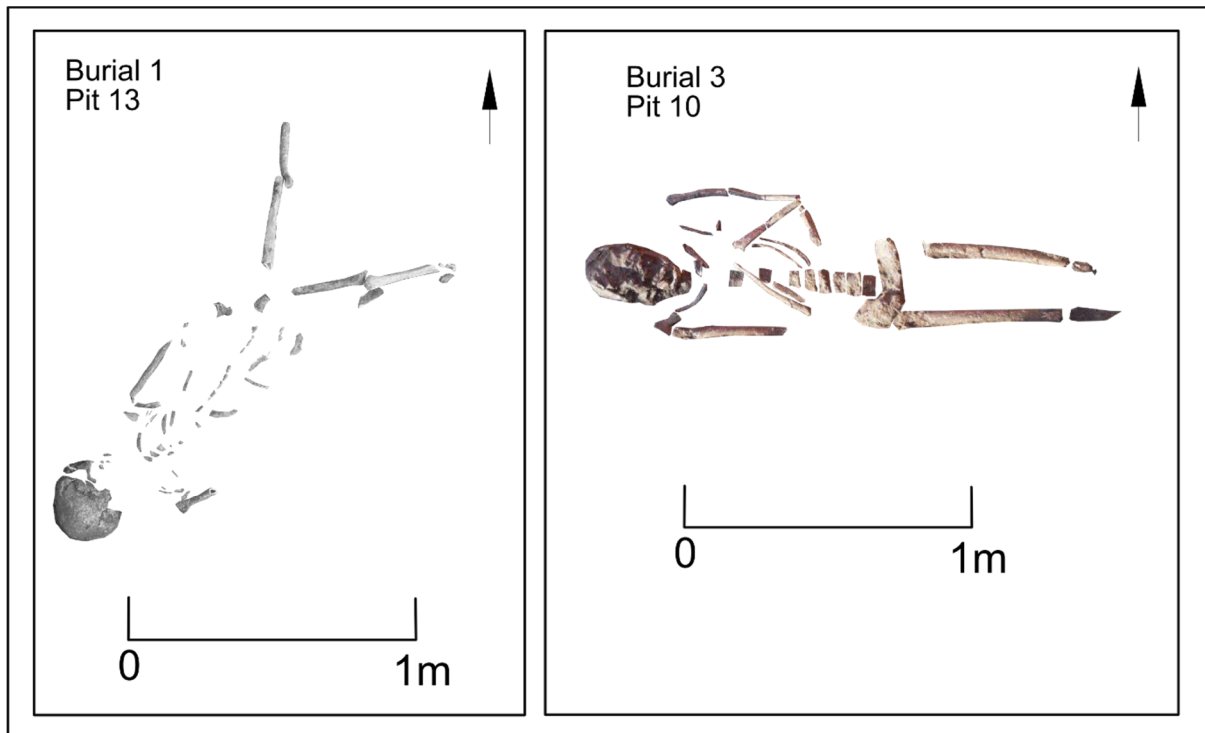


Figure 3: Burial 1 lying face down with legs splayed. Burial 3 typical Christian burial facing upwards with arms crossed and facing east.

4. Interpretation

The burials appear to represent a Christian era cemetery at this location. This would equate to the Albanian period and indicates that it was in existence in the 4th to 8th centuries CE. The dispersed nature of the burials is unusual. This possibly represents the more scattered edges of a cemetery. The focal point of the cemetery was likely to be north of the excavation area, as no burials were located during BTC or SCP work. The presence of a non-standard burial technique which may reflect the disapproval of society for an individual, could also indicate the presence at the very edge of a cemetery.

5. Surface Collection at Faxrali

There were large quantities of pottery on the surface of the field in the vicinity of the Faxrali excavation. An experiment was conducted to attempt to record the location and nature of this material using the built-in digital camera of the GPS to record the number and position of surface finds to put the pipeline archaeological excavation into context (see Appendix 1).

In the field the GPS ran continuously recording the route followed across the field. The GPS had WAAS enabled and reported an accuracy of 2-3m. The water furrows were followed as these gave a better visual indication of pottery sherds. The water furrows run in parallel with each other across each field, approximately 10m apart.

No information was collected along the line of the SCPX due to the excavation and the tent location. The dot density map (Figure 4) shows a concentration of material over the BTC and SCP excavation areas, with a drop off of density of material to the east and west. This agrees with the results of archaeological monitoring of pipeline construction. To the north of the SCPX, there is a reduction in material, although the field to the northwest had been ploughed and planted with a winter cereal crop. This surface was very conducive to the visibility of sherds, although all were very small. To the south of the pipeline route the field had a greater level of crop cover, with reduced pottery visibility. Beyond this between the line of electricity poles and the current village is a dense spread of material which was not fully examined.

A total of 494 objects was recorded. Two of these were obsidian flakes, the remainder were pottery. Types of material were identified as shown below:

Number	Description
398	Pottery sherds
3	Pottery handles
1	Pottery lugs
1	Pottery rim
2	Obsidian flakes
494	Total

The interpretation of these results suggests that some of the density of material over BTC and SCP results from disturbance of archaeological deposits as a result of pipeline construction that have been mobilised and come to the surface. South of this, an extensive spread of material suggests the main focus of the settlement, while to the north, little is evident. This agrees with the results of three episodes of archaeological excavation in the area. The suggestion is that a medieval settlement lies to the south of the pipeline route with an earlier cemetery to the north, which may have inhibited later extension of the settlement in that direction.

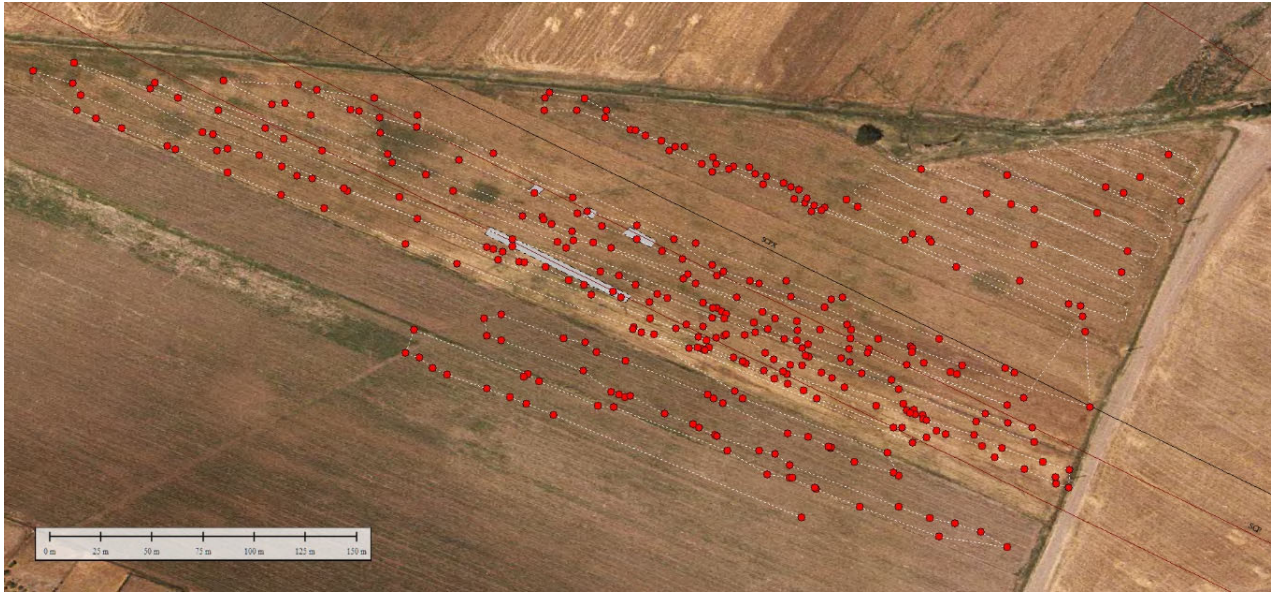


Figure 4: Faxrali, results of surface collection, track of survey shown by white dashed line. The SCPX route could not be systematically walked due to the presence of the open excavation area at the time. BTC and SCP pipes and excavation areas marked.

6. References

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