Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences

Archaeology and Ethnography Institute

BRIEF SCIENTIFIC REPORT

Excavations at Zəyəmçay necropolis at KP 335.8 SCPX pipeline

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1 SUMMARY

The Zayamchai necropolis was initially known to archaeologists as an archaeological area excavated in connection with the construction of the BTC and SCP pipelines. A total of 130 burial monuments dating back to the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age (late 2nd millennium-early 1st millennium BC) were excavated and studied during archaeological excavations conducted in the area in April-November 2003. It was presumed that burial monuments could have been present in the corridor crossed by the SCPX route to the south of the previously excavated site. Therefore, excavations were carried out in the area, but no such monuments were encountered. However, a small number of ceramics samples attributed to the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age were discovered. Work was done in the archaeological area on November 9-20, 2014.

No evidence of the late Bronze Age- Iron Age cemetery was found in this excavation. It appears the cemetery is found only on the gravel terrace ridge to the north of the excavated area. No additional information was found during construction of the SCPX pipeline in this area during 2016.

Contents

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 SITE DISCOVERY

The Zayamchai necropolis area located at KP 335.840 of the SCPX gas pipeline route was a site previously known to archaeologists. The work on the BTC and SCP project identified 130 burial monuments [1, p. 1-141]. The territory was examined by archaeologists David Maynard and Shamil Najafov, recorded as an archaeological area, and excavations were planned for the SCPX corridor.

2.2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The Zayamchai necropolis is located between the Bayramli and Duyarli villages in the western part of the Shamkir district, on a small hill located upon the right bank of the Zayam river, 306 metres above sea level. The lower part of the soil is comprised of a mixture of gravelly rocks and alluvial sand. The necropolis is situated at N 4534003.851, E 8574708.355 and N 4534057.488, E 8574648.992. The adjacent areas have been used for sowing for many years, which inflicted damage to the monuments.

The soil layer in the Zayamchai necropolis area contains saline soil with fine sand and clay mixture or plain gravelly soil in some areas. Soil of this composition is interrupted in some areas by petrified, hardened clay layer that is 10-15cm or even up to 20cm thick. The SCPX corridor where the excavation work was carried out traverses a small gulley alongside the ridge of gravel formed from a terrace of the river where the Zayamchai necropolis graves were excavated. A total of 130 burial monuments were recorded on the corridor crossed by the BTC and SCP pipelines. Archaeological excavations were launched in the SCPX excavation area, which is encompassed by low hills from both right and left, to explore the possibility of discovering new burial monuments.

Photo 1. Excavation in progress. View to south.

2.3 WHO CONDUCTED THE WORK AND WHEN

The archaeological excavations were conducted in the area November 9-20, 2014. The excavations were overseen by PhD in History, senior research fellow at the Archaeology and

Ethnography Institute, Shamil Najafov, and carried out with the participation of the Institute's employees, PhD in History, senior research fellow Vagif Asadov and research fellow Ahliman Abdurahmanov. SCPX Cultural Heritage Site Construction Manager Mahammad Novruzov contributed to the excavation work as an observer.

2.4 FIELD METHODS

A total of 20 excavation units sized 4mx4m were designated in the Zayamchai necropolis area (Figure 1). The excavation area was 4m wide and 80 metres long (Photos 1, 5).

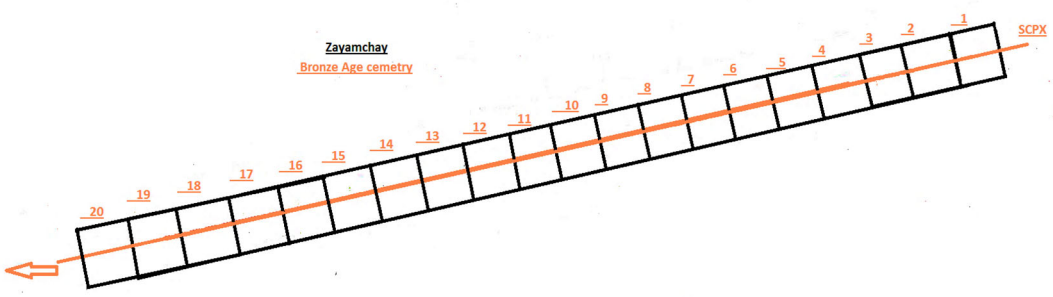

Figure 1.

3 RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

3.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The site is located in a hollow area between the low sloping terrace hills on the right bank of the Zayam river. It is about 700-750 metres away from the river. It is located in the Duyarli village of the Shamkir district. This territory is situated 314 metres above sea level, is uneven in terms of its relief [1, p. 1-3]. There is a plain area at a slightly higher altitude. Although soil at the necropolis is comprised of clay and gravel, areas with fertile black soil are available on the plain. These areas are perfectly suitable for sowing. The fertile soil layer is located at an approximate depth of 30-40cm . It is followed by a stratum of soil mixed with relatively yellow clay and yellow soil with sand and clay composition at greater depths. The site of the excavations is located in a hollow area between low hills formed from river terraces (Photo 2). It has completely yellow soil with clay composition, as well as soil with sand and limestone dust admixture. Excavations in the area were complicated by sedimentation that accumulated due to rainwater.

Photo 2. View of excavation. View to north. The prehistoric cemetery excavated in 2003 lies to the right on the low ridge in the foreground.

3.2 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF OCCUPATION LAYERS

No occupation layers were revealed during the archaeological excavations as no samples indicating traces of a settlement were encountered in the area. The excavations aimed at discovering potential burial monuments in this territory yielded no fruit either as no such monuments were revealed. Only a small number of ceramics samples and stone items were found during the excavations, which were conducted in the designated units until a certain depth (up to 1 metre). Though the ceramics items were discovered at different depths, they are not considered materials pertaining to the settlement and originated elsewhere.

Two large river rocks emerged at the depth of 90cm below the ground near the southeast wall of Unit 9. Small river rocks were lined up around them as well. No graves were discovered under this feature, which had a diameter of 1 metre.

A furnace was found (Photo 4) at a depth of 65cm, 1.3m from the southeast corner of Unit 11, 75cm away from the southwest corner. The walls of the furnace were plastered with clay and these edges hardened after burning. However, the edges mostly collapsed inside the furnace. It cannot be considered a tandir oven, because the item has a small size and its internal part was not put into shape. Ash and traces of burning were also seen 45cm away from the furnace. The furnace diameter was 25cm .

A dense pile of rocks was discovered parallel to Unit 19 about 2 metres away from the excavation area (Photo 3). A small test excavation revealed that this was not a grave. Most likely, these rocks were piled there for their further delivery to another location.

Photo 3. Pile of rocks near excavation area.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

The finds obtained from the excavation area are divided into two groups in terms of their purpose: ceramics and stone-made items.

The ceramics samples mainly include black, grey and light red fragments (Photos 6-15). These are fragments of the orifices, necks and stocks of boiler, crock and pitcher-type clay vessels. It is clearly seen from these samples that their clay composition is either clean or has a fine sand admixture. They were baked in stable temperature (Photo 1).

The stone items include (Photo 2) a spindle whorl (Photo 16), grindstones (Photo 17) and sling stones (Photo 18).

Photo 4. Mediaeval furnace, Unit 11. View to southeast.

4 ANALYTICAL RESULTS

No burial monuments or signs of a settlement were encountered in the necropolis part located in the SCPX corridor. This is due to the fact that the ancient residents of the Zayamchai basin did not carry out any burials in this particular area. Burials were conducted in the upper parts of hills. According to observations, evidently, there are densely located gravestones in these areas. Graves similar to burial mounds encompassed by cromlechs (stone cairns) are available there as well [2, p. 42-43]. Only a small number of clay vessel fragments and stone items were found.

4.1 SPECIFIC DESCRIPTION OF SIGNIFICANT FINDS

Significant tangible cultural remains were not found in the area during archaeological excavations. The obtained artefacts mainly include ceramics fragments inherent to the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age (late 2nd millennium-early 1st millennium BC). The discovered furnace dates back to the early Middle Ages and its condition is unsatisfactory. The fact that this furnace was found close to the necropolis area remained unclear. Presumably, this was a household item that belonged to semi-nomadic, cattle-breeding residents who lived in the area much later. It is possible that this feature is related to the rectangular stone structure found on the gravel ridge to the north. This has been suggested as being of much later date, so may not be contemporary with the furnace.

4.2 PERIOD AND CHRONOLOGY

All of the finds date to the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age (late 2nd millennium-early 1st millennium BC). These include ceramic samples and a small number of stone items. Radiocarbon tests were conducted upon the graves excavated at the Zayamchai necropolis in the BTC and SCP pipeline corridors. According to the outcomes of these tests, burials were carried out at the Zayamchai necropolis in the 6th and 7th centuries [3, p. 56-59]. Although the tests were conducted upon materials derived from only five of the graves (Graves No. 8, 72, 75, 102, 117) at the necropolis, this data was sufficient to define the chronological range of the burials.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Having summarized the results achieved in the excavation area**,** one may arrive at a conclusion that the SCPX pipeline corridor is significantly away from the central part of the Zayamchai necropolis. The graves are located upon the low, sloping hills to the right and left of the SCPX corridor. There is a very dense concentration of graves in the area. Most likely, the ancient residents of this basin carried out the burials in the higher parts of the hills, which was also due to certain climatic conditions. Rainfall and torrential water in this area, which has tumultuous precipitation, could have easily washed away the graves in the valley located at the foot of the hill. Therefore, the graves were dug upon hills instead.

A few ceramics samples and stone-made items were found during the excavations. The discovery of ceramics samples is quite interesting, given that no occupation layer indicating traces of a habitat in the area was found. These ceramic samples are probably parts of vessels that accidentally broke off clay vessels that were supposed to be placed in the graves during burials conducted at the necropolis. According to the burial customs of the Zayamchai residents, clay vessels were placed in graves in their entirety. Another conclusion suggests that these artefacts are materials that could have been brought from nearby settlements dating back to the same time

period. These materials were either in the soil fetched by rainwater or ended up there as a result of sowing work.

As for the furnace found in the excavation area, it belonged to seasonal, semi-nomadic cattle breeders or sedentary merchants who lived in the area long thereafter.

6 INVENTORY

Inv	Item	Description	Unit and depth	Dimensions
1	ceramic base	Part of the base of a thick walled, brown-red coloured ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with an admixture. The stock part goes into the base sharply. The base is flat and broad. The surface of the vessel was significantly smoothened. Probably roughly made by hand. Figure 3, Photo 13.	unit 3 depth: 40-60cm	wall thickness-1cm
2	ceramic fragment	Part of a thin walled, dark black ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with a slight sand admixture. The surface of the vessel is polished.	----------	wall thickness-4mm
3	ceramic vessel fragment	Part of a thick walled, grey coloured ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with non-organic admixture. The surface of the vessel is smoothened and combed on the inside. The surface was also processed with a comb-like tool.	unit 5 depth: 80-100cm	wall thickness-8mm
4	stone	Part of a white coloured stone made of a porous rock in the form of a spindle head. The sides of the item were hewn to a round shape.	----------	diameter-4cm
5	spindle whorl	A part of a spindle whorl made of a white limestone. There are holes on both sides in the centre of the item. One of the sides is oval-like and the other is flat. Figure 3, Photo 16.	----------	diameter-4cm
6	stone hone	Whetstone-type tool made of a small, smooth cobblestone. The sides of the tool are well smoothened due to lengthy use. Figure 3, photo 17.	----------	length-7.7cm
7	grater	Round porous stone-made item used as a grinding tool. Apparently, all sides of the item were used. Figure 3.	----------	length - 6.6cm width -6.6cm
8	stone item	Round stone-made tool with a stamp image and one flat side. Probably used as a tool by hand.	----------	
9	sling stone	Small sling stone. It was properly selected for use. Figure 3, Photo 18.	----------	
10	grater	Grater type tool made of a grey cobblestone. The sides of the tool were tattered due to use.	----------	
11	jug fragment	Part of a large household jug orifice element. The orifice area was funnel shaped with significant welt and bent outward. Its grey coloured clay has an admixture. The surface is scaled. The opening and shoulder areas are girdled by a deep, canal-like line. Apparently, it was made on a potter's wheel.	unit 11 depth: 20-40cm	wall thickness-2.2cm
12	ceramic fragment	Part of the stock of a thick walled brown ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with non-organic admixture. There is an embossed wave-like pattern drawn on the vessel. The inside is black coloured. Made on a potter's wheel.	----------	wall thickness - 1cm
13	pitcher fragment	Part of the orifice element of a thick walled, black coloured pitcher-type ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with sand admixture. The opening area had welt and was bent outward. There is a canal-like line on the inside of the opening area. Made on a potter's wheel.	----------	wall thickness-6mm
14	ceramic fragment	Part of the orifice element of a thick walled, grey coloured pitcher-type ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with non-organic admixture. The opening area was funnel-shaped and opened widely sideway. There are canal-like lines on the inside of the opening area. The neck sharply transforms into the shoulder. Made on a potter's wheel.	unit 9 depth: 0.80-1m	wall thickness-6mm
15	ceramic fragment	Part of the stock of a thick walled, black pitcher made of well baked clay with sand admixture. There are belt-like patterns stamped on the vessel fragment, these curl-shaped patterns are askew and protuberant. Made on a potter's wheel.	----------	wall thickness-7mm

Inv	Item	Description	Unit and depth	Dimensions
16	ceramic fragment	Part of a thick walled vessel stock made of black clay with fine sand admixture. Traces of a potter's wheel are seen on the inside.	----------	wall thickness-7mm
17	pitcher fragment	Part of the orifice element of a thick walled, grey pitcher-type ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with sand admixture. The opening area had welt and was bent outward. The shoulder part is girdled by concentric canal-like lines. At the same time, two rows of consecutive, askew notched patterns were drawn over those lines. The patterns were applied prior to baking. The vessel had a spheric stock, a narrowing neck and a funnel-shaped orifice element bent sideway widely. Made on a potter's wheel.	unit 13 depth: 60-80cm	wall thickness-7mm
18	ceramic fragment	Part of the orifice element of a thick walled, brown pitcher-type ceramic vessel made of well baked clay with sand admixture. The opening area had welt and was bent outward. Made on a potter's wheel.	unit 13 depth: 80-100cm	wall thickness-7mm

7 APPENDICES

7.1 REFERENCES

1. N.A. Museyibli, G.H. Aghayev, 2003. *The scientific report on archaeological excavation work carried out at the Zayamchai necropolis in 2003 by the BTC and SCP archaeological expedition*. 141 p.
2. S.N. Najafov, 2009. *Natural-geographic conditions of the Zayamchai basin and the location realm of burial monuments dating back to the late Bronze Age and the early Iron Age*. Azerbaijani Archaeology and Ethnography, No. 2, 2008, Baku, 2009, Nafta-Press, p. 42-47
3. S.N. Najafov, 2008. *Chronology of Zayamchai necropolis graves*. Azerbaijani Archaeology, Vol. 11, No. 1-2, 2008, Baku, 2008, Khazar University, p. 55-64
4. N.A. Museyibli, 2009. *Grave types of Zayamchai necropolis*. Azerbaijani Archaeology", 2009, No. 2, p. 37-57.

7.2 ILLUSTRATIONS

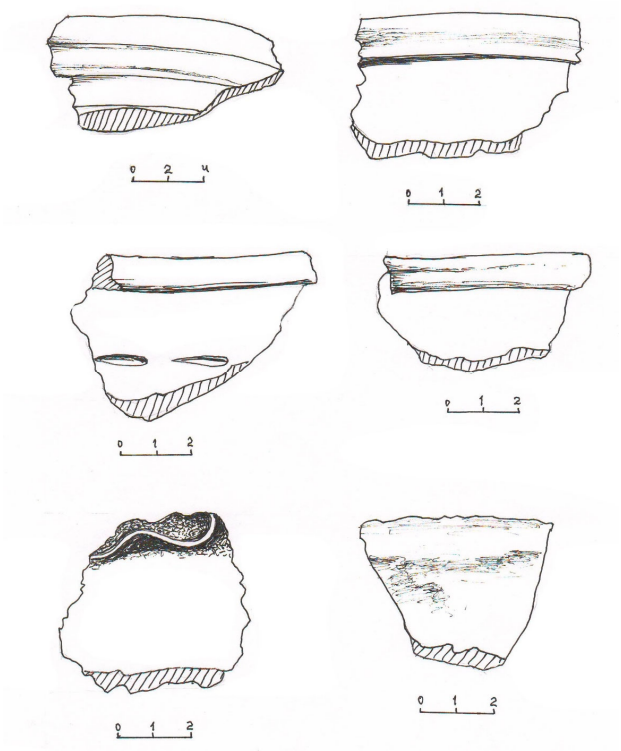

Figure 2.

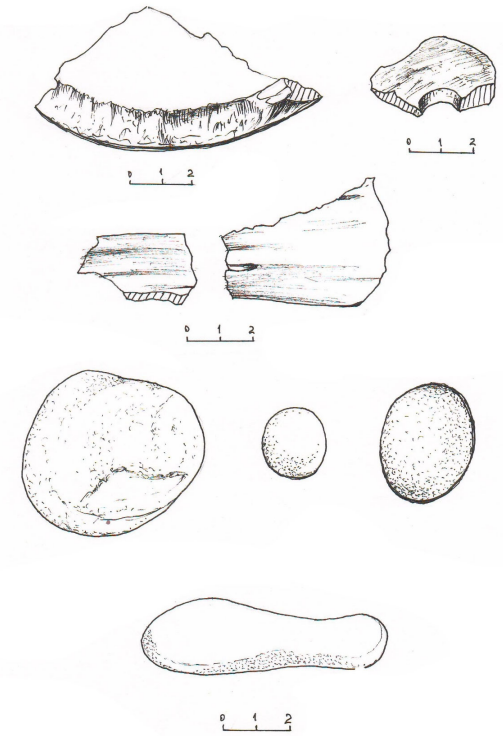

Figure 3.

7.3 PHOTOS

Photo 5. Excavation area. View to north.

Photo 6. Fragments of ceramic vessels.

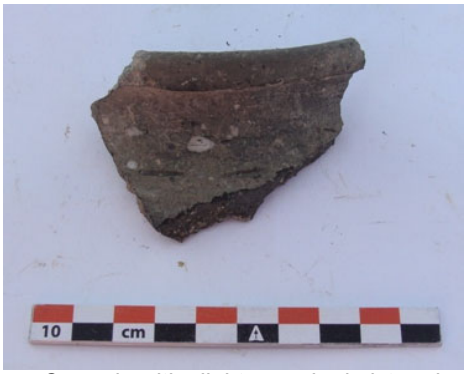

Photo 7. Ceramic with slight gravel admixture in clay composition.

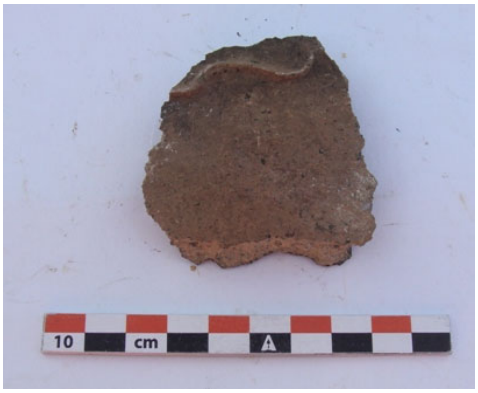

Photo 8. Ceramic item with thick walls.

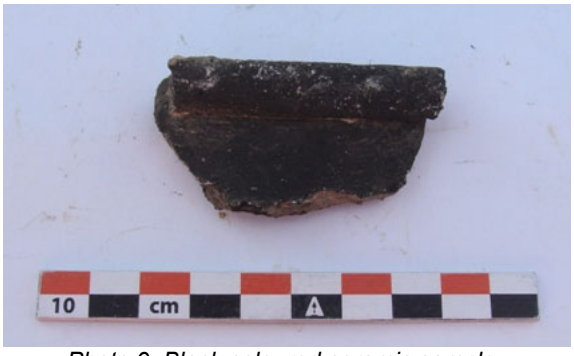

Photo 9. Black coloured ceramic sample.

Photo 10. Household jug orifice

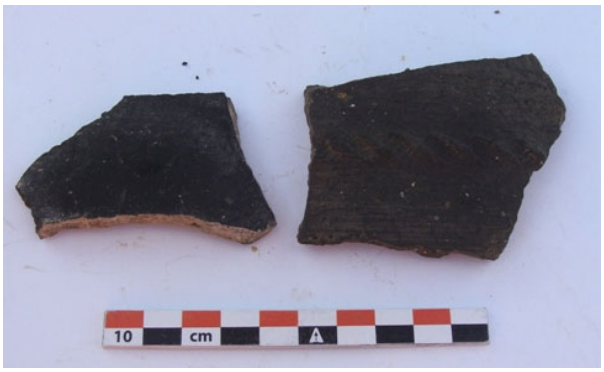

Photo 11. Fragments of ceramic vessel with clean clay composition.

Photo 12. Ceramic vessel orifice fragment.

Photo 13. Clay vessel base, Inv 1

Photo 14. Ceramic fragments with sand admixture in clay composition.

Photo 15. Roughly made ceramic.

Photo 16. Spindle whorl, Inv 5.

Photo 17. Utilised stone tool, Inv 6.

Photo 18. Sling stones Inv 9.