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**Amirarkh Report
Excavations of an Antique Period Wooden Coffin Grave
At Kilometre Point 204 of
Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and South Caucasus pipelines Right Of Way**

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ABSTRACT

This report describes the excavation of a wooden coffin grave discovered at Kilometre Point (KP) 204 of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline at Amirarkh village, Agdash District. Excavations of the burial produced rich archaeological material – pottery ware, metalware and jewellery all of which are so beautifully made that can serve as brilliant examples of the delicate taste of the customer and the craftsmanship of the master. The stylist study of the artifacts from the burial indicates that the wooden coffin grave could be dated to the first century, A.D.

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I. Introduction

- *Description of the BTC and SCP Archaeology Programme*

Archaeological excavations in connection with the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) pipelines were conducted prior to, and during the construction of these pipelines. These excavations generally were carried out within the 44m wide pipeline corridor from 2001 to 2005. The archaeology programme consisted of five phases of which the first four phases constituted field investigations:

Phase I – actual and potential archaeological sites were visually identified during walkover or baseline surveys during the selection of the pipeline route.

Phase II – the sites that were identified during Phase I as archaeologically potential were tested by digging test pits and conducting small-scale trial excavations.

Phase III – small and large-scale excavations were carried out within the BTC Right Of Way (ROW).

Phase IV – small and large-scale excavations were carried out within the SCP ROW.

In addition to these, all the construction activities were monitored by watching brief archaeologists.

In general, during the core Phase III and Phase IV archaeological excavations were carried out at 41 sites with thousands of artefacts discovered. None of these sites had been previously known to archaeological science.

Phase V – preparation of scientific reports on the archaeological excavations carried out during the previous phases.

- *Discovery of the Archaeological Site*

The site was found in April 2004 by a watching brief archaeologist following trenching for the BTC pipeline at KP 204. No surface markers or indicators (if there were any) could have been previously identified as the site was located in a heavily cultivated area. The wooden coffin grave was excavated in May 2004 by Muzaffar Huseynov and Bakhtiyar Jalilov from the the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography (IoAE). The work was supervised by the BTC archaeological representative Richard Moore.

II. Field and Office Methods

- *Field Methods*

The wooden coffin grave at Amirarkh was discovered at 3.4m depth. The grave was accidentally hit by an excavator bucket when digging the trench for the pipeline. The depth to the floor of the grave was 4.05m. The excavation of the grave, that was located at the edge of the trench, turned out to be a challenge as the major part of the grave went under the intact soil layer and in addition more loose soil from the spoil heap had already fallen down on top of the grave. Digging out the grave was dangerous because the massive soil layers from the walls of the trench could have collapsed at any moment. Taking all this into account all the potential risks had been properly estimated and special safety measures had been taken. The two archaeologists and the two labourers involved in the excavation of the grave had been provided with safety harness. The other end of the harness had been fixed to a pickup car with its engine running. To minimize the

risk the work was performed in shifts - one archaeologist and one labourer at a time. The excavation site was also equipped with ladders.

The wooden coffin grave at Amirarkh produced rich archaeological material. All of the finds were washed, recorded in a field logbook, boxed and sent to the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography in Baku.

- *Office/Laboratory Methods*

Some of the samples, especially broken pottery vessels were restored and each sample was illustrated. In addition, all the photos taken in the course of excavation of the grave have been scanned, and digital copies included in the site archive. The work on the excavation site plan and logbook records was finalized and the text of this Report was produced.

- *Special Analysis Methods*

In order to date the monument and determine the composition of archaeological finds some of the metal items found in the wooden coffin grave have been subjected to chemical analysis. The results of the analyses are given in the table that opens the illustrative part of this Report.

- *Archive Disposition*

All the processed archaeological material was handed over to the IoAE special archive set up for the storage of finds discovered on the BTC and SCP ROW.

III. Excavation Results

- *Site Description*

The archaeological site where the wooden coffin grave was found is located near the village of Amirarkh in the Agdash District at KP 204 of the BTC pipeline. The area is flat and is characterized mostly by sierozem, grassland and saline soils. The prevailing vegetation is field and semi-desert plants. The land had been used for agricultural purposes. As a result of ploughing no surface markers indicating the grave survived. Close to the grave there was an irrigation ditch. The nearest large water source is the Turyanchai river on the east side of the site. The site is 28m above sea level. The site is located at Polkovo coordinates 8701591, 4492479.

- *Description of the Grave*

The wooden coffin grave was placed on a sand layer. The depth to the bottom of the grave was 4.05m. Remains of hearths were found on the eastern and western sides of the grave. The eastern hearth was located 80cm from the grave and measured 65cm in diameter and 55cm in height. The debris of the western hearth measured 70cm in diameter and were 65cm high. The heights of the hearths were not entirely composed of ash. They contained also burnt soil, pieces of pottery, animal bones and flakes of charcoal.

Compared to the first, the second hearth was richer in this respect. Many pottery pieces, a fragment from above the shoulder of a small bardag-type vessel, and the skull, backbone and ribs of a horse or cattle were found here. The butchered animal bones were placed at different heights. Decayed wood residue and wood marks were detected on the skeleton while studying the grave. The logs were laid on the floor and top of the grave parallel to the skeleton. Besides, decayed wood remnants and marks were perpendicular to the skull and lower part of the skeleton. Wood remnants were well preserved in the silver ladle placed upside down inside the wooden coffin grave. It is noteworthy from this point of view that the pottery samples were put around the grave outside the wooden coffin.

The skeleton in the grave was buried on its right hand side facing the south. The skeleton was in a semi-crouched position, its legs slightly bent forward from the pelvis and backward from the knees. The skeleton's arms were bent towards its face from the elbows. Its length in this crouched position was 120cm. The deceased was buried with a large quantity of grave goods. Differently shaped bronze and clay vessels as well as many items of decoration were found in the grave. It

should also be noted that the bronze and decorative artifacts were found inside the wooden coffin grave whereas the pottery outside of it.

- *Archaeological Material Recovered from the Grave*

Silver

Of all grave goods the silver ladle is of special interest. It was placed upside down facing the skeleton's skull. The silver ladle is in the form of a plate (piyalə). Its body diameter is 20.5cm , height is 5cm , and the base diameter is 7.2cm . The ladle's rim becomes thicker towards its internal edge. The base has small legs. The inner surface of the ladle is decorated by stamped patterns of botanical motifs. These decorations in the form of five flower petals are stamped side by side beginning from the rim and down to the bottom of the ladle. The space between these patterns is filled with images of grape clusters. There are two clusters of grapes depicted in each of the four blank spaces. These grape cluster patterns were made by punching dots on the ladle's inner surface. The body and the base of the vessel were made separately and then fixed together (Figure 1).

Pottery

The pottery ware found in the grave consist of five bardag-type and one jug-type vessel.

Vessel 1

The jug-type vessel is light red with a slightly everted rim. It has two handles running from the mouth to its shoulder. The jug has also a 6cm diameter lid. This has a central knob with a hole in it (Photo 1).

The mouth diameter of the jug is 11.5cm , the body diameter is 15cm , the height is 15cm , and the base diameter is 11cm . This is a narrow-mouthed plain-style jug. The soil layer where it rested was above the layer where the wooden coffin grave and other vessels were found. Presumably, this jug was added to the grave after the wooden coffin and pottery around it were backfilled.

Vessel 2

The bardag-type ceramic vessel placed behind the skeleton's skull differs from the rest in terms of its large size. It is 32cm high, the mouth diameter is 18cm , the neck height is 6.5cm , the body diameter is 25cm , and the base diameter is 13cm . The colour of this single handled vessel is light red. Its mouth is gutter shaped. On both sides of the mouth there are attached lugs. Its design is plain (Photo 2).

Vessel 3

Another bardag-type vessel is relatively small, its mouth diameter is 10cm , neck height is 5.5cm , body diameter is 15cm , overall height is 20.5cm and the base diameter is 11.5cm . The single handle of this light red vessel connects its mouth and shoulder. On both sides of the gutter-shaped mouth there are attached lugs. It has a plain design (Photo 3).

Vessel 4

One more bardag-type vessel is even smaller. Its mouth is 6.5cm in diameter, the overall height is 16.5cm , the body diameter is 12cm and the base diameter is 8.5cm . The single handle of this light red vessel connects its mouth and shoulder. Like the other vessels it has a gutter-shaped mouth. The design is plain. This vessel was damaged while trenching (not illus).

Vessel 5

Another bardag-type vessel was seriously damaged during trenching. Only its base and handle were more or less intact when found. Judging by the 20cm base diameter and several other pieces preserved, it could be assumed that this vessel was relatively larger than the other bardag-type

vessels. The semicircular handle on the shoulder of the vessel differs from the others in shape. This light red vessel has a plain design (not illus).

Vessel 6

Another large bardag-type vessel that was taken out of this grave was also damaged during the pipeline construction. This vessel is also light red and has a gutter-shaped mouth. It has a handle connecting the mouth with the shoulder. At either side of the mouth there are small lugs attached. Its mouth diameter is 14.5cm, the neck height is 3.4cm, the body diameter is 28cm, and the base diameter is 19.5cm. There are notched patterns on the handle and the part where the mouth and shoulder meet. The upper part of the shoulder is girded with a wavelike pattern (not illus).

Bronze Objects

The two bracelets found, are made of bronze. One is 7cm in diameter and its thickness varies from 1cm in the central decorative part to 0.5cm at the ends. The gap between the two ends of the bracelet is 3.5cm. Its central part is shaped by way of widening. Its cross section is round.

The other bracelet differs from the first by being thinner and smaller. One end of the bracelet overlaps the other by 2cm. Its diameter is 6cm, thickness is 0.5cm. Compared to the first one this bracelet is badly preserved. Its cross section is flat.

Of the rings, two are made of thin bronze plates. One of them has no jewelry on, its surface is decorated by 3 lines of stamped circular patterns. Another ring is made of relatively narrow bronze plate, it had an embedded jewel of light green glass. Both of them are 1.6cm in diameter. The third of the rings made of iron has a cruder shape. Its outer diameter is 3.3cm, the inner diameter is 2.5cm. The cross section is semicircularly shaped. The ring is well preserved.

Among the metal artifacts bronze bells predominate quantitatively. As to their shape and dimensions the bells are divided into three groups: pyramid-shaped, pyramid-shaped latticed and dome-shaped latticed jingles.

The biggest of the bells is pyramid-shaped. It has tiny legs jutting out from all four sides of it. The jingle is 4cm high and 2.7cm in diameter. Its top part designed for suspending is circular from inside and quadrangular from outside.

There are 3 pyramid-shaped latticed jingles. All three are small and similarly shaped. Lattices in the shape of triangle were attached to all four sides of the jingles. Their suspension parts are in the form of a circle. The jingles are 2cm high, their diameter is 7.5mm.

The number of dome-shaped jingles is 9. They are alike as to shape and size. The suspension parts are circular from inside and quadrangular from outside. The height is 1.7-1.8cm, diameter 1.5-1.6cm.

There are 7 dome-shaped latticed bellss. Two are relatively small, each with triangular lattices on their 3 sides. The other jingles are bigger, with six or seven lattices. Their suspension part is circular from inside and triangular from outside.

The most interesting among the metal finds is a zoomorphic figure. The neck and body of the figure are oblong, the legs are circular. The belly has a hole for suspension. There are remnants of iron wire attached to the circular legs. Presumably, this zoomorphic suspension served as the central figure to which by means of iron wires different decorations were suspended. Moreover, the suspension parts of bronze jingles have remains of iron wire as well. The clapper to produce sound when striking the jingle wall is also made of iron. Most of the bells are well preserved.

Beads

One hundred and thirteen beads differing in material, shape and size were found on the skeleton (Photo 5).

The largest beads were made of round pieces of glass. They are encrusted with minerals of different colours with the holes made on them in advance. These items of decoration are seemingly amulets. There are three such beads and all of them measure 1.8cm in diameter and 1.2cm in width.

One of the ceramic beads is circular, it is light black and measures 2cm in diameter. The bead made of glass paste is interesting for its decorations. The patterns on its surface look like a richly decorated carpet. Its diameter is 1.9cm, the width is 1.5cm. Several of the beads are oblong. Among them a cornelian bead with several patterns stamped on its surface measures 5cm in length and 1.2cm in diameter. Another 3.7cm long and 1cm wide bead made of black onyx is incrustated with red substance. A 3.1cm long and 1.1cm wide bead made of black glass is incrustated with wavelike decorations using white minerals. A 2.2cm long and 0.8cm wide chestnut colour bead made of onyx is decorated by incrusting thin wavelike lines using white minerals. One glass bead is diamond shaped, it is 1.2cm wide and its diameter is 1.6cms. The number of white beads made of chalk is 23. They are circular and flat shaped. Eight of the beads made of light red clay are rectangular. Two of the beads are made of bone with their surfaces glazed.

IV. Analytical Results

- *Interpretation of Excavation Results*

It is assumed that the site of the wooden coffin grave was discovered was a former Antique Period necropolis, because several jar graves were detected some 150-200m south-east of the excavated site. The necropolis is thought to cover an area of over 1 hectare. No doubt the majority of the graves remain outside the pipeline corridor because excavation at this site was restricted by the width of the pipeline trench which was only 4m.

Decayed wood residue and wood marks detected on the skeleton provides strong evidence to propose that the burial can be attributed to the wooden coffin type of graves.

The importance of each artifact found in the wooden coffin grave should be emphasized. The fabrication technique of the pottery ware recovered from the wooden coffin grave suggests the art of pottery at that time had reached the highest level of development.

In addition to pottery the metal artifacts found in the grave are also very precisely and neatly made. However, the silver ladle found in the grave is particularly worthy of attention. The abundance of found metal artifacts proves that metal-working was highly developed in the Antique Period Azerbaijan.

Also of great interest are bone, glass, paste and ceramic beads found on the skeleton in the wooden coffin grave. Some of the beads are so beautiful and delicate that one cannot but admire the taste of the customer and the craftsmanship of the master.

The metalwork and decorations made of different materials that were found in the grave bear witness to the highest level of development both of different branches of craft on the one hand, and the spiritual culture of the people in the Antique Period Azerbaijan, on the other.

- *Discussion and Analysis of the Results of the Work Compared with Other Sites of a Similar Nature on the Pipeline Route*

Rich archaeological monuments have been discovered on the BTC Pipeline Route. However, except for the wooden coffin grave at Amirarkh no other similar types of grave monuments have been found on the pipeline route.

- *Discussion of the Site within a Regional and National Context*

Close analogs of the wooden coffin grave found at Amirarkh are provided by wooden coffin graves excavated at different times in other areas of Azerbaijan. Similar Antique Period grave monuments have been excavated in Mingechevir and Guba. These Antique Period sites also contained pottery identical to that found at Amirarkh. What is particularly worthy of attention is that ladles similar to the one found in Amirarkh were also recovered from wooden coffin graves excavated in Mingechevir and Guba.

The study and comparison of the material from all the three wooden coffin graves bears a striking similarity. This similarity manifests itself both in the types of the archaeological material and manufacturing technique and in the funereal rites which could be said to be almost the same. For example, building a fire during the funeral was an accepted practice which implies that the belief in fire was very strong in that period of history.

This close similarity among Antique Period monuments separated by considerable distances is an indicator that the people living in different areas of Antique Period Azerbaijan were ethnically the same.

In general, the wooden coffin grave excavated at Amirarkh is the proof of high development of crafts, pottery, metal-working in the Antique Period in Azerbaijan.

V. Illustrations

Table

No.	Site	Metal	Qty	Elements											
				Au	Cu	As	Sn	Ag	Pb	Sb	Zn	Fe	Co	Ni	Bi
1	KP 204	Bracelet	1	0.1106	14.30	0.0346	0.0050	79.12	0.018	0.1040	0.026	5.80	0.0002	0.012	0.0006
2		Jingle	1	$<5 \cdot 10^{-4}$	80.90	0.0007	3.40	<0.00001	5.405	0.0006	9.450	0.31	0.0001	0.018	0.0007
3		Jingle	1	$<5 \cdot 10^{-4}$	93.44	0.0008	0.590	-	3.410	0.0026	0.034	0.054	0.0001	0.016	0.0005
4		Jewelry	1	$<5 \cdot 10^{-4}$	93.68	0.0016	3.26	0.00950	0.0340	0.0008	0.420	0.50	0.0002	0.021	0.0006

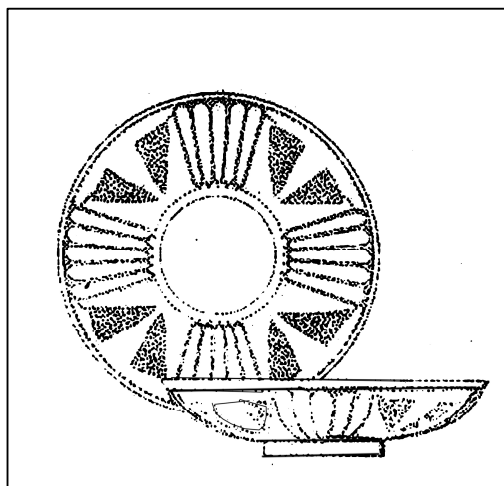


Figure 1.



Photo 1. Vessel 1



Photo 2. Vessel 2



Photo 3. Vessel 3



Photo 4. Metal Objects



Photo 5. Beads

VI. Inventory of Artefacts

No	KP	Type of Site	Material	Find	Qnt.
1	204	wooden coffin grave	ceramic	jug	1
2	204	wooden coffin grave	ceramic	bardaq	1
3	204	wooden coffin grave	ceramic	bardaq	1
4	204	wooden coffin grave	ceramic	bardaq	1
5	204	wooden coffin grave	ceramic	bardaq	1
6	204	wooden coffin grave	ceramic	bardaq	1
7	204	wooden coffin grave	silver	ladle	1
8	204	wooden coffin grave	bronze	bracelet	1
9	204	wooden coffin grave	bronze	bracelet	1
10	204	wooden coffin grave	bronze	ring	1
11	204	wooden coffin grave	bronze	ring	1
12	204	wooden coffin grave	iron	ring	1
13	204	wooden coffin grave	metal	jingle	1
14	204	wooden coffin grave	metal	jingle	3
15	204	wooden coffin grave	bronze	jingle	9
16	204	wooden coffin grave	bronze	jingle	7
17	204	wooden coffin grave	metal	jingle	1
18	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	3
19	204	wooden coffin grave	paste	bead	1
20	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	1
21	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	1
22	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	1
23	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	1
24	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	1
25	204	wooden coffin grave	paste	bead	23
26	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	8
27	204	wooden coffin grave	paste	bead	1
28	204	wooden coffin grave	glass	bead	16
29	204	wooden coffin grave	bone	bead	2