

## ANCIENT ARCHEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS ALONG THE ROUTE OF THE BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN CRUDE OIL PIPELINE AND THE SOUTH-CAUCASUS GAS PIPELINE

Amongst the archeological monuments discovered and investigated in the pipeline corridor, the numerous necropoleis and settlements from the ancient period are significant. Out of them, the various necropoleis of the Albanian period are the most interesting. Three types of burials have been registered altogether. These are burials in soil (dirt) graves, ceramic jars and burials in wooden (tree) coffins. All three types of burials were quite common in Caucasian Albania during the ancient and Early Middle Ages. The presence of numerous Albanian monuments dated from the IV-III centuries BCE to the VII-VIII centuries CE along the route of the pipeline demonstrates that Albanian people began to intensively develop the whole area from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>1</sup>

Soil (dirt) burials found in the pipeline corridor can be divided into two groups. There are burials with the elongated skeletons on their backs, and burials with the skeleton in a crooked position, lying on its left or right side. A soil burial with a skeleton lying on its back was investigated in the village of Seidlyar in the Samukh district. The skeleton was lying on its back, with its skull pointing north-westwards, and its arms extended along the body. The bones of the skeleton, except the skull, were highly deformed. There was a bronze ring on the right hand finger, gold earrings in the ears, and several strings of beads on the neck including four strings of gold beads.<sup>2</sup> Four deformed ceramic jars, a ceramic spinning wheel and a needle-shaped iron tool were also found in the grave. Soil (dirt) burials with elongated skeletons are well covered in the archeological literature of Azerbaijan. They were studied in Mingechavir and were dated from the VII-IV century BCE, based on the composite of the materials collected.<sup>3</sup> Scythian articles are often found in the graves of this type. E.g., bronze mirrors with the handles that end with animal figurines, Scythian style arrow heads, Akinak daggers (*short swords*), etc.<sup>4</sup> One of the interesting finds in the grave near the village of Seidlyar were gold earrings with serpentine-patterned apices. Such earrings were also found in the soil graves with the elongated skeletons in Mingechavir.<sup>5</sup> The soil grave in the village of

Seidlyar was dated from the V-IV century BCE.<sup>6</sup> Soil burials with the skeletons lying on their left or right side were studied in the Dera-yeri area, near the village of Borsunly in the Geranboy district. This was a burial mound in the barrow of the Late Bronze epoch. Soil burials of the same type and synchronous in time, namely pertaining to the III-I centuries, with highly arched skeletons were found near the village of GyraKh Kesaman in the Gazakh district. Ceremonial articles in these graves were represented by various ceramic jars, including widely known Yaloylutepinski style ceramic articles; various ornaments – beads, bronze rings, pendants, bracelets, etc.<sup>7</sup>

The second group of ancient burial grounds in the pipeline corridor is represented by burials in large household jars – kyupas. A total of six necropoleis with jar burials were found along the pipeline route.

It should be mentioned that the burial ceremony in ceramic vessels was widely used across the globe in ancient times. This ritual was done in the Mediterranean basin, Egypt, the Middle East and in the Caucasus<sup>8</sup>.

A new burst of activity of this burial ceremony has been observed in the middle of the I-st millennium BCE practically all over Eurasia - from Spain to China. This type of burial was the most common in the Southern Caucasus and the whole of West Asia. In the small area of the present-day Azerbaijan Republic, over 100 necropoleis with jar burials have been registered. The Yaldili necropolis in the Yevlakh district, the three necropoleis in the Agdash district and the necropolis near the village of Borsunly in the Geranboy district should be mentioned among the jar burials. They all used the so called standard procedure of jar burials, when jars with the skeletons in various poses were placed horizontally into the excavated grave. Ceremonial articles were placed both inside and around the burial (Canopic) jars. Burial jars, or kyupas, are large, wide-mouthed containers with thick walls. Researchers think that both large household jars, and jars specially made for burials were used. In the valley of the Kura River where the pipelines were laid, jar burials occurred most frequently at the turn of epochs: from the II century BCE to the III century CE, and coexisted with the burials in soil graves. It is interesting that the nature and typology of the ceremonial items are identical in the graves of both types. In both types of burials one can find both rich and insignificant ceremonial articles.

A wooden (tree) coffin burial deserves special mention amongst the ancient burials found in the pipeline corridor. It was found near the village of Amirarkh in the Agdam district, at a depth of 3.4 meters from the ground surface. Unfortunately, the wooden coffin used for the burial was practically fully decayed, probably because of the permanent accumulation of groundwater. The rotten top of the wooden coffin fell through. The skeleton was found in a slightly crooked position, lying on its right side, and facing west. Beams parallel and perpendicular to the cross timbers of the wooden coffin were clearly discernable.

This is the first burial of such type found on the territory of Azerbaijan after the excavations in the middle of the XX century in MingeChavir. Wooden coffin burials are quite rare. It is assumed that noble persons were buried in wooden coffins. Rich ceremonial paraphernalia was found in these graves, as a rule, if they had not been robbed in ancientry<sup>9</sup>.

Ceremonial articles in such wooden coffins were found both inside and around the wooden coffin. Large ceramic jars were found outside the wooden coffin, whilst small ceramic articles,

various ornaments – beads, rings, pendants, etc. were found inside it. An interesting and rare find amongst the ceremonial paraphernalia of this burial is a silver-plated bowl on a round plate, decorated with an embossed ornament and paired bunches of grapes. This was the third find of silver-plated bowls with such ornamentation. The first bowl was found in 1949, in the wooden coffin in Mingechavir, and the second bowl was found in the soil (dirt) burial of the Rustovski necropolis. Whilst the Mingechavir bowl was made using techniques characteristic for the Graeco-Roman school of metal working, the other two bowls, which have a similar decorative motive and ornamentation, were produced using a completely different technique, characteristic for the local artistic approaches to metal working.

One should note that in the course of the archeological excavations in the pipeline corridor, over ten ancient settlements and necropoleis were discovered and registered. They are located outside the pipeline corridor and could become sites for future scientific studies.

There is one more notable burial ground among the ancient monuments that have been studied. The graves of this burial ground were destroyed by the later Epichristian burial ground. This burial ground is located in the Chaparly area of the Shamkir district, and is interesting as it shows the appearance of Christian funeral ritualism on the territory of Azerbaijan in the Early Middle Ages. Signs of the early Christian chapel can be seen on the territory of the necropolis, which had been possibly built at the site of a more ancient pagan worship structure of that time.

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