

**Grounded: A MB Settlement on the Sharur Valley Floor, 2015–2016 Excavations of the Naxçivan Archaeological Project**

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The Naxçivan archaeological project (Emory University and University of Pennsylvania) has undertaken three years of research in the Sharur Valley, Naxçivan, Azerbaijan, funded by two US National Science Foundation research grants (1430403 and 1430404). In the last two years, valley floor excavations revealed an unexpected series of Middle Bronze Age elite structures that challenged the previously well-accepted hypothesis that complex village life had been largely abandoned in the MB period. We propose that in certain well-watered valleys such as the Sharur Valley, populations may have moved from settlements on mounds and hills to the valley floor, perhaps because of a lessening of tensions that required a defensive elevation. These valley floor settlements are very difficult to recover archaeologically because 3,000 years of agricultural activity has tended to destroy them, leaving only the well-known burial mounds on higher noncultivable ridges. What was thought to be a cultural pattern may be a matter of archaeological preservation.

In this paper we present the results of the excavations of MB settlement on the valley floor as well as of a select group of kurgan burials on the higher ridges surrounding the valley. In addition to settlement data we present a coordinated analysis of bioarchaeological data zooarchaeology and paleobotany in order fully to understand the agro-pastoral patterns that may have created this regionally specific settlement system.