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14TH AND 15TH CENTURY SHIRVAN WEAPONRY AT “SHIRVANSHAHS LEGACY IN WORLD MUSEUMS” EXHIBITION

An exhibition titled “Shirvanshahs legacy in world museums” was held very successfully at the Shirvanshahs Palace Complex in Baku. The event, organized by the “Icherisheher” State Historical-Architectural Reserve Department and taking place from October 24, 2018 to January 23, 2019, featured hundreds of exhibits pertaining to the history of the medieval Azerbaijani state of the Shirvanshahs (861-1538). The displayed exhibits had been delivered from the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, “Icherisheher” History Museum, Shamakhi Museum of History and Local Lore, Archaeology Museum, as well as Turkey’s Askeri (Military) Museum and the Georgian National Museum. It is also worth mentioning that a number of modern museum technologies and interactive tools were used at the exhibition to convey the rich history and cultural heritage of the Shirvanshah state to the visitors more comprehensively (1).

For the first time, the exhibition, which fascinated both Azerbaijani citizens and foreign tourists, featured four helmets that belonged to Farrukh Yasar I (1465-







1500), as well as bulletproof vests of the last Shirvan ruler, Shirvanshah Keygubad (1317-1348) and Shirvanshah Khalilullah I (1417-1465) (9, p.58-73, 76-81). These items, which were taken out of Azerbaijan during the Middle Ages, were brought back to the home country for the first time (2).

A great number of Azerbaijani weapons continue to be stored at the museums in the Republic of Turkey. The weapons, taken as trophies as a result of the Aghgoyunlu-Ottoman war in the 15th century and the Ottoman-Safavid war in the 16th and 17th centuries, were included in the Ottoman arsenal and preserved as museum exhibits from the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, the weapons handed over as presents for the embassy when the diplomatic ties were being established are still stored at Turkey's Askeri Museum in

Istanbul and the Topkapi Palace museum.

The weapons exhibited at the "Shirvanshahs legacy in world museums" exhibition were delivered from the Askeri Museum. A part of Azerbaijani defensive weapons, which are included in the museum's collection comprised of a total of 55,000 exhibits, are displayed in the "Defensive weapons" section, while the other part is stored in the museum's foundations (3, p.3; 11, p. 92-93).

Let us take a close look at the three exhibited helmets with the inscribed name of Shirvanshah Farrukh Yasar I. The first helmet (4, inv. No. 13581) has the following inscription in Arabic: "It belongs to a happy man. Let peace be bestowed upon him and let him live long, without grief, and may the world enjoy happiness from his state."

The inscription on the broad part of the rim of the

second helmet (4, inv. No. 5911) says, "This helmet belongs to Sultan Farrukh Yasar, cavalry leader, the master of virtue and fate, dignity and grandeur. May the triumph of the victorious sultan be fortified." There are also large silver-plated letters in the lower stripe of the crest saying "it belongs to the victorious master of the state and fate".

The rim, glass incisions and lower side of the third helmet were designed the same as the other helmets (4, inv. No.163). Though the inscription made in large Arabic letters on the broad part of the rim is damaged, the words saying "this helmet belongs to cavalry leader, Sultan Farrukh Yasar bin Khalilullah, the master of virtue and fate, dignity and grandeur" is legible. There is also an inscription in interwoven Arabic letters in the lower stripe of the crest saying, "It belongs to a happy man. Let peace be bestowed upon him and let him live long, without grief, and may the world enjoy happiness from his state".

Two more helmets that are part of the Askeri Museum collection pertain to the Shirvanshah state (AM, inv. No. 7954; AM, inv. No. 9488) (5, p.90). Since their decorative design is damaged, the inscriptions over them, including the owner's name, are illegible.

All Shirvan helmets are of the "tulband" ("turban") type and differ mainly in terms of their artistic design. Let's take a close look at the features of such an item. The term "turban helmet type" emerged due to its peculiar shape. It is an international term used in Turkish, Western and Russian scientific literature ("tūlbānd miġfāri (türk.); turban helmet (English); пюрбанний шлем (rus.)).

A turban-shaped helmet has a high rim, a wide body, a rising crest and a two-piece top. The rim was made wide so that it would be put on a person's head deep-down. There are two semi-ellipse-shaped holes for the eyes on the front of the orifice. Both the orifice and the holes' edges were reinforced by metal margins. Orifices were also made between these holes for the nose shield. The latter was shaped as a narrow and long board and attached to the item vertically. At times, its upper part was finished with a round-shaped board with a flat, flower-like protuberance. The protuberance was used as a symbol (6, p.98). The protrusions on the rim were fastened. A circular net made of metal wires was pulled over these protrusions. The net protected the neck and the mouth. The body expanded from the rim and gradually transformed into the crest. The helmet's inflated edge prevented blows from the top and its even side mitigated strikes dealt from the sides. Sometimes,



a metal hook was attached on the front of the helmet's body. Presumably, the hook was required to keep the fighting mask elevated. The crest part gradually narrowed and transformed into the top, rising upward. The top of the helmet consisted of two parts. The lower part was comprised of a board decorated in "pakhlava" style; the pakhlava sweets were pointed in four directions, and there was a hole in the center of each pakhlava. The strings pulled over these holes were covered by a small flag or a colored ribbon. The upper part of the top side was finished with a pointed tip.

According to US researcher David Alexander, a well-known expert on Islamic world weapons, who has dedicated a special article to the emergence of helmet types, the "turban" type, created in the late 14th century in Anatolia in the Turkic principalities (including the Ottoman state, Garagoyunlu and Aghgoyunlu), was improved owing to the efforts of Anatolian, Shirvan and South Azerbaijan craftsmen (6, p.100). Turkish researchers note that passages from the Ayat al-Kursi and al-Fath surahs of the Holy Quran, as well as the names of the owners, are legible over some of the helmets (5, p.94). In the inscriptions, the helmet itself is called "bayda" ("helmet" in Arabic).





Given the Shirvanshah state's being subordinate to the Aghgoyunlu state, as well as the close political and economic ties based on the kinship bonds of their rulers, Alexander believes it is not a mere coincidence that the Shirvan "turban" helmets are similar to those of the Aghgoyunlu state. Arabic and Persian inscriptions were made over the helmet and the inflated weapon with a board and ring made in the same style, the elbow, knee and thigh pads, and the base. The religious writings engraved on it included excerpts from the Ayat al-Kursi, al-Fath and Al-Ikhlâs surahs of the Quran, as well as words requesting help for its owner from Allah and wishes for success. Moreover, the owner's name and sometimes the craftsman's name were indicated over the weapons (7, p.303).

According to Alexander, the expression "the power dwells upon obedience and wealth is in content" specifically characterizes the 15th century Aghgoyunlu and Shirvan weapons, as well as those created under their influence in the eastern villages of the Ottoman state (7, p.22). He believes that the fact that helmets of such high quality were made in the Shirvanshah state is not accidental, considering that "the city of Shamahki and the Kubachi (Zirehgeran) village were well-known centers of metalworking" (6, p.99).

The Shirvanshah state-era arms displayed at the exhibition pertained to a single type, but differed in terms of their technical details and artistic composition. These weapons are stored at the Askeri Museum (5, p.100).

The item that belonged to Shirvanshah Keykubad



It is considered the most ancient weapon in the Askeri Museum collection with the name of a historic personality on it (4, inv. No. 21300). It is a sample of a classical, plated ring-shaped weapon that is 84 cm long and 134 cm wide (with the arms open). One or more words are indicated on each of the plates: "Enlightened man; work of Amgah, may the destiny bestowed upon you from Allah be graceful and the esteem be everlasting; the work of craftsman Amgah, let his fate be graceful; the Great Ruler, master of sword, grand man of the world and religious backbone, hero Keykubad, may Allah eternalize him". The ornaments and writings are silver-plated. Thus, the names of ruler Keykubad and craftsman Amgah are cited here.

The plated and ring-shaped weapon was made as a robe. The main part of the robe was woven from steel rings. The rings were connected using the "nail" method (the two tips of the ring are attached to one another by a nail). The collar is long and protects the lower part of the neck. The weapon has short arms, reaching the elbow. The weapon's bottom is also short and in most cases does not stretch beyond the knee. The weapon is enclosed in the front, with a hook at the collar and small belts in the abdomen. Several rows of steel plates

are woven into the body in the abdomen area in the front, along with one row on the right and left sides. The lateral side of the side plates is cut out in a way that would not restrict the fighter's movement under his arms. There are more plates on the back, woven in several rows from the belt to the shoulders. An incision at the bottom of the weapon's back side allowed the fighter to ride on a horseback freely.

The plates of the weapon pertaining to Shirvanshah Khalilullah I (4, inv. No. 16376) had the following inscription: "The shadow of Allah is upon the slave; the sultan of the nation; the grandest of all; may he be eternalized; he is supreme; it was made by Mahmud under divine fate; the proprietor, hero, Sultan Khalilullah; the grandest of all; the property belongs to him; let the senior be supreme and eternal; it belongs to the sultan; religion; the most beneficial" (the inscriptions are not fully legible due to damage). Thus, the names of Shirvanshah Khalilullah I and craftsman Mahmud are cited on the weapon.

The weapons of Shirvanshahs Khalilullah I and Keykubad I were known in medieval literature as "chovshan". The fact that the works of 10th century chronicler Ibn Rushd, poets Mujiraddin Beylagani (11th-12th centuries) and Nizami Ganjavi (12th-13th centuries)

cited this term indicates that this type of weapons was widespread in Azerbaijan (15, p. 219).

As a result of archaeological excavations, "jovshan" weapon plates dating back to the 11th-13th centuries with rings attached to them were discovered in Azerbaijan's Darband and Beylagan cities (10, p. 139-141). Z. Rahimova believes that the first classical style "jovshan" image in Oriental miniatures was encountered in a 1396 miniature (14, p.17). 16th century Tabriz miniatures also featured an image of such a weapon (16, sh. No. 32). Sharaf ad-Din Yazdi wrote that the Zirehgeran village that was part of the Shirvanshah state was famous for the manufacturing of such weapons; even Amir Timur received such a weapon as a present while crossing the northern Caucasus (13, p.51).

"Jovshan" was usually considered as a defensive weapon of heavily armed cavalymen and troops' command. Ahmad bey Javanshir (19th century) noted that certain fighters used "jovshans" of their forefathers in Azerbaijan in the late 18th century (12, p. 40).

In his work published in 2015, D. Alexander said in the chapter titled "The Turkoman method of weaponry production" that this method became widespread in the 15th and the first half of the 16th century in Azerbaijan, Anatolia, Iran, and northern Syria, which were part of the territory of Azerbaijani states. Garagoyunlu, Aghgoyunlu, the Shirvanshahs, the Safavid states, as well as the Garaman, Kastamonu, Germiyan and Dulgadir Turkic principalities were credited for having developed the method (7, p. 308-311). According to some researchers, the most remarkable samples of this technique are made in Azerbaijani cities; even during the Ottoman-Safavid War the Ottoman state was ordering turban helmets and jovshans to craftsmen from northern Azerbaijani cities, including Darband (8, p.137).

Thus, the helmets and arms displayed at the "Shirvanshahs legacy in world museums" exhibition that belonged to the Shirvanshahs clearly show the high level of the medieval Azerbaijani art of war and craftsmanship. 🌸

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