



12th century glazed crockery

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MEDIEVAL SHAMKIR IN LIGHT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

IN THE MIDDLE AGES, THERE WERE MANY POPULATED, MODERN CITIES WITH POWERFUL DEFENSIVE WALLS, MONUMENTAL BUILDINGS, UNDERGROUND WATER PIPES, SANITARY FACILITIES, CLOSED MARKETS, WAREHOUSES AND ADVANCED CRAFT IN AZERBAIJAN. AMONG THEM WAS SHAMKIR, WHICH IS CONSIDERED AN ANCIENT CITY.

The 9th century historian Ahmad al-Balazuri, who described the history of the Arab conquest, says: "... Salman ibn Rabi'a al-Bahili (Arab commander – T. D.) sent an army which seized the city of Shamkur, which was considered an ancient city," (Baladzori, 1927, p.14). This report indicates that even in the 7th century, Shamkir was considered an ancient city. This city, located in the contact zone between two civilizations - Muslim and Western - on the Great Silk Road, played an important role in

Excavation at Naringala





Monumental building

the military-political, socio-economic and cultural life of medieval Azerbaijan. Its prosperity falls to the 11th-12th centuries. Shamkir attracted not only scientists, merchants and craftsmen, but also invaders. In the 1230's, Mongol hordes looted and destroyed many cities of Azerbaijan, including Shamkir. In the late Middle Ages, the city of Shamkir was in ruins. Even the ruins of the city were impressive. The 17th century Russian traveler Arseniy Sukhanov says: "... we passed through an empty city, which was large, built from bricks and stone and was different from inside; both had damaged walls, but the crying tower (minaret – T. D.) was much higher, intact and built from bricks. There is also a brick bridge over the river here..." (Orthodox-Palestine, 1889, p.103)

The ancient settlement of Shamkir is located in the western region of the Azerbaijan Republic on the left bank of the river Shamkirchay at 40°50'11.45"N and 46°07'44.19"E. According to a joint project of the In-

stitute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan and the Public Association for Regional Development in 2007-2012, stationary and large-scale archaeological excavations are being implemented in the ancient settlement of Shamkir.

One of the achievements of the archaeological work in Shamkir is the study of the fortification of the city. It is known that the defenses of the medieval cities of Azerbaijan were closely related to topographical conditions. Like other lowland cities of Azerbaijan, the fortifications of Shamkir were erected artificially. The city with the citadel was fortified with sufficient reliability.

The citadel of the city lies in the eastern part of the settlement on the left bank of the river Shamkirchay. It is rectangular in shape, elongated from north to south and covers an area of more than one hectare. In the process of archaeological work,



11-12th century arrow heads



IRS Our history

5th excavation site. Lower layer



Remains of urban sewage



the layout and design elements became clear and new data was acquired regarding the dating and periodization of the construction and repair of this defensive structure during the Middle Ages. Archaeological excavations uncovered remains of the eastern, southern and northern walls. The walls of the citadel were reinforced by corner towers and rectangular buttresses. The height of

the walls ranges from 5.5-7.5 metres and width - 3.2-4 metres. The excavations showed that the foundation of the wall of the citadel was different, depending on the terrain and the nature of the soil. For example, if near the north-eastern tower of the eastern wall, the foundation and basement were powerful, monolithic and two-stage, in the central tower, there was no need for that, since the

soil here was very hard.

The citadel wall is erected as combined masonry and represents a series of alternating lines of fired bricks, river gravel and hewn white stone. Medieval architects and builders paid great attention to the wall covering. Using a combination of masonry, they created a masterpiece of military architecture. It should be noted that the city of Shamkir was one of the centers of the Arran architecture school, for which polychrome, combined masonry walls are very characteristic.

The walls of the citadel, according to archeology, were built in the 11th century and renovated several times. After the Mongol destruction, the walls were in ruins. The reconstruction of the destroyed walls took place quite late. The restored part of the walls stands out for its coarseness and primitiveness.





Remains of the city wall



It became clear that in the 8th-10th centuries, the city was protected by a fortress wall built from river stone and mud bricks. The lower rows of the masonry were built from river stones on a plaster solution. The top lines of the masonry were built from mud bricks. In the 11th century, parallel city walls were built. Both walls are built with combined masonry, which is characteristic of the Arran architecture school. The distance between them is up to 10 meters. The outer wall was located along the old wall. Note that excavation V, where the fortress walls of the shahristan were discovered and studied, is double-decker unlike other excavations. They connect at the top tier, where the city walls come very close to the citadel, creating a narrow corridor. This wall and tower are parallel to the wall of the citadel and tower. The distance between the walls is 4-4.3 meters.

In the lower layer of excavation V, the length of the excavated wall is 80 meters and width - 3.8 meters. This part of the wall is reinforced with four semi-circular monolithic towers. The parallel inner defensive wall of the city has been studied at a length of

27.5 meters. The gate located on the southern side was protected by two flanking towers, and the southern tower turned out more devastated. Both towers were skillfully covered with local white stone. The distance between the towers is 4-4.1 meters.



In the area between the second and third towers of the exterior of the wall, a construction with arched openings was found. It is adjacent to the city wall, i.e. the fortress wall forms its western wall.

During the archaeological excavations, valuable information was acquired on the civil structures of Shamkir. In the north-eastern part of the citadel, the remains of a monumental building built in the 9th century were found. This is a building with a yard and covers an area of approximately 0.25 hectares. In the compositional-planning scheme of the building, the quadrangle yard with many rooms around occupied the central place. The outer wall of the building has a defensive nature and resembles castle walls with semi-circular and rectangular towers. Ar-



Minai ceramic fragment, 12-early 13th centuries

chaeological excavations have studied the eastern half of the complex in a relatively better way.

In the yard, along the eastern, northern and southern walls, the remains of seven columns have been identified and studied. They are built from mud and fired brick and stand out for their archaic forms. The height of the relative well-preserved column is 3.2 meters.

The floor of the building was originally covered with lime plaster. Subsequently, the courtyard was paved with fired bricks. Along the eastern

Glazed ceramics, 13th century



and southern walls and around columns, a layer with a thickness of 25-30 cm, consisting of fragments of fired bricks and a lime layer, was found. It can be assumed that this layer was formed following the collapse of the roof of the eyvan. A large number of fragments of architectural decorations made of plaster have been found here. It can be assumed that they used to be fragments of architectural decorations that formed the building's ledge. In these fragments, there are geometric and ornamental elements, and individual carved letters of the Arabic alphabet.

On the eastern wall of the yard, there are remains of four and on the southern wall - two doorways. They were all later closed with mud bricks. The width of the doorways is 1.23 cm. In the eastern half, there were four rooms, the first of which has been excavated partially, two – in



Glazed ceramics, 9th century

full and the study of the four one has only just begun. They are square or rectangular. Room № 5-7 were in the southern part of the complex.

The lower rows of the masonry of the buildings were built from river stone on a plaster solution, and the upper rows from mud bricks are 30x30x8 cm in size. The thickness of the walls is 1.6-1.68 meters. The height of the masonry is more than one meter. The outer wall is thickened, and its width is 3.2-4 meters. During refurbishment on the outside eastern wall, the mud brick masonry was partially covered with fired brick masonry. In the passage from stone masonry to mud brick, there are remains of a wooden anti-seismic zone. Judging by the residue, the diameter of the bars is 14-16 cm. The height of the walls of the complex reaches 3.8 meters.



Ancient glazed ceramics, 9th century

In the western side of the yard, there are remains of a wall built of mud brick. It connects to a column in square 7F. The length of the wall is 17.5 meters, width - 1.6 meters at the bottom of the masonry and 1.1 meters at the top. The height of the remains of the wall is 3.6 meters. In front of the western wall of the yard, this wall creates a kind of corridor with a width of 3.3 meters. In the north-western corner of the yard, a layer of a major fire has been found. In the layer saturated with chunks of coal, ash and burnt earth, along with artifacts of different categories, charred seeds of peaches, plums,



12-13th century ceramics



Inscription, 11-12th centuries



dogwood, watermelon and cucumber have been found. This fact allows us to conclude that the fire was raging in summer, in August or in early September.

Building remains discovered in excavation VII in the shahristan also belong to a large complex. The main structure of the complex with an area of about 200 square meters, judging by the remains, was rectangular in shape. From the south, east and north, it is joined by other buildings, some of which remained outside the excavation. It is assumed that the number of rooms in this complex was more than 10. The main structure of the complex is divided into rooms of various sizes with partition walls. The partition between rooms No 8 and 9 stands out for artistic decorations made of patterned brickwork. The decoration is made from small bricks in the form of a rectangle, triangle, trapezoid, rhombus, etc. In some rooms of the complex, remains of a brick floor of different levels were found. In the southern part of the excavation, remains of a water pipe made of clay pipes (tungs) directed into this complex from the south were found.

The initial results of the archaeological survey of this complex indicate the existence of highly decorated multi-room monumental buildings in the central part of the shahristan.

The city successfully addressed issues of renovation. To meet the needs of citizens for drinking water, kahrizes were constructed and water pipes made of ceramic pipes were laid. The kahriz -an underground structure found in Shamkir – is a perfect medieval hydraulic installation. The underground hydraulic installation reminiscent of an ovdan built of fired square bricks on a lime solution

deserves attention. The entrance aperture of the structure is rectangular in shape. On the northern side, the hydraulic installation had a staircase with 13 steps made of fired bricks and white local stone. The hydraulic structure has a lancet niche with a height of 1.95 meters and a depth of 80 cm. Ceramic pipes – tungs – have been mounted for ventilation on the eastern wall of the installation. A kup-pool was built in the floor, and its mouth was made of fired brick and had an eight-pointed shape. Water came from a source with the help of ceramic water pipes - tungs.

The city operated an extensive sewer system. The remains of an engineering unit for sanitary purposes were found in the shahristan and in the citadel. In the lower tier of excavation V, archaeological excavation revealed the remains of urban sewage facilities. It was built from river cobbles and white stones - "zayam-dashi". It was found that the sewer line was directed from west to east and passed through the city gates. In the outer wall of the city, it has



Jug with a painting, 12th century



Topographic layout of Shamkir



an arched shape and is lined with fired bricks.

Remains of a 12th century sewer line were identified and investigated in the north-eastern sector of the shahristan, in excavation VI, which, in all probability, was connected to the urban sewer installation found in Excavation V. Sewage residues were studied in the space of 18.3 meters. The branched sewer device found at the citadel belongs to the 9th-10th centuries.

Archaeological finds include tools, weapons, simple and glazed ceramics, metal items, fragments of glass vessels, pieces of window glass, items of jewelry and coins. Pottery dominates. Seljuk earthenware products such as "Minai" stand out for their high artistic value.

The archaeological excavations revealed interesting patterns of architectural decor - five-pointed facing brick, samples of tiles, plaster tiles with geometric, floral and epigraphic ornaments. Bricks with handprints also deserve attention.

Imported items, weights, especially copper, silver and gold coins discovered in the ancient settlement of Shamkir make it possible to imagine the nature, amount and direction of trade.

Epigraphic finds are few. The inscription in Arabic carved on the plaster surface reads: "... power belongs to Allah."

Among the finds there are also fragments of khachdashes. They depict the Albanian cross. The edge of these khachdashes is decorated with

a complex lattice, which was quite characteristic of Albanian culture from the 10th century. The Shamkir finds are early samples confirming the use of this decor. Note that similar decor is found in the art of Hungary and in the monuments of the 11th century. It is no coincidence, for a people called "Siyavurdiya", the ancestors of the Hungarians in the 8th-9th centuries, lived on the Ganja-Gazakh plain and was Christian. In the 8th century, they revolted against the Caliphate and destroyed the town of Shamkir.

The ancient settlement is gradually revealing its secrets and giving valuable information about the past centuries of Shamkir. But there are still many unsolved mysteries in the depths of this monument. ●



Excavation site

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7th excavation site, patterned wall, 12th century