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ONE BILLION POODS^{*} OF AZERBAIJANI OIL OF THE NOBEL BROTHERS' COMPANY

THE HISTORY OF DEVELOPMENT OF OIL FIELDS IN AZERBAIJAN AT DIFFERENT TIMES IS STUDIED THROUGH THE ANALYSIS NOT ONLY OF DOCUMENTARY MATERIALS STORED IN ARCHIVES, BUT ALSO THROUGH THE STUDY OF HITHERTO UNKNOWN ARTIFACTS STORED IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.



Silver plaquette in honor of the one billion poods of the Nobels' company. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. Front side.

A unique example of the medal art of the 19th - early 20th centuries is two plaquettes attributed to the activities of Russia's largest company – The

Petroleum Production Company of the Nobel Brothers, now stored at the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan.

As is known, Robert, one of the Nobel brothers, who arrived in Azerbaijan to purchase precious wood for the manufacture of gun parts, spent a long time in Baku, familiarized himself with the oil business and assessed its prospects, and in 1873 he co-founded a small company with his brother Ludvig. There were few such enterprises, and Robert Nobel began to receive a steady income and acquired oil sites and a kerosene plant in Black City for 25,000 rubles in 1875.

Funds were needed to launch oil production, and the further activities of the company were linked with the name of Ludvig Nobel, who arrived in Baku in 1876. However, all the available funds were not enough for the expansion of production, and in this regard, the company was transformed into a joint stock company. So the Petroleum Production Company of the Nobel Brothers

* One pood (Russian) = 16 kq

Silver plaquette in honor of the one billion poods of the Nobels' company. NMHA. Reverse side.



was founded with the basic capital of 3 million (1).

The continuous improvement of technology and expansion of production yielded huge profits. If in 1899 the net profit of the Nobel brothers' company was 4 million

rubles, in 1907 – it totaled 8 million. As a result, the company had huge production at the time - 42 oil fields, 11 refineries with laboratories and 37 main pipelines with a total length of 420 miles. And that's just in the Baku industrial district.

Bronze plaquette in honor of the founder of the Nobel brothers' company. NMHA. Reverse side.



Bronze plaquette in honor of the founder of the Nobel brothers' company. NMHA. Front side.





The town of the Nobels' company. The village of Balakhani near Baku. NMHA. Published for the first time.

As you can see, the company not only produced and processed oil, but also wanted to control deliveries. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Nobel brothers' company established a large tanker fleet numbering hundreds of sea and river vessels (2).

As a result, the company that grew on Russian capital acquired international significance. The Nobel brothers' company, the only one of the Baku firms, labeled equipment and tools at its plants, recording its property and wealth (by the way, this factor greatly helps modern museum workers to study materials related to the activities of the company).

As it turned out, vanity was not alien to the Nobel brothers. In 1904, the company celebrated its 25th anniversary, immortalizing it with the release in St. Petersburg of the special edition "The 25th Anniversary of the Petroleum Production Company of the Nobel Brothers" and the album "Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Petroleum Production Company of the Nobel Brothers" (3).

In 1906, the Nobel brothers ordered two plaquettes: one silver and one bronze. They were devoted to the momentous milestone – the production of the first billion poods of oil by the company.

The silver plaquette (NMHA Foundation of New History No 713) with a size of 7x10x2 cm and weighing

298 grams is rectangular in shape with a rounded top side (4).

On the front side, in the corners in the upper part there are head and shoulders portraits of the founders of the company - Robert and Ludvig Nobel. The images are made as a bas-relief in the form of medals with a text between them: "In memory of the production of one billion poods of crude oil by the Nobel brothers' company in 1879-1906". As evidenced by the inscription, the Nobel brothers' company had extracted one billion pounds of oil in the fields of Azerbaijan - and that's just in the first 27 years of operation!

The map of the Absheron Peninsula and part of the Caspian Sea is schematically shown below the inscription. In the lower left corner, in a frame, the world's first oil tanker ship "Zoroaster", built by the Nobel brothers in 1877 in Sweden, specially for exploitation in the Caspian Sea, is depicted. On the opposite side, at the bottom, you can see oil fields of the company. If the front side of the plaquette reflects the achievements of the Nobel company in the development of the oil production in the late 19th - early 20th centuries, the reverse side reflects the past of the oil business. Against the background of oil rigs, a woman is shown standing at an altar with a fire and a burning lamp in her raised right hand. To her left, there is a caravan of camels laden with oil coming out



of the Baku fortress. In the back, in the right corner of the plaquette the Surakhani temple of fire worshipers is shown. The most powerful "fire source" that gave rise to the cult of fire has existed here on the Absheron Peninsula since time immemorial. Three marks on the edge of the plaquette are of interest. One hallmark carries the name of Faberge - the owner of a famous St. Petersburg jewelry company whose articles of gold and silver were of high artistic merit and technique of manufacture. On another hallmark there are initials A.T. - the initial letters of the name of Alexander Edward Tillander - the owner of a jewelry firm in St. Petersburg, where the plaquette was apparently cast no later than 1907. The third hallmark shows a woman's head in a headdress with the number 84, indicating the standard of silver.

No less interesting is the bronze plaquette with a size of 8.2x10.2 cm cast in 1907 (5). On the front side, against the background of oil rigs and ships moored in the Baku bay, four medals are depicted. Along with the head and shoulder portraits of Ludvig and Robert under a laurel garland, there are images of Alfred and Immanuel Nobel. Alfred Nobel - a doctor of chemistry and inventor of dynamite and smokeless powder - was elected founder of the company by the brothers. It was he who bequeathed 50 million francs, the interest from which is used to pay the annual international award for outstanding achievements in the field of science, literature and peaceful cooperation. The head of the family - Immanuel Nobel - is an interesting personality.

An architect by education, he did a lot in the field of military-marine engineering and was the first inventor of underwater mines. Under the bas-relief images on the plaquette there is a text similar in content to the text on the silver plaquette, but in French. On the reverse side of the plaquette, against the background of the Surakhani temple of fire worshipers, there is a picture of a woman with a lamp in her raised hand. At her feet is a baby with a laurel branch in his outstretched left hand. There is an image of fire worshipers on the right.

Underscoring the continued importance of oil and gas, the author of the plaquette placed a text in Latin in the cartouche: "ISNISMUNLIDUMEN, VITE FOCUS" - "The Light of the World Fire. The Flame of Life."

As history showed, the author of the plaquette was right. ✨

References

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3. Both albums are stored in the National Museum of history of Azerbaijan
4. National Museum of history of Azerbaijan, Fund of a New history
5. Ibid, inv. №2006