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About the function of the glazed vessel found in the city of Gabala (North-Western part of Azerbaijan)

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Keywords: Medieval, Gabala, glazed vessel, medicine, Muslim East, Seljuqs

Түйін сөздер: орта ғасырлар, Габала, сырлы ыдыс, медицина, Мұсылмандық шығыс, селжұқтар

Ключевые слова: средние века, Габала, глазурованный сосуд, медицина, Мусульманский Восток, Сельджуки

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The article examines a glazed vessel discovered in the city of Gabala (Azerbaijan Republic), which is kept in the archaeological fund of the National Historical Museum of Azerbaijan. The structure and shape of the artifact are interesting. A vessel of a similar shape has not been found on other medieval monuments of Azerbaijan. The article presents some ideas about the purpose of the object and its use. The vessel is reddish in color, covered with brown and green glaze. The bowl has a flask-shaped tube inside and a round hole. It was concluded that the vessel could have been used in the preparation of medicinal products from plants.

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Габала қаласынан табылған сырлы ыдыстың атқаратын қызметі туралы
(Солтүстік-батыс Әзербайжан)

Мақалада Габала қаласынан табылған, Әзербайжан ұлттық тарихи музейінің археологиялық қорында сақтаулы тұрған сырлы ыдыс қарастырылады. Заттың ерекше пішіні назар аудартады. Әзербайжанның орта ғасыр ескерткіштері материалдарынан осыған ұқсайтын ыдыс табылмады. Мақалада заттың атқаратын қызметі мен қолдануына қатысты бірнеше нұсқа баяндалады. Ыдыстың түсі – қызылдау, қоңыр және жасылмен сырланған. Ыдыстың ішінде пішіні колба тәрізді түтікше мен дөңгелек тесік бар. Ыдысты өсімдіктерден дәрі жасау кезінде қолданған деген қорытынды жасалды.

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О назначении глазурованного сосуда, найденного в городе Габала
(Северо-Западный Азербайджан)

В статье рассмотрен глазурованный сосуд, обнаруженный в городе Габала (Азербайджанская Республика), который хранится в археологическом фонде Национального исторического музея Азербайджана. Строение и форма артефакта заслуживают отдельного изучения. Сосуд подобной формы на других средневековых памятниках Азербайджана не обнаружен. В статье изложены некоторые идеи относительно назначения предмета и его использования. Сосуд красноватого цвета, покрыт коричневой и зелёной глазурью. Чаша имеет внутри трубку в форме колбы и круглое отверстие. Сделан вывод о том, что сосуд могли использовать при приготовлении лекарственных средств из растений.



Сілтеме жасау үшін: Исмаилова А. Габала қаласынан табылған сырлы ыдыстың атқаратын қызметі туралы (Солтүстік-батыс Әзербайжан). *Қазақстан археологиясы*. 2024. № 2 (24). 270–276-бб. (Ағылшынша).

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Introduction

Museums are not only places where history, material, national and cultural heritage are promoted, they are also scientific and research institutions. The National Museum of Azerbaijan History is no exception in this regard. National Azerbaijan History Museum (NAHM) has a rich collection covering different stages of history. Among them, archaeological materials are of special importance. As historical artifacts are a material source, they visually show many issues of the time. A part of the medieval archaeological collection of NAHM is made up of objecta found in the city of Gabala. The methods of description, comparative analysis, and generalization were used while working on the article.

A vessel found in the city of Gabala

Gabala is one of the ancient cities of Azerbaijan, its history dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. The name is mentioned for the first time in Pliny the Elder's "Natural History" in the 1st century AD [Babayev, Əhmədov 1981: 7]. In 1829, some explorations conducted by A. Yanovsky determined that the ruins near the village of Chukhur-Gabala belong to ancient Gabala. In 1903, village teacher R. Afandiyev gave a brief description of the ruins of Gabala city in a small article he published. In 1915, E. Lalayan looked at the city ruins. The first exploration works in the city of Gabala were conducted in 1926 under the leadership of D. Sharifov and in 1944-1945 under the leadership of S. Gaziyeu. For the regular study of the city,

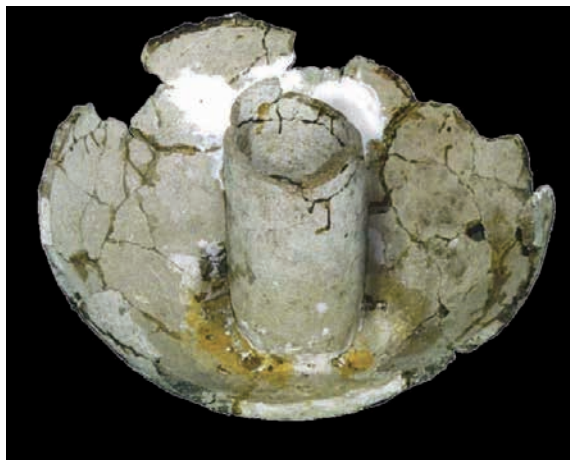


Fig. 1. Sheki, Dashuz. Samovar. Sheki Museum of Local History. Photo: Intizar Badalov
1-сур. Шеки, Дашуз. Самаурын. Шеки тарихи-өлкетану музейі. Фото: Интизар Бадалов
Рис. 1. Шеки, Дашуз. Самовар. Шекинський історико-краєведческий музей. Фото: Интизар Бадалов

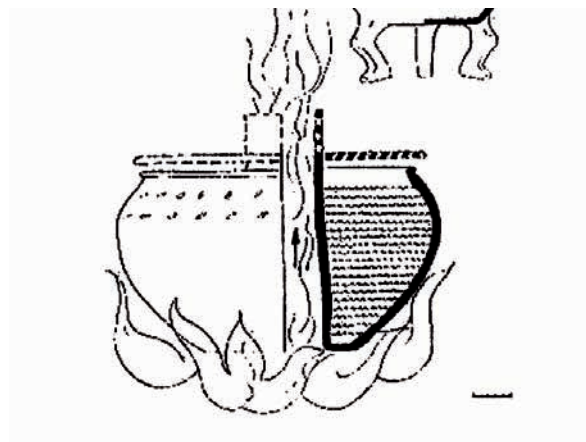


Fig. 2. Sheki, Dashuz. Samovar – after – Akhundov 2000: fig. 5, photo 3
2-сур. Шеки, Дашуз. Самаурын ([Ахундов 2000: 5-сур., 3-фото] бойынша)
Рис. 2. Шеки, Дашуз. Самовар (по: [Ахундов 2000: рис. 5, фото 3])



in 1959, the Gabala archaeological expedition was established by the History Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, under the leadership of S. Gaziyeu [Babayev, Əhmədov 1981: 4].

Among the material culture examples of the medieval period of the archaeological collection, the glazed vessel found in the medieval city of Gabala attracts attention with its unique structure. The vessel was discovered in 1957 in the Salbir part of Gabala, and according to its manufacturing technique, it can be attributed to the 10th century. Its number is AF25953 (Archaeological fund 25953), Qabala collection. The Pottery of the vessel is reddish in color and covered with brown and green glaze. The grips, the barrel, the edges of the muzzle have been restored, the seat is flat. The bowl has a flask-shaped tube inside, and a circular hole in the seat (fig. 3). The uniqueness of the archaeological material is that a bowl of a similar shape was not found in other medieval cities of Azerbaijan. From this point of view, it becomes much more difficult to conduct similar analyses. Based on the general structure of the vessel, it can be assumed that



Fig. 3. Medieval town place Gabala. Glazed vessel. National History Museum of Azerbaijan.

Photo: Mirnaib Hasanoglu

3-сур. Орта ғасырлық Габала қаласы. Сырлы ыдыс. Әзербайжан тарихы ұлттық музейі.

Фото: Mirnaib Hasanoglu

Рис 3. Средневековый город Габала. Глазурованный сосуд. Национальный музей истории Азербайджана.

Фото: Mirnaib Hasanoglu

it was used as a medicine vessel or for brewing some medicinal plants. A vessel somehow similar to the vessel discovered in Gabala was found in the area of the Galat-Jabar fortress in Syria and belongs to the 13th-14th centuries [Shaddoud 2017: 195]. The vessel found in Galat-Jabar has no handle and no barrel, but contains three flask-shaped tubes (fig. 4). The author of the article writes that it was used in water baths for the purpose of treatment [Shaddoud 2017: 195].

It is appropriate to mention one fact here, in 1989, in Dashuz village of Shaki region of Azerbaijan, an interesting pottery fragment was discovered from a mound. The shape of the bowl is balloon-shaped, with a tube rising upwards in the middle. The bowl is not fully formed, archaeologist Tufan Akhundov writes that it may be an early version of a samovar (fig. 1-2). It dates to the 16th century BC, and other pottery found in the mound parallels Asia Minor materials [Ахундов 2000: 59-60]. It is difficult to give a specific, absolute opinion about its function. It seems that, although not completely, similar shaped vessels existed in ancient times as well.



Medicine during the Middle Ages in Azerbaijan

If we take a brief look at the history of the development of medicine in Azerbaijan, it becomes clear that even in ancient times, primitive people used medicinal plants and herbs for the treatment of diseases. There are plants that are still useful in folk medicine as auxiliary drugs in the process of curing. As an example, we can consider the saffron plant cultivated in Absheron, Azerbaijan. Its usage dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. As a result of Gutians' invasion and control of Mesopotamia, interactions and influences with the ancient Sumerian city-states have also manifested themselves in medicine. The Gutian tribes benefited from the plants such as lavender, sesame, dates, saffron, onions, and garlic used by the Sumerians and Akkadians. The Gutians brought medicinal oils from Egypt, Syria, and Palestine [Alakbarli 2006: 7-8]. In the Zoroastrian's book "Avesta" that was written in the 1st millennium BC, it was said: "The doctor has three tools: herbs, a knife and a word." In shamanism, they used music and special dances for healing purposes. It is known that in the Middle Ages various plants, especially chamomile, have wound healing properties in the folk medicine of Azerbaijan, called Turkachara (remedy for a turk), and that plants are used in the treatment of various diseases [Alakabarli 13]. It is not in vain that doctors in Azerbaijan were called "otchu" and "otachi" (herbalist) starting from the early Middle Ages [Seyidbäyli et al. 2019: 56]. It is interesting that in the "Kitabi-Dede Gorgud" epic of military heroism of the Turks, a scene of treatment with herbs is described, where they mix mountain flower with mother's milk and apply it to the young man's wound. It is known from Mahmud Kashgari's work "Diwan lughat-al-turk" written in the 11th century that plants and folk medicine were used in the treatment of some skin, eye diseases and infectious smallpox [Sadiqlı 2022: 193–197].

Material evidences discovered during archaeological excavations confirm that medicine developed in Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages. The earliest variants of alembics known from Muslim cities were found in the city of Gabala in Azerbaijan. Pottery alembics were found in the Salbir area and belong to the 8th century [Qədirov, Əliyev 1985: 81].

In 2014, as a result of archaeological excavations carried out in the medieval city of Shamkir, the remains of a pharmacy and the supplies used there were found. The supplies include glazed alembics, albarello-type dishes, and spherocoines [Dostiyev 2022: 79].

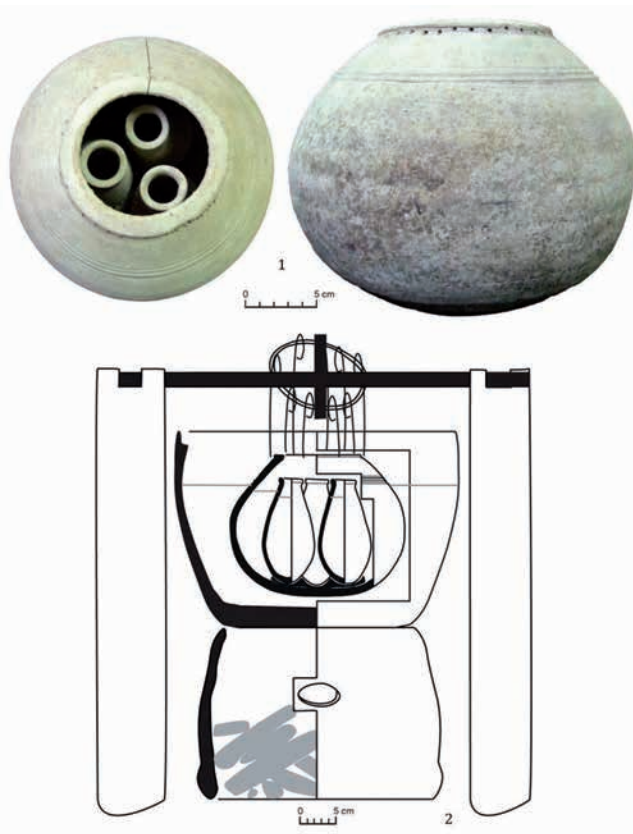


Fig. 4. Qalaat Jabar, Crucible with three bottles for heat treatment – after – Shaddoud 2017: fig. 4

4-сур. Калаат-Джабар, қыздырып өңдеуге арналған үш құтылы отбақыр ([Shaddoud 2017: 4-сур.] бойынша)

Рис. 4. Калаат-Джабар, Тигель с тремя флаконами для термической обработки (по: [Shaddoud 2017: рис. 4])



Fig. 5. Physician preparing an elixir – after – Canby et al. 2016: fig. 70

5-сур. Эликсир дайындап жатқан емші
([Canby et al. 2016: fig. 70] бойынша)

Рис. 5. Лекарь за приготвлением эликсира
(по: [Canby et al. 2016: fig. 70])



Fig. 6. Preparation of medicine from grapes – after – Canby et al 2016: fig. 107b

6-сур. Жүзімнен дәрі жасау
([Canby et al. 2016: fig. 107b] бойынша)

Рис. 6. Приготовление лекарства из винограда
(по: [Canby et al. 2016: fig. 107b])

In the Middle Ages, in the cities of Baku, Shusha, Sheki, Guba, Shamakhi, Ganja, and Tabriz in Azerbaijan, students were also educated in medicine and pharmacy in madrasahs. Here they studied the works of Ibn Sina and other medieval doctors. Darulfun was active in the cities of Shamakhi and Tabriz. Omar Kafiyeddin, the uncle of the famous poet Khagani Shirvani, founded the “Malham” madrasa in Shamakhi in the 11th century. It is no coincidence that Darush-shafa was founded by Rashiduddin, the vizier of Ghazan Khan (1295–1304) in the city of Tabriz in the 14th century. It was a large scientific campus with a hospital, observatory, facilities for teaching, treatment and scientific research [Алекперли 2008: 65-66]

In the Middle Ages, the emergence of the Caliphate and its administration over a wide area played a significant role in the development of the field of medicine in the Muslim world. The Umayyad caliph Khalid ibn Yazid (668–704/709) had an interest in al-chemistry, and the translation of medical texts into Arabic began during his time. It is no coincidence that the first hospital in the Islamic world was built by the order of the Umayyad caliph Walid I.

The Muslim chemist Jabir ibn Hayyan (721–815) conducted various laboratory experiments and wrote that metals (iron, tin, lead, copper, silver, gold) were formed from the combination of sulfur and



Fig. 7. Preparation of medicine from honey
– after – Canby et al. 2016: fig. 107a

7-сур. Балдан дәрі жасау барысы
([Canby et al. 2016: fig. 107a] бойынша)

Рис. 7. Процесс приготовления лекарства из меда
(по: [Canby et al. 2016: fig. 107a])

mercury in different proportions. With this, he laid the foundation of the mercury-sulfur theory.

Starting from the 9th century, there were separate literatures on the preparation and using of medicine tablets. Although pharmacy was not yet formed as an independent field during this period, individuals were already preparing medicines as pharmacists and operating in retail. Already in the 11th century, doctors such as Al-Majusi, al-Zahrawi, and Ibn Sina were preparing medicines for their patients [Tschanz 2003: 15].

It is not surprising that during the Seljuk era, medicine occupied an important place in the social life of Anatolia, Syria, and Iraq. Hospitals were built near mosques in cities such as Konya, Divrigi, Aleppo, Damascus and Baghdad. Starting from the 11th century, the process of combining theory and practice began. It is likely that they used the treatise “Materia Medica” or “On Medicinal Substances” written in the 50s–70s AD during the Seljuk period [Canby 2016: 167].

The development of medicine in medieval Muslim cities is not confirmed only by the means of archaeological materials. In the miniatures of the period (fig. 5–7) healers who prepare the medicine and the description of the preparation process of the medicine, as well as the equipment used there are also observed.

Conclusion

Although the glazed vessel found in the medieval city of Gabala is the only example in Azerbai-

jan, it shows that there is a long-standing tradition of medicine. Since there is no analogy to compare, it is difficult to come to a unanimous conclusion about its function. Due to its structure, it is likely that it was used in the brewing of certain medicinal herbs, to keep it in the same temperature regime. The inner wall of the vessel was not sampled or analyzed; it may be used as a medicinal vessel. If similar examples are discovered in the future, a more precise idea can be given about its function.

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