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CONCLUSION ON THE TYPES AND PURPOSES OF SIGNET RINGS DISCOVERED ON THE TERRITORY OF AZERBAIJAN

Abstract. The article refers to signet rings discovered in 2017 in stone boxes in the village of Demirchi (Shamakhi district). Judging by the finds, rings also played an important role in the everyday outerwear of Albanian women. Despite the fact that the patterns of jewelry changed depending on the age of women, the shape remained unchanged. In addition to being a decoration element, rings served a protective function. Along with the fact that funeral, equipment reflects the aesthetic worldview of the people; they are also of great importance from the point of view of studying various historical events.

In the initial stages, jewelers widely used bird motifs in their jewelry. Decorations with bird motifs were widespread in the territories of Azerbaijan, where the Sassanid dynasty ruled. But over time, these motifs began to be used in the form of patterns. These finds, dating back to the Albanian period, were considered a symbol of the sun and fertility. The found materials found in the stone box burials date back to the last Sassanian period (III–V centuries).

Key words: Village Demirchi, signet rings, stone boxes, archaeological research, material culture.

Introduction. During the archaeological excavations conducted in different regions of Azerbaijan, rich examples of material culture of the Albanian epoch for various purposes were discovered. Besides, unlike material culture samples obtained from residential areas, those obtained from grave monuments are better preserved.

A certain part of the material culture remains discovered during field research are women's adornments (jewelry and ornaments). They are made

of precious, semi-precious, ordinary (simple) materials; most of them are of high quality and exquisitely decorated. Such valuable examples of material culture are known from the excavations in Mingechevir, Shamakhy, Gabala, Aghsu, Demirchi, etc.

The interpretation of the main material. Rahim Vahidov grouped the seal (signet) rings found during the investigations in Mingechevir as seals of the Roman-Hellenic era, seals of the Parthian-Sasanian era, and seals related to the Islamic or Christian religion [8, p. 64].

If in the first stage various gods, mythological heroes and battle scenes were depicted on the stones of signet rings of the Roman-Hellenic era, then on the stones of signet rings of the second stage zoomorphic, plant and religious images related to faith are prevalent. On the stones of signet rings characteristic for the Islamic period, inscriptions confirming the identity of the master who made it, the person who gave the order, i.e. the owner, zoomorphic or geometric images prevail.

Along with archaeological materials, written sources also confirm that signet rings were spread over a wide area. For example, in the Albanian chronicle of the 5th century, in the document from Tsar Vachagan's era dated May 13, 488 is written: "The nobles of the entire Albanian kingdom put their ring seals on this inscription" [9, pp. 65-69].

In general, adornment includes women's crowns (wreaths), necklaces, bracelets, rings, pendants, pins, belts, beads, various embroideries, ornaments, etc. [7, p.11]. Finger adornments are a certain part of the ornaments, which were also ritual objects that reflected people's ideological notions. Numerous finger adornments found from Demirchi stone box graves dating back to the beginning of our era differ from each other in the shape and decoration of their stones. They are divided into two groups, rings with and without inlaid stones. The rings with stones, which were produced later, were more often used as a seal (stamp) than the rings without them. Examples of such Signet rings are mostly of Roman production. These findings indicate the extensive relations of Caucasian Albania with the Roman Empire. For example, during the archaeological explorations conducted in the necropolis near ancient Shatyrli settlement, along with various jewelries, stone molds used to make earrings and other decorative items were found. Bracelets occupy an important place among the decorations, which were mostly those of Roman one. According to the researchers, the beads were mainly brought from the famous cultural

centers of the ancient world. This indicates that in the 4th–1st centuries BC and 1st-2nd centuries AD, the cities of Caucasian Albania had had extensive trade and cultural relations with the cultural centers of Parthia, Rome, Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and Syria [6].

During the archaeological explorations in Yardimli district, 5 jar (or pitcher) and 8 stone box graves were studied. The burial tradition in stone box graves or graves with megalithic covers is typical for the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages in the mountainous regions of southeastern Azerbaijan. It is interesting that the jar and stone box graves studied in the Bilgah area are chronologically coeval and belong to the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. The stone box graves are 2–4 m long, and covered with 3 rows of megalithic covers. Researcher Emil Iskenderli states that both jar and stone box graves have similar characteristics. Thus, both types of graves are aligned to northeast, and a large circular carved stone cover is placed on the top of the burial jars, and a flat stone door is placed vertically on the northeast part of these stone box graves. Pottery vessels were placed inside both types of graves, as well as outside the entrance. Single and double burials were also met inside the graves. In the chamber of the stone box graves, next to the skeleton, along with pottery, iron helmets, swords, spear heads, copper, bronze and silver ornaments were also placed [6]. The destruction of the northeastern entrance doors of all the investigated stone box graves, one of the upper cover stones broken and the violation of the initial anatomical structures of the skeletons in the grave chamber, the broken grave equipment and their scattering in different places, etc. confirm the robbery of the grave. Along with following the early tradition, Parthian, Roman and Sarmatian influences were also observed in the mentioned grave equipment. It should be noted that in the mentioned region there are many cemeteries consisting of jar and stone box graves, which is considered as an indicator of intensive settlement and population growth in the area in the first centuries AD [5].

After the adoption of Christianity in Albania, Christian elements in burial customs and grave types also began to grow strongly. Burials were performed in both soil and stone box graves. Both types of graves are typical for the entire territory of Caucasian Albania. According to researchers, one of the original types of Christian graves is stone chests. They are shaved from white stone and the top is covered. Stone chests are 1.7 m long and 48-50 cm wide. According to some researchers, these types of graves were mostly used for people from the wealthy class [4, pp. 122-123].

The Demirchi necropolis is also among the monuments of the Albanian period under study. The territory of this cemetery, built in the foothills of Demirchi village of Shamakhy region, is also called “Gegeli yaylaghi (summer pasture)”. Demirchi necropolis is located on Shamakhy-Lahij road, 1800 m above sea level, 35 km northwest of the district center. In 2017, archaeological investigations were conducted under the leadership of Professor Gafar Jabiyev in 600 sq/m of the necropolis with an area of 3 hectares [1, pp. 183-191].

A total of 28 stone box graves were discovered during the 20-day exploration. Only 18 of them were studied. During the exploration, it was observed that the people in these stone box graves were buried on their left and right sides, as well as in a tight and relatively half-folded state. Anthropologist Vusal Pasha, while examining the types of those buried corpses in laboratory conditions, came to the conclusion that they were “Caspian” type people from the anthropological viewpoint [10, p. 75]. 17 of the examined graves contained rich material culture remains along with skeletons, while one of the graves was small and empty. There are several reasons why the graves were empty. Probably, it was a grave intended for a well-known (authoritative) person and not buried there, or that he died due to an infectious disease – was cremated and not buried. For its size the studied empty grave is believed to belong to an underage child. No traces of burial and equipment were observed in this grave.

Since it is located on a big caravan-trade route, the caravans going to Shamakhy and other areas passed through there. A great deal of material culture remains related to the economic occupation, military art and daily life of the population were discovered among the Demirchi stone box grave equipment. A part of ornaments found in stone box graves are theseal (signet) rings. Based on these findings, it can be said that in the early Middle Ages besides the signet pendants, signet rings were also widely used in Iran, Central Asia and Caucasian Albania. Most of the signet rings found there were made of bronze, metal and copper. In total, there are 14 of them and they are very well preserved (Fig. 14). The stones embedded on the rings are oval and round and made of the same material - bronze. Only one is made of glass. Rings were used both as seals and finger adornment.

Signets are the wealth of culture not only of a district but also of a nation. Signets inherited from our ancestors not only reflect their outlook, but also indicate their aesthetic views and what kind of culture they had.

Graves No. 10, 11 and 18 differ from the others in terms of the richness of equipment of Demirchi stone box grave. The man buried in grave No. 10 was about 40 years old, 170.5 cm tall, and 75.6 cm skull index. A silver glass with a diameter of 22.5 cm and a depth of 2.5 cm was discovered under his head. Grave No. 11, which is close to Grave No. 10, belonged to a 40-year-old, 172.1 cm tall man. It was not possible to determine the size of the deceased's skull. However, there is 8x13 mm sharp cut on the skull [10]. A Roman-made silver plate was placed under the head of the person buried in grave No. 11, and large cutting tools were placed next to it.

After the samples found from both graves were cleaned in laboratory conditions, the fabric remains in a useless condition inside the silver dish were presented to the Azerbaijan Carpet Museum for recovery. In the laboratory of the carpet museum, the rest of the cleaned fabric was restored and designated in the department of restoration of leather and archaeological fabrics of I. E. Grabar All-Russian Art Scientific and Restoration Center in Moscow by N.P. Sinitina [2, pp. 127-133]. Based on the equipment found next to the skeletons, it is assumed that the person buried in the grave was a tribal leader or warlord at the time.

Grave No. 18 studied in Demirchi necropolis is particularly noteworthy for its rich grave equipment. A lot of adornments were found just in this grave. A piece of leather was found on the back of the woman's head near her neck. Probably, when the woman passed away, she was buried with her clothing adornments in that leather bag under her head. The woman, who was buried in the west direction from man's grave No. 11, is approximately 40 years old, 158.4 cm tall, and 79.6 cm skull index.

Based on the abundant material culture and rich adornments revealed in graves No. 10, 11 and 18, it can be said that the finger rings confirm a tribe or family was from the highest class (considering other precious jewels). At the same time, these rings had a special status within the community of the tribe belonging to that clan. Most likely the signet-rings belonging to those persons were used as seals in the confirmation of all paperwork [3, pp. 257-265].

According to the types of rings discovered during field studies, they are stoned and un-stoned. Stoned rings are also divided into two types according to their production. First, a hook was made from several places on the edges of the area to fasten the stone to the ring.

In the process of making stone-framed rings made by the second method, the edges of the area for stone were slightly widened and the stone was

attached to the ring by soldering. Most of the numerous rings found in the Demirchi necropolis (except for one) belong to the third type.

The stone part of each of the revealed stoned signet rings is worked with different designs. The images being zoomorphic, tree of life, fortune ring, etc. were made by engraving and incising. The stone of one of the rings is made of a flat and oval-shaped mother-pearl and two people are depicted facing each other. It can be assumed that these human images are priests (Fig. 1).

Two of the rings have an ellipse-shaped stone, and within the embossed points have a fish pattern, which is a symbol of abundance and fertility. Fish, which is considered as a living being in the mythical thinking of Azerbaijanis, is also a symbol of wealth. The presence of fish on our tables as a symbol of sustenance and abundance, on special holidays may have been related to these beliefs. Ethnographer A.I. Robakidze, based on the numerous artifacts with fish images discovered as a result of his research in the Salkinski region of Georgia, came to the conclusion that “in the mythical thinking of the Caucasian peoples, fertility is characterized as a being that has magical properties in the fight against evil forces” [11, pp. 21-24]. Such images are called the crowned “king of fishes” (Fig. 3, 12).

The oval ring also was embedded with glass. The image on it is not clearly seen since the sample has been under the soil for a long time and corroded (Fig. 2).

One of the discovered rings has an image of a deer on it with its horns reminiscent of a tree branch (Fig. 4). The image of the animal on the framed stone is shown in motion. Gazelle and deer symbols occupy an important place in the mythical thinking of nomadic cattle-breeding peoples. The worship of these animals is widespread among the ancient tribes living in Azerbaijan. Deer and gazelle images on dishes, carpets and decorative items have meanings such as sanctity and growth of generation.

The stone of one of the rings is divided into four equal parts. Some researchers say that such signs are symbols of the poles or the sun (Fig. 5). Such images can also be found on the handles and necks of pottery.

A snake-like (dragon) image is depicted on the oval stone of two of the rings (Fig. 8, 9 and 10).

Three of the rings used as signets have the image of a mixed animal (bull) carved on the ring (Fig. 6, 7, 11). The circumference of the stones of these rings is filled with densely forging dots.

One of the rings is different from the others in terms of shape and decorative appearance (Fig. 13). Its thin ring was soldered to the circular mounting. The inner

surface of the mounting is filled with pomegranate seeds, a symbol of abundance. In classical literature, “pomegranate” is called a jewel endowed by God to nature. They also remind that this jewel is a small chest stuffed inside a thin sheet.

Thus, the signet rings found in the stone box graves in Demirchi necropolis, on the one hand, confirmed the genealogy of the family, on the other hand, they were used as decorative items. On the one hand, the various bird and animal images depicted on the stone embedded in the ring of finger ornamentals are related to the worldview of the craftsman who made them, and on the other hand, they are a product of the mythical thinking of people (nations). That is, in the mythical imagination of people, these images are understood as fertility, healing, strength, and protection from evil forces.

The symbol of fish (“crowned fish” – *E.A.*) is of special importance among the images on the inlaid of signet rings. Rings embedded with fish-shaped inlaid, symbols of abundance -fertility-innocence-health, were used in the seat of pottery as well as general merchandise, as seals. The “crowned fish” symbol, which is embedded on the ring and symbolizes fertility, was also used in the art of carpet weaving, a branch of the textile art (fig. 3, 12).

As can be seen from the findings, rings also played a key role in the everyday clothing of women living in Albanian society. Although the patterns of women’s clothing decorations have changed according to age, the general shape has not changed. Along with being a decorative item, rings also had a protective function. Finally, the seal rings (signets) found in Demirchi stone box graves chronologically belong to the 3rd–5th centuries, the last Sasanian era.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.

Fig. 1. Mother-of-pearl gem, **Fig. 2.** A ring embedded with glass, **Fig. 3.** A ring with the image of a fish on, **Fig. 4.** A ring with the image of a deer on, **Fig. 5.** A ring with the symbol of the poles or the sun on, **Fig. 6.** A ring with the image of a mixed animal (bull) on, **Fig. 7.** A ring with a bull image on, **Fig. 8.** A ring with a snake (dragon) image on.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



Fig. 11.



Fig. 12.

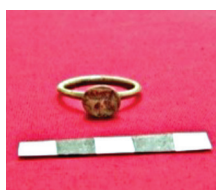


Fig. 13.



Fig. 14.

Fig. 9. A ring with a snake (dragon) image on, **Fig. 10.** A ring with the image of a mixed animal on, **Fig. 11.** A ring with a bull image on, **Fig. 12.** A ring with the image of a fish on, **Fig. 13.** A ring with the image of pomegranate (granite) on, **Fig. 14.** General view of rings. **Note:** The findings were handed over to the archives of the National History Museum of Azerbaijan.

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Abbasova Elmira (Azərbaycan)

AZƏRBAYCAN ƏRAZİSİNDƏN TAPILMIŞ

MÖHÜR-ÜZÜKLƏRİN TIPLƏRİ VƏ TƏYİNATINA DAİR

Məqalə 2017-ci ildə Dəmirçi kəndi (Şamaxı r-nu) ərazisindəki daş qutu qəbirlərindən aşkar olunan möhür üzüklərə aiddir. Tapıntılardan da görüldüyü kimi Alban dövründə yaşayan qadınların gündəlik üst bəzək geyimlərində üzüklər də əsas rol oynamışdır. Yaşlara uyğun olaraq qadın geyim bəzəklərinin naxışları dəyişsə də ümumi forması dəyişməmişdir. Üzüklər əsasən bəzək əşyası olmaqla yanaşı, həm də qoruyucu funksiya daşmışdır. Demək lazımdır ki, qəbir avadanlıqları xalqın estetik dünyagörüşünü özündə əks etdirməklə yanaşı, baş verən müxtəlif tarixi hadisələri öyrənmək baxımından da olduqca əhəmiyyətliyədir. Zərgərlər ilkin mərhələdə istehsal etdikləri zərgərlik məmulatlarında quş motivlərindən geniş istifadə etmişlər. Quş təsvirli nümunələr Azərbaycan ərazisində Sasani imperiyasının hakimiyyəti dövründə geniş yayılmış olsa da sonrakı dövrlərdə naxış kimi geniş istifadə edilmişdir. Alban dövrü mədəniyyətinə aid olan bu tapıntılar nəsəl artırmayı, günəş simvolu da sayılmışdır. Dəmirçi daş qutu qəbirlərindən tapılmış möhür qaşlı üzüklər III–V əsrlərə, son sasani dövrünə aiddir.

Açar sözlər: Dəmirçi kəndi, möhür üzüklər, daş qutu qəbirlər, arxeoloji tədqiqatlar, maddi mədəniyyət.

Аббасова Эльмира (Азербайджан)

О ТИПАХ И ПРЕДНАЗНАЧЕНИИ ПЕРСТНЕЙ-ПЕЧАТЕЙ, ОБНАРУЖЕННЫХ НА ТЕРРИТОРИИ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА

В статье говорится о перстнях-печатах, обнаруженных в 2017 году в каменных ящиках в селе Демирчи (Шемахинский район). Судя по находкам, кольца также играли важную роль в повседневной верхней одежде албанских женщин. Несмотря на то, что узоры украшений менялись в зависимости от возраста женщин, но форма оставалась неизменной. Помимо элемента украшения, кольца выполняли защитную функцию. Наряду с тем, что погребальные оборудования отражают эстетическое мировоззрение народа, они также имеют большое значение с точки зрения изучения различных исторических событий. На начальных этапах ювелиры широко использовали птичьи мотивы в своих украшениях. Украшения с птичьими мотивами были широко распространены на территориях Азербайджана, где управляла династия Сасанидов. Но со временем эти мотивы стали использоваться в виде узоров. Эти находки, относящиеся к албанскому периоду, считались символом солнца и плодородия. Найденные материалы, обнаруженные в погребениях каменных ящиков, относятся к последнему Сасанидскому периоду (III–V века).

Ключевые слова: Село Демирчи, перстни-печати, каменные ящики, археологические исследования, материальная культура.