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Glazed bowl from Samshvilde (Georgia)

(Preliminary results)

Preamble

Former settlement of Samshvilde is located in the central Transcaucasia, Georgia (Tetritskaro municipality) at the 69th km to the south-west of Tbilisi /41°30'26" N, 44°30'20" E/ (Tab. 1). It was located on a natural cape between rivers Ktsia-Khrami and Chivchava rivers which had a rather favorable location for the political-economic development of the city. XII-XIII centuries when the Georgian king David IV the Builder released Samshvilde from Seljuq Turks (1110) and subordinated it to the royal power are considered to be the "Golden Age" in the centuries-old history of Samshvilde. During that period Samshvilde was actively involved in trade-economic relations in the Caucasus as well as the Near and Far East.

Discovery

During the 2015 field archaeological season, nearly an entirely preserved glazed bowl was discovered in the eastern area of the former settlement, in the citadel, and no similar bowl is found in the materials of the developed medieval period of Georgia.¹

The discovery was made in the trench No. 68 located to the south-east of Samshvilde bath of the late medieval period and its area is 25 square meters. During the excavations the expedition was using a field-archaeological method which implies identification of separate archaeological contexts and creation of a stratigraphic model of the monument on the basis of establishment of their interconnection.²

The item was discovered in the fifth context of the trench No. 68 which represents an immovable cultural layer. It was covered by ruins (context No. 3) which encompassed nearly the entire trench. As a result of excavations it was established that these ruins are the remnants of the structure which was located in this section of the citadel at the final stage of functioning of the fortress³. The above period (1748-1749) when strong battles were fought between muslimized Archil Bagrationi (Abdulla Beg) and Erekle II for the royal throne of Kartli is depicted by the chronicler as follows: "... Abdulla Beg took canons and armory from Lori Fortress and brought

¹ Archaeological researches of former settlement of Samshvilde has been conducted by Samshvilde archaeological expedition of the University of Georgia since 2012.

² We express gratitude to the leader of the Georgian-British Expedition of Nokalakevi, N. Mughulia who shared the experience of international expedition of Nokalakevi in connection with the above method.

³ Archaeological material, field documents and scientific report of excavations is saved at the Department of Archaeology, Anthropology and Arts of the University of Georgia.

them to Samshvilde Fortress ... began to fix the fortress ... constructed two large abutments of Samshvilde, made two pools on both sides to keep large water and made reserves for two years with everything ... they brought many captives, i.e. goods and brought them to Samshvilde" [Orbeliani P. 1981. 125; 127-128]. From the portion of the source it is evident that significant construction works were carried out in Samshvilde and in particular, in its citadel during that period and premises of various designation were arranged in addition to fortification structures.

After removal of the ruined layer discovered in the trench No. 68, the stratigraphic picture was changed at the depth of 50-55 cm from the ground surface. In particular, an immovable cultural layer was observed which contained large amount of fragments of glazed ceramics and osteological material as well as small amount of obsidian pieces and metal items. The bowl which represents the main subject of our research was discovered in this layer.

Description of the item

As it was mentioned, the bowl is preserved nearly entirely (H – 8 cm; mouth D – 22 cm; bottom D – 9.5 cm). It is made of levigated pinkish clay on a machine-tool. The "ketsi" is thin (4-5 mm), the mouth is wide and open, with a slightly visible lace. The pottery is glazed outside nearly to the bottom. The flat bottom ends with a weakly grooved heel. The bowl is decorated by yellowish, violet and greenish paints flowing from the mouth to the center. The mouth of the bowl is also decorated with violet "moles". A stylized plant is depicted on the protruding bottom with paints of the same color. The bowl is glazed by transparent clear glaze.

General context

Bowls occupy a special place among the Georgian glazed pottery of the developed medieval period. This type of ceramics is known from Tbilisi, Rustavi, Zhinvali, Dmanisi, Gudarekhi etc. [Mitsishvili M. 1979; Jorbenadze B. 1984; Rcheulishvili G. 1985; Japaridze V. 1998; Chilashvili L. 1999]. A wonderful collection of glazed bowls was discovered in the island of Cyprus during archaeological excavations of the Georgian monastery of Ghalia [Gagoshidze I.; Mindorashvili D., Gagoshidze G. 2014].

Besides, the main centers where glazed bowls and glazed pottery in general were produced in Georgia of the developed medieval period are identified [Maisuradze Z., 1953; Japaridze V. 1956; Mitsishvili M. 1969; Chilashvili L. 1999]. Technological processes, methods of decoration, artistic images and ornaments common for local glazed items are also known [Chkhvimiani J, 2011; Bakhtadze N. 2013; Mindorashvili D. 2015].

Production of glazed ceramics and in particular, bowls achieved a particularly high level in Georgia in XII-XIII centuries and maintained a high level of products until destructive invasions of Mongols. In the above period, it was particularly popular to decorate bowls with bough-sprout ornaments which created artistic images in combination with radial lines, triangles and rhombic motif. Depicting birds on bowls provided ever more effect. Glazed bowls decorated with such

images are one of the most visible in the XII-XIII century materials of Georgia [Japaridze V. 1956, tab. XXXIX-XLIII; Maisuradze Z. 1953. tab. XI-XVII; Berikashvili D. 2013. tab. X]. Often there was an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic painting (lion, tiger, wolf, donkey etc.) under the glaze of bowls which was painted in the central part and was decorated with a floral motif [Gvritishvili L. Kereselidze T. 2011. 203-204; Bakhtadze N. 2013. 90-95; Mindorashvili D. 2015. Chapter VI. Tab. II).

Against this background, the bowl discovered in Samshvilde trench No. 68 is absolutely different and does not resemble to any glazed pottery of the above monuments.

Similar materials and date

The analogue of Samshvilde bowl is not found in the glazed ceramics of the medieval period of Georgia. Archaeological collections of Tbilisi [Mitsishvili M. 1979; Chilashvili L. 1999; Mindorashvili D. 2009, 2015], Rustavi [Chilashvili L. 1958; Lomtadze G. 1988], Dmanisi [Maisuradze Z. 1953; Japaridze V. 1956. Kopaliani J. 1996, Chkhvimiani J. 2011], Gudarekhi [Muskhelishvili K., Khidasheli Sh., Japaridze V. 1954], Urbnisi [Chilashvili L. 1964] and Telavi [Chikoidze Ts. 1979] do not contain such pottery. Such items were not found in the excavated materials of Ganja [Najapharova N. 1964, Akhmedov R. 1992], Orenkala [Minkevich-Mustafaeva N. 1959, Shelkovnikov B. 1959, Jacobson A. 1959] and Dvin [Janpolatian H. 1988. Kalantarian A. 1996]. A certain typological resemblance with Samshvilde bowl is demonstrated by the glazed bowl of Anisi saved in the Armenian historic-ethnographic museum, however, the latter is also considered to be an imported item (Shelkovnikov B. 1942)⁴.

Indeed, items like Samshvilde bowl are known best of all from the centers of the north Iran, such as: Tabriz, Rey, Mashhad, Gorgan [Wilkinson Ch. 1973. Grube E. 1976. Allan J. 1991. Watson O. 2004. Priestman S.M.N. 2005], but resemblance is conditional here as well, because the exact analogue is not found here. It is known that Nishaburi was the most distinguished among the centers mentioned in IX-XII centuries and it represented the main center of ceramic production of Iran (Khorasan region) [Bulliet R. W. 1972]. It was located along the central trade-economic main road – the Silk Road and this facilitated its economic development. Products and primarily, ceramics produced in Nishaburi were very popular in the Near and the Far East and the items produced here are often found in regions located far from Iran [Wilkinson Ch. 1973. 26]⁵.

In the publication of 1973 Wilkinson distinguishes 12 typological groups in Nishaburi ceramics of the Islamic period. The author separately reviews items painted in black on a white engobe with bare "ketsi", color droppings, painted in many colors on a white engobe, decorated and

⁴ B. Shelkovnikov compares the above bowl to Aprasiabic bowls and assumes that they were disseminated in the Transcaucasia from the Central Asia. In our opinion, it is possible that this type of bowls represents an import in the Central Asia (as well as in the Transcaucasia) and must have come from the northern regions of Iran.

⁵ Georgia was also actively engaged in this trade-economic network. The imported tray with an anthropomorphic image discovered in Nekresi in 2001 points to this fact [Bakhtadze N. 2010; Chemia M. 2011].

glazed with color spots, glazed opaquely, glazed in yellowish, glazed in yellow, monochromatic, glazed with alkaline glazes and Chinese items [Wilkinson Ch. 1973.VII]. In addition, imitations are also reviewed separately whose area of distribution is rather wide and which are very popular [Wilkinson Ch. 1973. 180].

By form (flat bottom with slightly grooved heel, widely open sides, relief hillock in the center), parameters (bottom diameter 9,5 cm; mouth diameter 22 cm; height 8 cm), decoration (glazed paints dropping to the center, decoration of the bowl center and mouth with dotty spots) and glazing technique (entirely glazed internal face, half glazed side nearly to the bottom), Samshvilde bowl resembles the items united in the second group defined by Wilkinson [Wilkinson Ch. 1973. 82. 40-43; 83. 44-47; 86. 56-57] (Tab.2). However, as already mentioned, it significantly falls behind the originals in terms of decoration and quality, in general. We think that it represents an imitation of the later period of Nishaburi, 12th century or early 13th century which is produced in any center of ceramic production of the North Iran (Rey, Tabriz) and was imported to Georgia from there.

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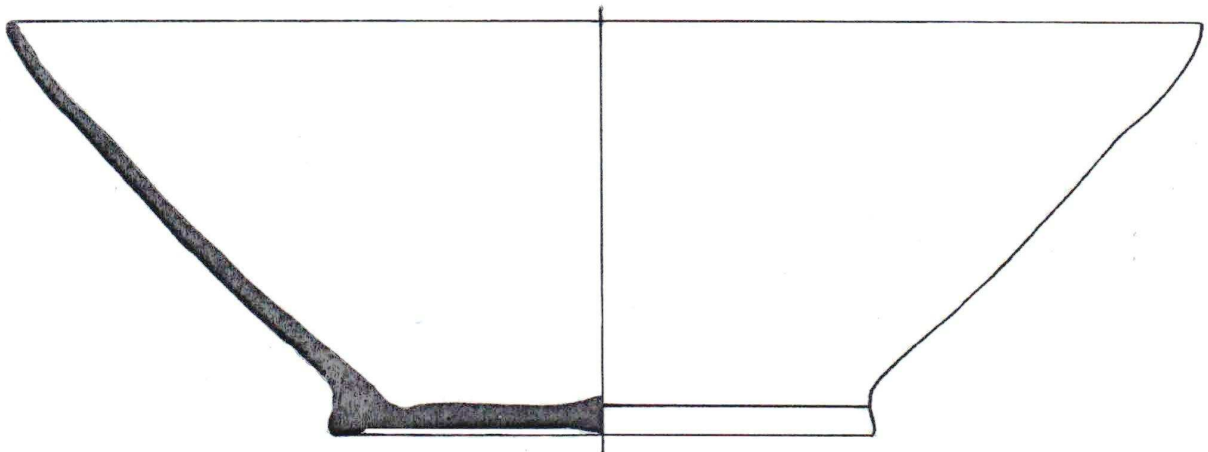
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samshvilde

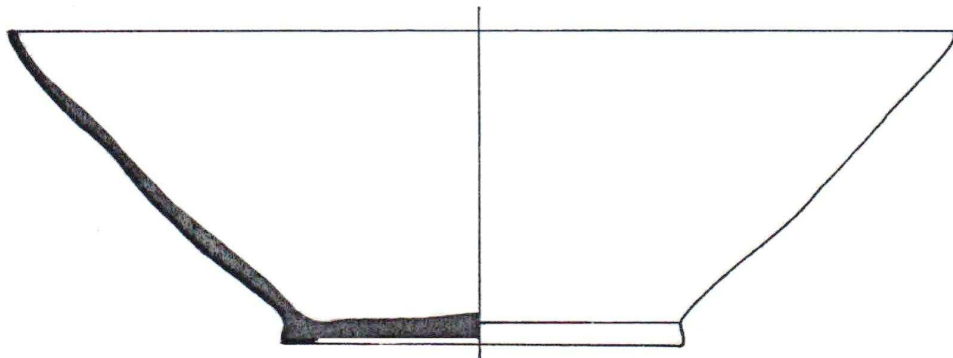
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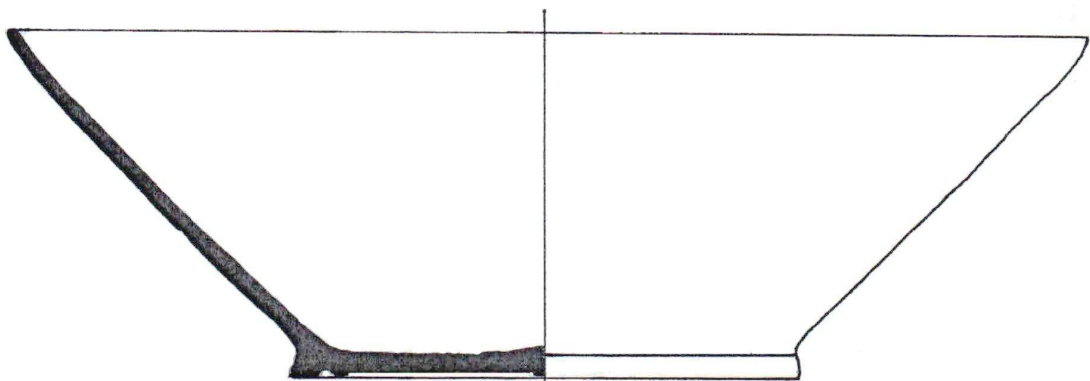
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Samshvilde



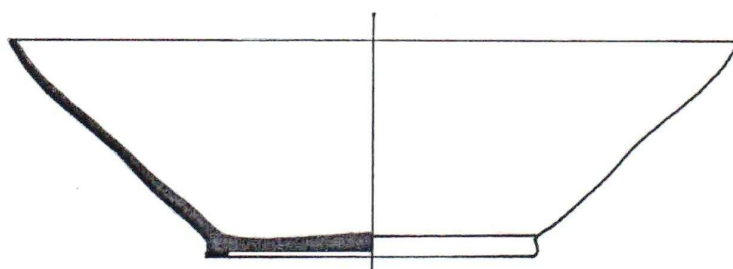
2.

Sabz Pushan (Iran)



3.

Sabz Pushan (Iran)



4.

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