

## THE HOUSEHOLD OF YERKURGAN CERAMISTS IN THE 5TH-6TH CENTURIES

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is the result of archaeological research in the ruins of one of the most ancient cities of Central Asia, the settlement of Yerkurgan is characterized as the ruins of the oldest and largest settlement in the territory of the Karshi oasis. The article provides an in-depth analysis of the surroundings of the Yerkurgan ceramists' quarter. In the course of the study in the quarter of ceramists of the Yerkurgan settlement, 9 separate farms were identified, the members of which from generation to generation during the 5th-6th centuries. engaged in this craft, studied the processes of their activities at home, lifestyle, everyday life, religious beliefs, specialization in the production of ceramic products.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Home Ownership; Terracotta Figurines; The Quarter Of Ceramists; Workshop; Ceramic Production.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The archaeological site of Yerkurgan is the ruins of the oldest and largest city in the Karshi oasis, which is mentioned by the chroniclers of the campaigns of Alexander the Great as Xenippus (Rtveladze 2002, 85-94). However, until recently, it was believed that Xenippa was in the upper reaches of the Kashkadarya (Masson 1972; Suleimanov 2000; Isamidinov 1978, 20-21). The settlement is located 10 km north of Karshi and the Karshi-Kasan main road crosses its double defensive walls. The inner wall of the Yerkurgan settlement was erected in the form of a very large pentagon, from the outer side of which you can see the traces of towers, which were previously located every 17-18 meters from each other. Within the boundaries of the inner defensive wall, the structure of a very densely built-up city is clearly visible. In its central part there were two houses of worship (i.e., the eastern and western sanctuaries), a little southeast - the ruler's palace. The ruins of the rest of the buildings testify to the very active political, economic and cultural life of the city's population. If you look closely at the settlement, you can understand that it is filled with the ruins of buildings of the once public, religious, industrial and military purposes (Isamidinov, Suleimanov 1984, 7-9). Between the houses of worship in the city center and the eastern wall stretched for more than 600 m a quarter of ceramists, which consisted of a group of households, closely attached to each other. The ceramics' quarter, the total length of which was 600 m and the width - 200 m, occupied an area in the southern part of the ancient city, respectively, from the southern to the northeastern gates, or almost to the fortress of the ruler of the city. A group of archaeologists, including S.K. Kabanov, who noted that they discovered many objects that clearly belonged to ceramists: pottery that did not have

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time to undergo firing; slag left over from destroyed kilns; fragments of dishes melted during the firing process; terracotta figurines; molds for making terracotta figurines (Kabanov 1950). Indeed, within the boundaries of the inner defensive wall of Yerkurgan, a large area of the eastern part and a quarter of the total was the quarter of ceramists. In this case, we called a quarter in the eastern part of Yerkurgan, a quarter in the eastern part of Yerkurgan, which is 600 meters long and 200 meters wide. Naturally, each household consisted of separate rooms [3-6].

**Household №1** was located in the northern part of the ceramists' quarter, and here only one large, almost square-shaped (6x6.6 m) room was uncovered.

We assume that this special room, located in the farthest, inner part of the household, served as a guest room (mexmonkhona) or a sanctuary. A sufa with a height of 25 cm (room 37) stretched along all four walls. The western and northern parts of the Sufa were about 2 m wide, and in the center of the room an object was discovered, supposedly an otashdon (altar) with a volume of 1x1 m and a height of 25 cm. Later, it was believed that this square-shaped object was part of a support that supported ceiling beam. As for the Sufa, it was most likely intended for relaxation.

**Household №2** was one of the largest, combining 8 premises. They are designated by numbers 14-17, 60-61, 36. A narrow passage leading from room 14 connected the household with a large area on the east side. The most characteristic feature of this home ownership was a very dense arrangement of rooms, which were extremely small in size. They were probably more intended for winter conditions. This is confirmed by the found remains of obligatory reed mats, under which there was a dense layer of white organic matter - probably straw or rice stalks. Premises No. 14-15 were residential and were located in the inner part of the household, i.e. connected the outside of the house to the inside. Along the southern and western walls of room 15 there was a sufa, on which three hums were placed one after another, found buried to the rim. They probably stored grain products, water, etc. The presence of white organic matter shows that everywhere mats were laid on top of straw. A coin of the rulers of Nakhshab, minted in the 5th-6th centuries, was found in room No. 15. The ceramic products that were produced in this household were fired in an oven installed to the left of the entrance. The firebox of the stove, in which the fire was kindled, was outside the room, protruding into the wasteland on the east side.

In the course of archaeological work, it was revealed that two kilns were functioning in this farm. Thus, in room No. 1, a two-tiered circular oven was found. However, it should be noted that both ovens were found under the topmost floor covering.

Room 16 of this household was clearly intended for prayers. Along the three walls of the room, there were sufas for sitting, and on the opposite wall - a small square-shaped sufa. They usually put idols made of wood, terracotta or clay on it. The presence of just such idols was noted by Y. Yakubov, who conducted research in settlements of the early Middle Ages in the upper reaches of the Zarafshan River (Yakubov 1996, 11-20).

**Household №3** consisted of eight very closely attached premises for economic, residential and religious purposes. At the entrance to the house there was an aivan, under which a large sufa was arranged. There was an entrance from the aivan to the main room of the household. This room, designated as No. 2, was in the form of a square, measuring 5x4.5 m, with one door on the south and one on the west. The entrance to the room was blocked by a not very high threshold. 1.5 m from the threshold in the center of the room, a burnt circle with a diameter of about 60-70 cm is visible - a trace of the hearth. On both sides of the hearth, there are rectangular barriers, 8 cm

high, 20 cm long and 10 cm wide. Barriers for two more hearths and fragments of one cauldron were also found here. A pile of white ash was found to the west of the barrier. The upper part of the rectangular shield is also burnt and has a reddish tint. A clay figurine was found 40 cm west of the hearth. The figurine is 12 cm high and 9 cm wide. The figurine is a depiction of the head of a person; the left side of the face, curls of hair, and the left eye are well preserved. The surface of the figurine is covered with alabaster, there is a large red mole on the cheek, and the eyes are black. According to experts, the statuette has been restored many times. The main reason for this is her constant presence near the fire. That is why the surface of the figurine is covered with soot. Due to the soot, the figurine of the god often needed cleaning and, naturally, the sculptor was doing this. Judging by the surviving layers covering the crack on the obverse, the figurine was repaired at least 10 times. The back of the head was made in the form of a flat surface. Probably, originally, the deity was supposed to be attached to the wall. This is evidenced by the holes in the neck of the figurine. We believe that this clay figurine was an idol, the base of which was probably made of wood. There is written information that these very figurines of idols were widespread on the territory of Sogd (Narshakhi 1897; Biruni 1957, 254-257) [1]. Again, there is information that in the course of archaeological work on the territory of Fergana, Ustrushana and Sogd, just such idols of various types and forms were discovered (Mukhtarov 1982, 5-48; Brykina 1982, 192). [2]

**Household №4** consisted of 15 premises and is considered one of the largest households that occupied the southern part of the block. The farm was distinguished by its size, compact arrangement of rooms, and an abundance of ceramics. In the course of the survey, material was obtained related to the expansion of the family of the artisan-ceramist and its subsequent division into separate families. So, if initially the farm consisted of rooms No. 19, 27, 33, 39, 22, 23, 13, 8-9, 18, 28, 35, then in the process of expanding the farm, rooms No. 22-23, 13, 8-9 were separated. and 18.

Pottery is considered to be such a type of craft production that the craftsmen of this craft made not only small jugs, but also a large number of bowls, plates, bowls and even tripod dastarkhans. Near the wall of room No. 23, belonging to the workshop, 11 pieces were lifted from the floor surface. similar terracotta figurines. All of them depicted a ruler with divine power. The terracotta figurine found among others in room 23 of Yerkurgan is very similar to the find made at the Shurtepa settlement of the Chimkurgan reservoir (Kabanov 1981: 100). S.K. Kabanov, who carried out archaeological work there, having found 2 such figurines, immediately determined that they were "terracotta figurines made by city craftsmen". Archaeological work at the Yerkurgan settlement was carried out 10-15 years after S.K. Kabanov, but he probably foresaw the discovery of similar finds in the future. S.K. Kabanov initially assumed that the statuette he found belongs to the Kidarite period, and later expressed the opinion that it dates from the 3rd-4th centuries. and Nakhshab could be related to Parthia (Kabanov 1981, 100-102). After it became known that these terracotta figurines were made in the workshop of household No. 4 of the ceramics quarter of Yerkurgan, we came to the conclusion that they date from the 5th-6th centuries. and can be an image of the "deified ruler of Nakhshab" [7-9].

We assume that the serial production of the image of the ruler is a manifestation of the cult of deification of the early Middle Ages and in practice was carried out through a centralized order. Obviously, the centralized production of such products in large cities of a given territory, with its subsequent sale throughout the country, implied a special organizational nature of this event.

**Household №5,** which consisted of 7 rooms, was also located in the southern part of the ceramists' quarter. One of the premises, measuring 9x7.7 m, designated by us as No. 19, was clearly intended for handicraft affairs. At the western and northern walls, spacious sufas were built, in several places of which large khums were buried. The presence of a large number of tripod dastarkhans made of clay testifies to the fact that this room was the workshop of a ceramic craftsman. This also indicates the serial production of finished products.

The most important thing is that room 19 resembles a large workshop, built in the form of a large courtyard. The thing is that, despite the large size of the room, there were very wide sufas along the northern and western walls. At the northern edge of the western wall, 1 hum was buried at full height. The same is the case with the hums located in the suf near the northern wall of the room. Thus, if in the northeastern corner there were 2 khums buried side by side, then a little to the west of them you could see a lot of the aforementioned dastarkhans, stacked on top of each other and being ready-made products. At the western edge of the Sufa, an ash-filled hearth was discovered, near which there was another buried hum. In other parts of the Sufa, two more hearths that existed here can be judged by the surviving ash spots.

So, this is a large room in all respects, i.e. its size, arrangement of sufas, equipping with the necessary items was intended for the implementation of craft activities. From this room, through a narrow passage, one could get into room no. 27. Unlike others, it has been well preserved. There was a sufa along the eastern wall. At the southern wall there was a marble base in a kind of a circle, on which a second base of fired clay was installed. This find deserves special attention, because the top of the ceramic base was not suitable for supporting a large support. In our opinion, the assumption that such a base served as a kind of pedestal for a figurine of a deity associated with Zoroastrianism can be considered closer to reality.

In the most southeastern part of the workshop of a ceramic craftsman, room No. 33 has been partially preserved. Since it was located at the exit to the street, there is an assumption that it was a shop for the sale of finished goods.

Thus, in the pottery, which occupied the entire southeastern part of the ceramists' quarter, at first there was one household, which over time, due to the expansion of the family, was divided into two (No. 4 and 5) parts. Workshop No. 5 included at least 6 rooms, of which room No. 19 occupies a special place. Among the products that were produced by this workshop, the item called "dastarkhan", which was widespread in the Middle Ages, is of particular interest. In addition, other products were produced in the workshop, which was separated from the main father's. It seems that this part of the clan specialized in making terracotta figurines.

**Household №6.** In the process of studying the quarter of ceramists, 9 households were specifically identified, of which only household No. 6 was not provided with information regarding its economic activities. Being the smallest, it consisted of only 3 rooms (nos. 48, 50, 53), and the entrance to the property was on the main road on the west side.

Thus, when examining the warehouse of the ceramic workshop (No. 5) of the household No. 7, the products ready for sale and a whole series of cookware prepared for firing were raised. Most of the pottery production consisted of hums and miniature jugs.

As already mentioned, there is a large place between the western walls of rooms No. 53, No. 59 and the roadside, which was probably a large aivan. The facade of the aivan overlooked the main

road and at the same time served as a retail store for finished products. From an architectural point of view, the aivan connected several premises into one large household.

## CONCLUSION

Thus, during the survey of the Yerkurgan ceramics quarter of the early Middle Ages, we got acquainted with the daily life, economic activity, trade, religious beliefs and ritual actions of the inhabitants in the 5th-6th centuries, which was told about by their houses, arrangement of premises and finds.

The study of the structure of ceramists' households showed that they had: a separate workshop, a ceramic oven, a potter's wheel, a prayer room, a drawing-room, an "inner room", a "winter room", etc.

The upper horizon of the quarter, the ceramists, belong to the Hephthalite era, because the complexes found here retain clear ethnic features. That is why this period, which combined the features of the culture of the Sogdians and Hephthalites, we began to call the period of "Sogdian-Hephthalite symbiosis".

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