An Achaemenid « Palace » at Qarajamirli (Azerbaijan)

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Abstract
Excavations on a small mound near the village Qarajamirli in western Azerbaijan provided remains of a monumental building, as well as quite a number of fragments of limestone column bases. The symmetrical ground plan of the building, the architectural sculpture and the pottery found on the floor closely follow Persian models from the Achaemenid era. Similar structures are known from Sary Tepe (Azerbaijan) and Gumbati (Georgia). These, as well as the building in Qarajamirli, can be interpreted as the residences of Persian officials, who left this area when the Achaemenid Empire collapsed. The painted pottery from the following period, when some peasants or herdsmen occasionally lived there, so far finds parallels only in Eastern Georgia.

Keywords
Achaemenid Empire / Azerbaijan / Architecture / Column bases / Pottery

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35 years ago a limestone column base with cyma-recta-profile was found near the village Qarajamirli, Shamkir district. According to Prof. Ideal Narimanov (Baku) a torus, originally belonging to this base, vanished shortly after the discovery. Now the base, cut in two pieces by its finder Hamid Jussibov, a resident of the village, rests in front of his house and in his courtyard (Fig. 1, 1a). So far, only a sketchy drawing of the base has been published.¹

On March 18th, 2001 the authors of this report, together with the late Prof. Narimanov visited the site and decided afterwards that archaeological investigations should be carried out here. The above mentioned base is a typically Achaemenid piece of architectural decoration and its prototypes are known

¹ Furtwängler & Knauß 1996, 374-376, fig. 9-10; Knauß 2005, 208; Knauß 2006, 97-98, fig. 18.
Fig. 1. Hamid Jussibov on a fragment of the bell-shaped base found accidentally in Qarajamirli in the 1970s.

from Susa and Persepolis. The Qarajamirli variant belongs to the type of bell-shaped bases which were in use at least from Dareios I until Artaxerxes II (521-359 BC). Such column bases have exclusively been found in connection with monumental buildings owned by high Achaemenid officials. It is especially significant that they are usually restricted to the core region of the Achaemenid Empire (Susa, Persepolis, Babylon etc.), with the only exception of South Caucasus, where quite a few such bases have been found in recent years. We know “palaces”, i.e. residences of Persian officials or local authorities