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## **An Achaemenid «Palace» at Qarajamirli (Azerbaijan) Preliminary Report on the Excavations in 2006**

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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 officers, 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**

[Please supply keywords]

Sponsored by the Gerda-Henkel-Foundation and with the support of the Academy of Sciences at Baku (Dr. Maia Ragimova), by the Georgian National Museum in Tbilisi (Prof. David Lordkipanidze) and by the local authorities in Shamkir (Azerbaijan), archaeological excavations were carried out at the site of Qarajamirli in western Azerbaijan between August 1<sup>st</sup> and August 28<sup>th</sup> 2006.

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.<sup>1</sup>

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, 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

<sup>1</sup> Furtwängler & Knauss 1996, 374-376, fig. 9-10; Knauss 2005, 208; Knauss 2006, 97-98, fig. 18.

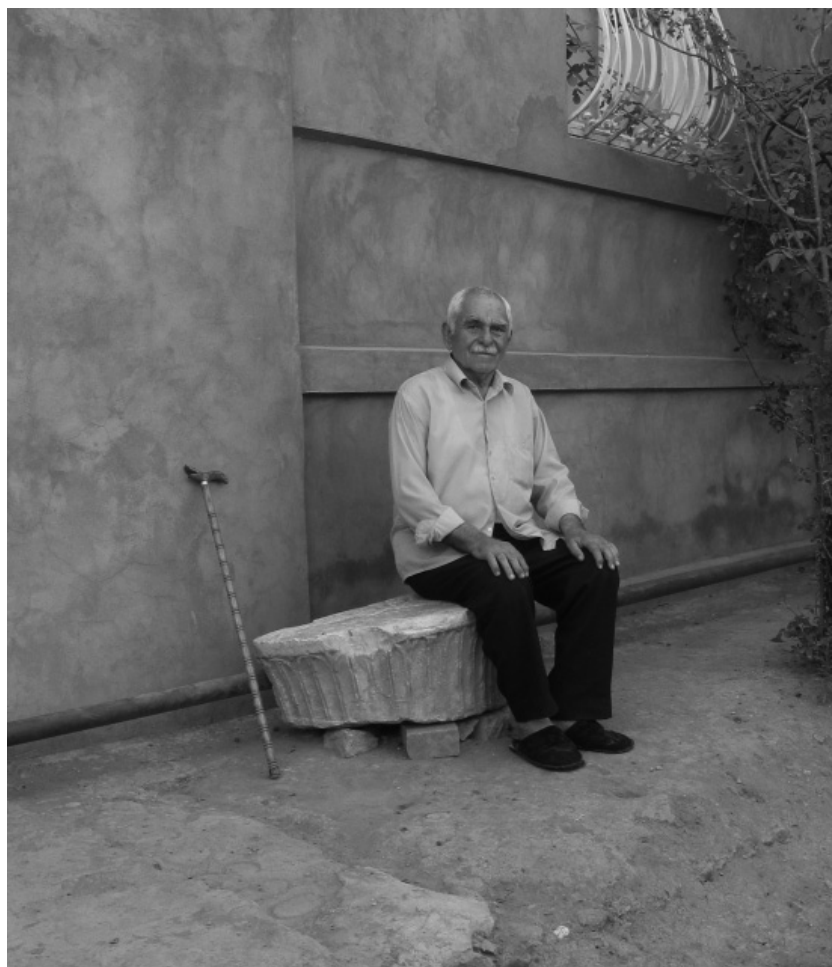


Fig. 1. Hamid Jussibov on a fragment of the bell-shaped base found accidentally in Qarajamirli in the 1970s.

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



Fig. 1a. The same fragment.

subordinated to Persia, at Gumbati (Georgia),<sup>2</sup> Sary Tepe (Azerbaijan)<sup>3</sup> and Benjamin (Armenia).<sup>4</sup> In 1971, one more bell-shaped base of minor size was discovered in Kavtiskhevi, which is also known as the discovery site of a double protoma capital corresponding to this base; the base and the capital are dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 2).

The similarities between the bases from Qarajamirli and Gumbati are so close that we might suppose their common origin, probably from a masonry workshop near Qarajamirli where such limestone can easily be found. The base leads to the assumption that there may have been a similar important building at Qarajamirli.

During the first campaign on a small and flat mound, not far from the find spot of the base, situated only a few kilometres northeast from the village Qarajamirli, we uncovered not only significant remains of monumental architecture but we also found a great number of fragments of column bases. Up to three layers of mud brick walls were preserved (1,0-1,6 m wide). The size of

<sup>2</sup> Furtwängler 1995, 177-211, figs. 6-7, 10-11; Furtwängler & Knauss 1996, 363-381, figs. 2-4, 6-8.

<sup>3</sup> Narimanov 1960.

<sup>4</sup> Ter-Martirosov 1996, 187-189; Ter-Martirosov 2001, 158-161, figs. 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Gagoshidze & Kipiani 2000, 59-64, figs. 1.7-8, 2-3.

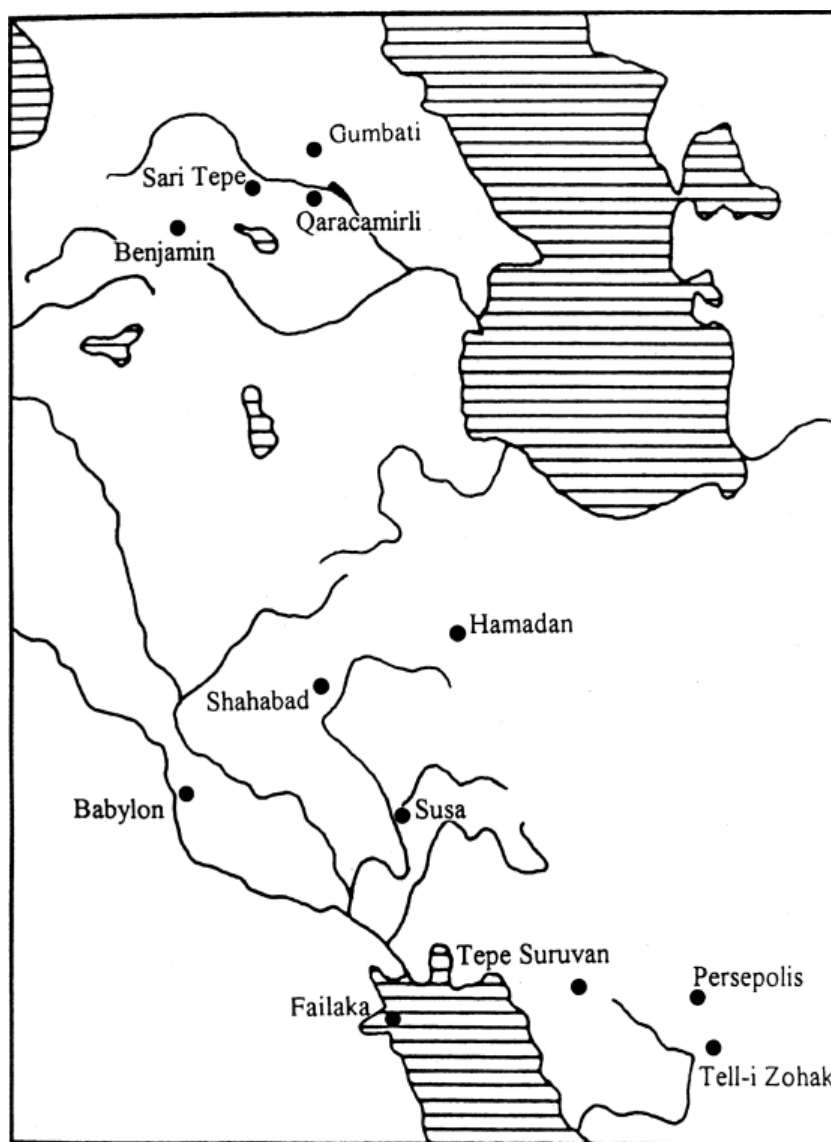


Fig. 2. Distribution map of Achaemenid bell-shaped column bases (after Furtwängler & Knauss 1996, 378).

the mud bricks is *ca.* 34 cm x 34 cm x 12 cm. The ground plan of the building immediately calls Persian models to mind (Figs. 3, 4). The building measures at least 25 x 22 m, but probably it was much larger. From the east a wide entrance gave access to a columned hall – obviously in the central axis of the building. In this hall the wooden beams of the roof were supported by four columns resting on bell-shaped limestone bases (Figs. 5-8). One of those bases has been found *in situ* (Fig. 9). These bases are decorated with vertical leaves and they have a torus above. The maximum diameter is 88 cm, the lower diameter of the column shafts measuring 52 cm. Although none of the bases have been completely preserved it is still certain that the height of the bases was originally around 60 cm, as has been asserted by the graphic reconstruction of the base (Fig. 10). It is remarkable that the height of the base from Sary Tepe is equal to its upper, smallest diameter, *i.e.* the diameter of the bottom of the column (53 cm).<sup>6</sup> Behind this columned hall one of the main rooms may have been situated. However, the greatest part of it still remains to be excavated. On both sides of this room and the columned hall there are long corridors. Further walls prove that the building was even wider and the walls of these corridors cannot have been the outer walls of the complex.

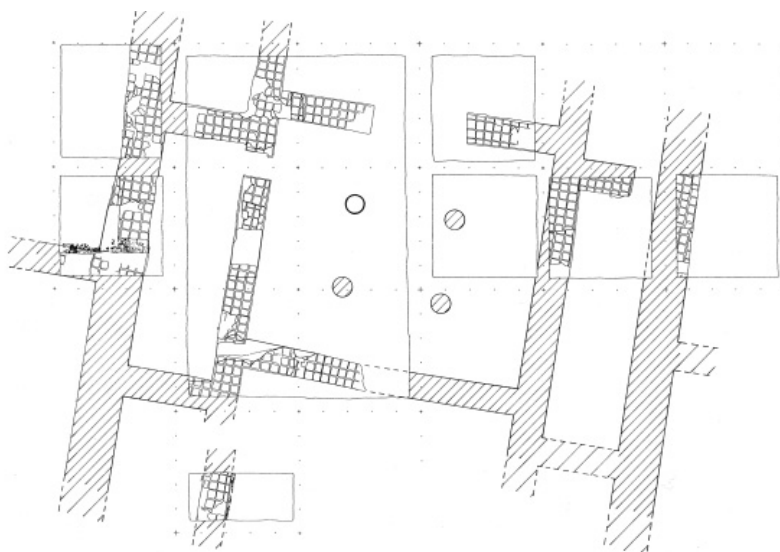


Fig. 3. Qarajamirli-2006. Plan of the excavated area.

<sup>6</sup> Narimanov 1960, 164.



Fig. 4. Qarajamirli-2006. General view of the excavation of the “palace”.



Fig. 5. Qarajamirli-2006. Fragment of a column base.

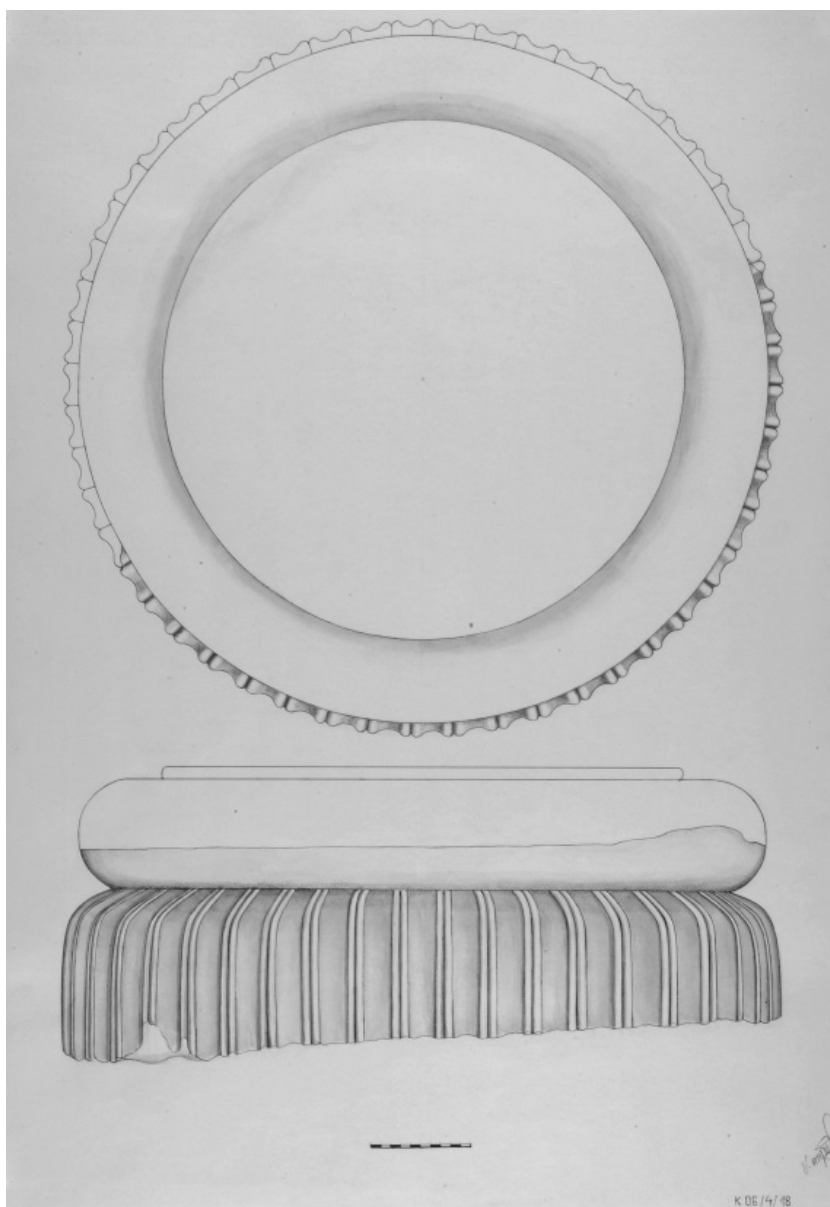


Fig. 6. Qarajamirli-2006. Fragment of a column base  
(drawing by T. Turkiashvili).

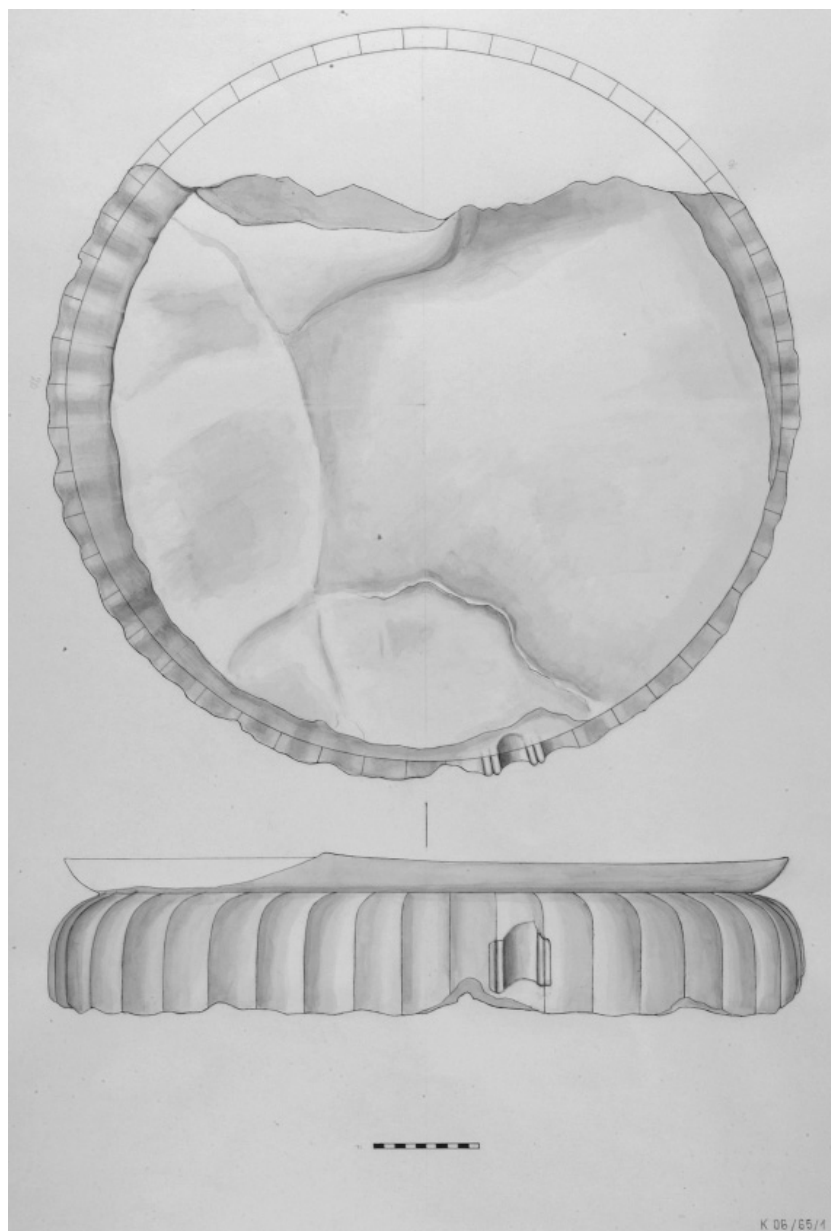


Fig. 7. Qarajamirli-2006. Fragment of a column base  
(drawing by T. Turkiashvili).



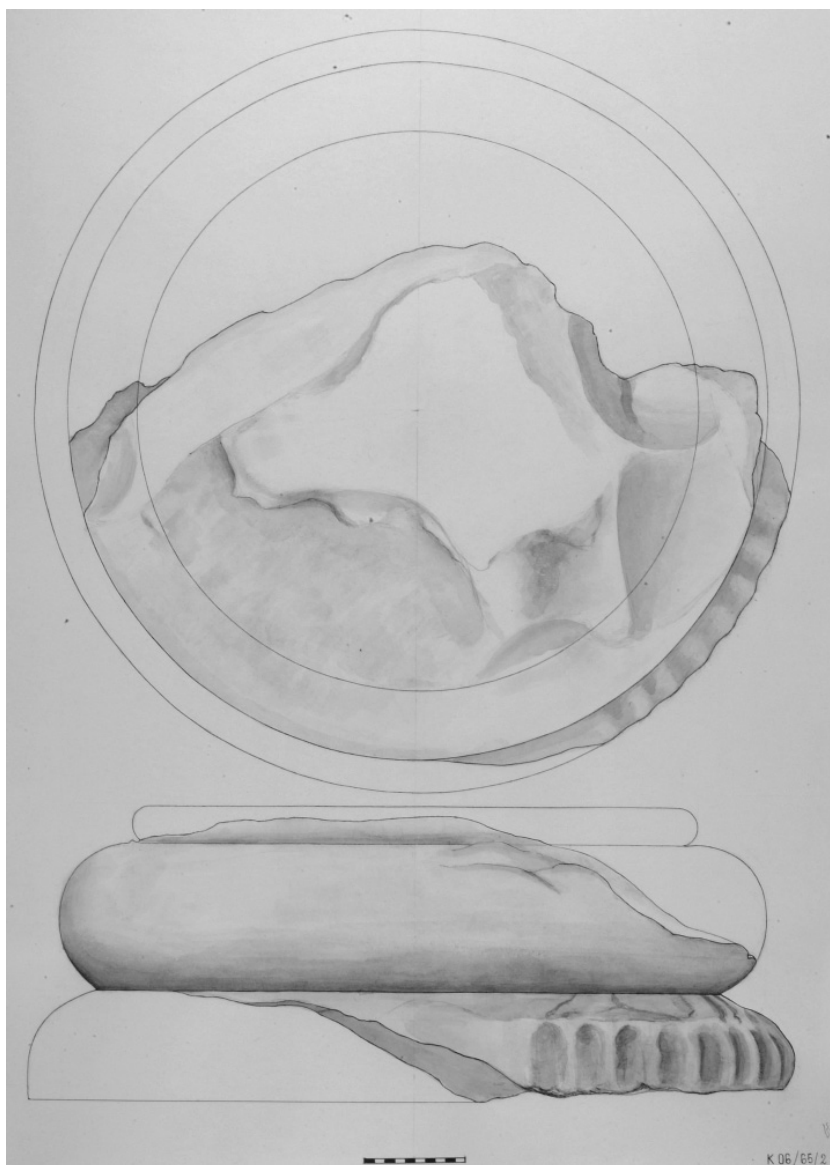


Fig. 8. Qarajamirli-2006. Fragment of a column base  
(drawing by T. Turkiashvili).



Fig. 9. Qarajamirli-2006. Column base *in situ*.

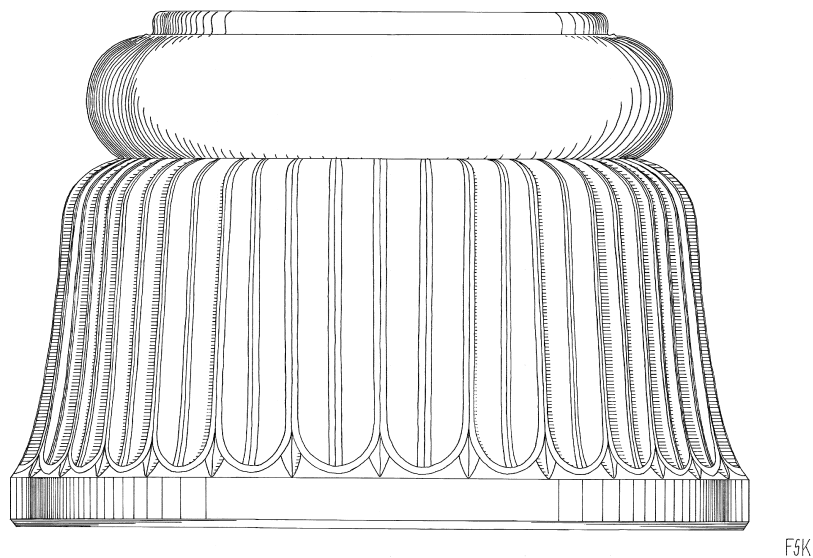


Fig. 10. Qarajamirli-2006. Graphical reconstruction of the bell-shaped column-base of the “palace” (drawing by F. Knauss).

Although great parts of this building remain to be uncovered, the symmetrical plan and the elaborated architectural sculpture let us assume that this was the residence of an important person in the time of Achaemenid rule in the Caucasus. All limestone fragments belonged to at least six columns. This means that there must have been further columned rooms or porticoes. The mud brick walls, as well as the column bases, each had a thin rubble stone foundation; the walls and the floors were plastered with clay.

This “palace” was erected without any doubt during the Achaemenid period (550-330 BC), according to the architectural sculpture and the small finds discovered on the floor. The historical background, as well as the comparison with similar structures in Gumbati and Sary Tepe, let us suspect that this took place in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, perhaps when Dareios I (521-486 BC) tried to subject the Scythians north of the Black Sea to his rule in 513/12 BC.<sup>7</sup> The pottery from the “palace”-levels belongs to the mid 5<sup>th</sup> to early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC (Figs. 11-12). Many shapes are influenced by Persian models. However, similar pottery has been found in Kakheti, in Kwemo Kedi and in Gumbati. The fragment of a blue glass bowl (Fig. 12 below) shows that even luxury goods from the centre of the empire were imported. When the Achaemenid Empire collapsed, the residents of the “palace” left Qarajamirli. There is no indication for any violent destruction at that time. Before the invaders came to this region, there had not been any settlement on this mound. When the Persians left the Caucasus the monumental building was not regularly used any more. However, fireplaces observed at several spots do show that the building must have been occasionally utilised. The pottery belonging to this phase is painted. This includes ceramics painted red as well as such with parallel lines of white paint characteristic of Georgia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>8</sup> This is the first case in which this type of painted pottery has been found on the territory of Azerbaijan. Here we also discovered tiles, which are apparently the earliest on the territory of Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, there are more mounds in the vicinity of the “palace”. Chance finds of limestone column bases of a slightly different type (torus and undecorated cyma-recta-profile) indicate that there must have been at least one more monumental building nearby (Fig. 13). Similar bases have been found at several sites in Iran and Iraq.<sup>9</sup> However, it seems probable that these bases are approximately from the same period as the bell-shaped bases, *i.e.* from the Achaemenid era. On another hill, about 500 m southeast of the “palace”, a great number of small ceramic finds from the surface also belong to the same period.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Gagoshidze 1979, 79-80, 90-95.

<sup>9</sup> Kleiss 1972, 197-198, fig. 63; Huff 1989, 285-295, figs. 2-4, pls. 1 a, b, d, e.

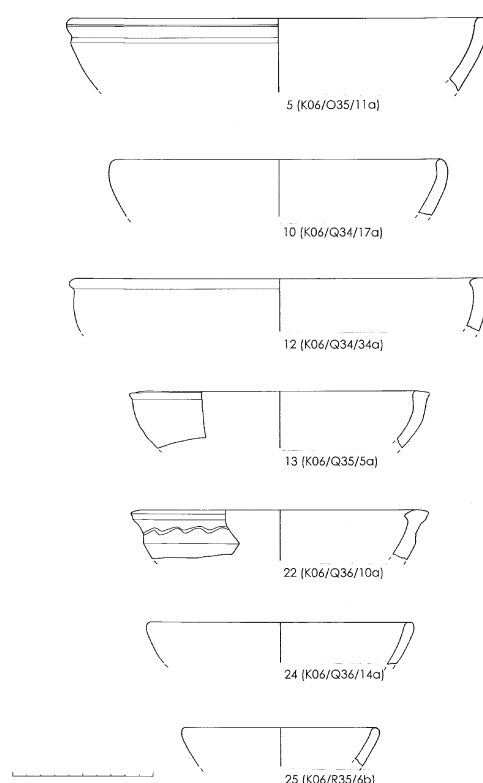


Fig. 11. Qarajamirli-2006. Pottery of the Achaemenid period.

The results of this first campaign give ample proof that there was an important administrative centre of the Achaemenids near the modern village of Qarajamirli. The Caucasus region once was under strong Persian (Achaemenid) influence. The architecture in Sary Tepe and Gumbati could only partly be reconstructed by the excavated remains. In Qarajamirli we have the opportunity to find additional evidence concerning the architecture of residences of Persian officials or local authorities subordinated to Persia. Further excavations may not only give us a more complete picture of the monumental structure in Qarajamirli, but also of its surroundings, additional official buildings as well as the settlement of the local population.

Whereas in Eastern Georgia a great number of imports from Achaemenid workshops as well as local imitations have come to light,<sup>10</sup> Iron Age Azerbaijan almost completely remains *terra incognita* until the present day. Unfortunately,

<sup>10</sup> Gagoshidze 1996; Knauss 2005, 197-207; Knauss 2006.

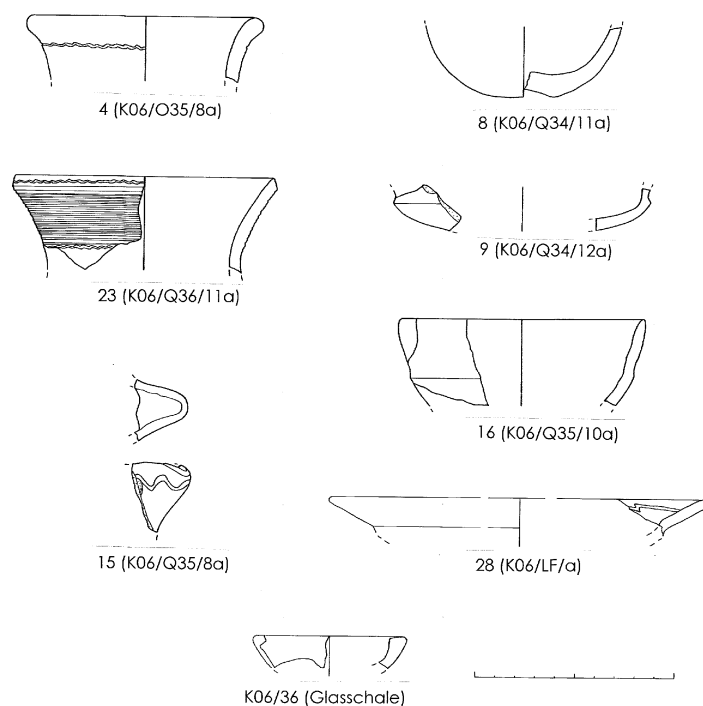


Fig. 12. Qarajamirli-2006. Pottery and a glass bowl of the Achaemenid period.

the results of the important excavations in Sary Tepe are only poorly published. This makes Qarajamirli even more important, since it enables us to get the first insights into the development of the local culture of this region. Iron Age remains from Lake Mingchevir are mainly from later periods (so-called Jaloilu-Tepe culture).<sup>11</sup> A comparison of western Azerbaijan, its architecture as well as its *artes minores* (especially pottery), with Eastern Georgia, which has been intensively investigated in recent years, seems promising.

In the future surveys of the neighbouring sites shall enable us to put the results from Qarajamirli into a wider cultural context. Such a procedure was extremely successful in Eastern Georgia during the campaigns of the German-Georgian Kakheti expedition (Furtwängler – Knauss – Gagoshidze). The region around Qarajamirli has been extremely fertile since ancient times (Strabo 11, 4, 2-3). Most probably, we owe the poor state of knowledge about the situation in antiquity and the lack of identified archaeological

<sup>11</sup> Aslanov *et alii* 1959; Kaziev 1960.

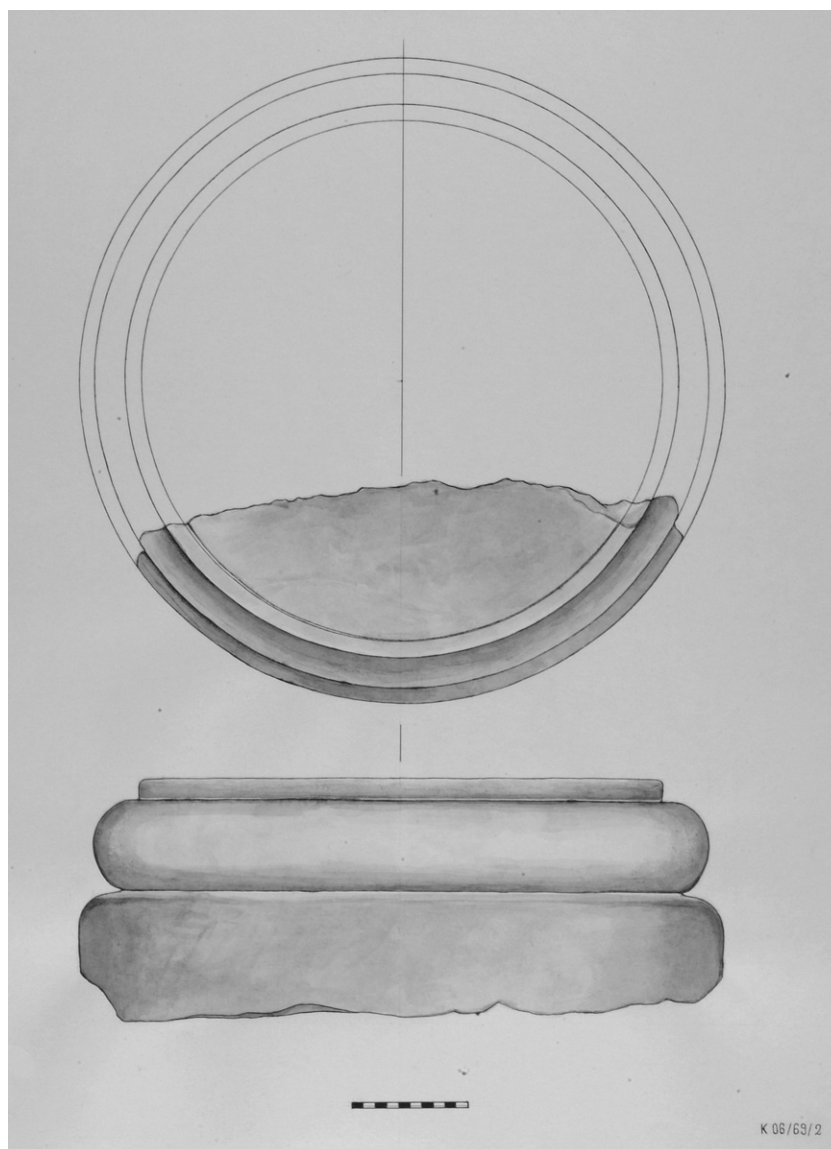


Fig. 13. Qarajamirli-2006. Fragment of a column base from Daraya Takh, approximately 1 km north of the “palace” (drawing by T. Turkiashvili).

monuments from here to the fact that there has hardly been any archaeological investigation of this region. Qarajamirli could be the start to explore it for the first time ever.

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