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EVOLUTION OF SEALS ON THE TERRITORY OF AZERBAIJAN

The earliest and simplest form of seals on the territory of Azerbaijan was the stamp seal. The main criterion of this type of seal was its use in economic and managerial activities. These ancient clay stamp seals were used for different purposes. They were used to seal warehouses and grain pits, and served as stamps for applying ornaments on leather or coarse woolen cloth. They were also used to mold bread.

The Azerbaijan Museum of National History keeps several dozens of pintader stamps from the late 2nd and 1st millennia BC, which were found in the village of Saritapa in Gazakh district (1958-1969). Pintaders were used for molding bread. The drawings of the sun or swastikas on sacred bread, according to primitive magical or ancient religious beliefs, symbolically united the sun and bread, which was supposed to bring a rich harvest. This custom of decorating bread baked on holidays with magical ornaments existed until the 19th century. Stamp seals were made of clay and wood and were mostly round in shape. In Azerbaijan, they were called "kulchebasan", after one of the types of bread. In villages, families related by blood had one "kulchebasan" (which was passed down from grandmothers to granddaughters and served as a family mark, the property of the family). On holidays, relatives agreed to bake bread one by one to use the stamp to ornament the bread. In many districts of Azerbaijan (Shamakhi, Sheki (Nukha),

Guba, etc.) some families still have "kulchebasan" with deep-cut decorations on the front, mostly with the image of the sun or swastika. The images on clay stamps give the impression of figures in constant motion, rotating from right to left or vice versa, sometimes marked by round depressions in the center of the image.

Stamp seal (clay seal). 2nd-1st millennia BC





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In the Early Bronze Age, cylindrical seals began to be made. Stamp seals were characterized by a closed compositional field, while the impression of a cylindrical seal had an open frieze composition. Cylindrical seals were designed for an impression of any desired length, representing a repeating motif. This feature was very suitable for sealing cuneiform documents made of clay. These seals were also used on clay cases used for livestock records and other household needs. During archaeological excavations in the village of Kharabagilan in the territory of Nakhchivan, cylindrical seals of 6-5th centuries BC were found. The images on the seals also served as a peculiar form of information exchange with neighboring regions about flora and fauna. They also reflected religious and ideological views. Seals were made of a variety of materials – semi-precious stones, metal, faience, paste, wood, and animal bones.

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this period, carv-

ers reached the heights of artistic perfection and had a significant influence on the formation of aesthetic tastes in society. Gems were made of colored semi-precious stones (agate, chalcedony, carnelian, onyx, jasper, etc.). They had a variety of shapes for certain periods and regions. All of them belong to glyptic (sculpted, carved in Greek) monuments and represent the art of carving on hard materials. They are divided into two groups: intaglios, or deepened images, and cameos, or convex. Only intaglios were used as seals and images on them were shown in a mirrored manner.

One of the important trade routes of the latter half of the 1st century BC was the route along the Kura River, as indicated by the finds of Roman gems in Mingachevir. They most often depicted gods in statuarial poses with their attributes. In the 3rd century, cultural and economic relations between Caucasian Albania and the Sassanid state strengthened. On the territory of Caucasian Albania, new samples of seals of so-called "false rings" appeared, which had a hole for a cord and were worn on the neck, hand and belt. Archaeological excavations in the territory of Azerbaijan repeatedly found semi-finished blanks for such products, as well as seals broken during manufacture. Local seals belonging to the 4-7th centuries were widespread in the territory of Albania. They were found in the towns of Gabala, Shamakhi (Chukhurt and Khinisli villages), Mingachevir, Ganja, Gazakh (Torpaggala settlement), Beylagan (Orenkala settlement) and other places, which indicates their widespread distribution.

The image on carved stones is a source of ideas about the life of ancient society, different nations, the external appearance of people, their cultural and religious life, mythological ideas, clothing and armament. The seals had cult objects, fantastic creatures,



Stamp seal (clay seal). 2nd-1st millennia BC

Ring seal. Silver, cornelian. 19th century



people, animals, birds, altars with flames, plants, various signs and monograms carved on them. Serving as objects of decoration, amulets and seals, glyptic monuments cover a wide range of subjects. It is no coincidence that, as researchers note, glyptic monuments are a kind of a mirror in which life and art are well reflected in all their versatility.

With the spread of Islam, seals with such images fell out of use, giving way to seals with Arabic script, the owner's name and religious sayings. Many religions use images to express the basis of their beliefs. However, Islamic culture favored calligraphy. Arabic calligraphy consisted of several styles, each style having a distinctive form and character and created for a specific purpose.

Masters of glyptic and sfragistic images engraved intricate calligrams that used sayings from the Quran. The main type of Muslim ornamentation used in making seals was islimi (a pattern of flexible, curly plant stems and shoots studded with leaves and flowers). Seals were made of colored semi-precious stones in the form of amulets and rings with the names of their own -



Seal. Agate, silver. 19th century

ers or sayings accepted in Islamic culture and symbolizing good wishes. Monumental style was mainly used, which maintained strict geometric principles and

clear proportions. Calligraphic inscriptions were carved on semi-precious stones – agate, jasper, chalcedony, cornelian, mother-of-pearl, turquoise and others.

Seal rings were intended for approving firmans (decrees), letters and decisions coming from rulers, viziers, etc. There was a widespread calligraphic style of seals – tugra (monogram), which combined intertwined words and phrases with images of a lamp, book, ship, etc. The word “tugra” is also used to designate many directions of calligraphic art, such as symmetrical depiction of the same words (like creating a mirror image), writing religious parables, mentioning the names of the Almighty.

A significant part of personal seals in Azerbaijan of

Six-faced seal. Agate. 19th century



the 16-17th centuries makes it possible to determine the date and names of their owners, as well as their adherence to the Sunni or Shiite current. For example, when examining seals with inscriptions “Ya Hussein”, “Ya Ali” or “Ya Hasan”, one can immediately determine whether their owner belonged to Shiite Islam. But after the words “Abdahu Raji” (His/God’s obedient servant) or “Abdahu Raji Muhammad” (His/God’s obedient servant Muhammad), it is impossible to determine to which religious current the owner belongs.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the art of making and using seals in Azerbaijan was undergoing dramatic changes. By this time, the khanates of Northern Azerbaijan were part of the Russian Empire. Oriental traditions in state administration, including the production and use of seals, were interrupted. Instead of seals with the image of “tugra”, which were traditional for the

Three-faced seal. Green yashma, silver. 19th century



East, new forms of seals became widespread. The seals were made of bronze or other metals and had wooden or metal handles. These seals were a reliable source when studying historical documents of one or another social orientation. Personal and state seals were widely used. Even the expression “coat-of-arms seal” appeared.

Many seals of the 19-20th centuries are kept in the Azerbaijan Museum of National History: the seal of “Yermolayev rural court, Guba province” with the coat of arms of Baku province; the seal of “Assistant elder of the lower Salahli rural society, Gazakh province, Elisavetpol” with the coat of arms of Elisavetpol province, the seal of the “Baku third women’s gymnasium”, the seal of “Count Vorontsov-Dashkov Higher Elementary School, Lankaran” and others.

Several other seals belonging to the early 20th century, when Azerbaijan was going through turbulent historical developments, are worthy of attention as well. The funds of the Azerbaijan Museum of National History have seals directly related to the huge cultural and educational activities that the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic had undertaken during the short period of its existence: the seal belonging to the first higher educational institution in Azerbaijan, Baku State University, which was established in accordance with the “Law

on the Establishment of Baku State University” adopted by the Parliament of the Azerbaijan Republic on September 1, 1919, as well as the seal of the “Azerbaijan State University”.

Seals are a magnificent artistic product and source of historical information, which enables the tracing not only of their evolution, but also of the valuable historical documents and evidence of past eras. 🌟

The article presents photographs of exhibits from the collection of the Azerbaijan National Museum of History

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