

AL-FIR FORTRESS: ARXEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE MIDDLE CENTURY QIAT (KAT) FORTRESS

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Annotatsiya: This article systematically analyzes the history of archaeological research on Qiyat (Kat), one of the ancient capitals of medieval Khorezm. It examines field research conducted by the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition since the mid-20th century, covering the stratigraphy of the city's cultural layers and the architectural features of the Al-Fir fortress complex. Drawing on medieval written sources — including Abu Rayhan Biruni, Yaqut, and Ibn Battuta — as well as modern scholarly work, the study scientifically substantiates the city's developmental stages from the 6th–7th centuries BC through the 15th–17th centuries, the construction techniques using raw brick and clay, and the periodization of the city based on numismatic evidence. The findings serve as a significant source for understanding the material culture and development dynamics of medieval Khorezm cities.

This thesis systematically analyzes the history of archaeological study of the medieval city of Qiyat and the scientific data obtained as a result of excavations. The study focuses on the field research work conducted by the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition since the mid-20th century, as well as the stratigraphy of the city's cultural layers. Based on archaeological materials, the architectural features of the city's early fortified fortress construction, the internal citadel (Al-Fil), and the remains of settlements around the city, dating back to the 4th–10th centuries, are revealed. The main content of the work is the archaeological reconstruction of medieval ceramics, glassware, and cultural layers found during excavations, as well as parts of the city submerged in the Amu Darya. Furthermore, the study scientifically substantiates the topographical changes of the city of Qiyat at various stages of the Middle Ages, the technique of using raw bricks and clay in city construction, and the periodization of the city based on numismatic materials. These archaeological data serve as an essential source for determining the development dynamics and material culture of medieval Khorezm cities.

The city of Beruni, named after our great ancestor Abu Rayhan Beruni, has a very ancient and extensive history. The scholar wrote the following about his birthplace, Kat: "People founded more than 300 cities and villages along both banks of the Jayhun. Their remains have been preserved to this day." Abu Rayhan Biruni. Selected works. 3rd ed., Tashkent, 1966. P. 95].

Our ancestor Beruni explains the reason for the city of Kat being called Pyl Kala or Fir as follows: "Kat (Pyl Kala) was surrounded by three fortresses built one after another... and was the central city of the Afrigids.... That is why it was called Al-Fir," and according to other sources, "this fortress housed the elephants of the Afrigian army... that is why it was called Elephant Fortress."

One of the scholars who studied Biruni's works, N. Veselovsky, expressed the following opinion in his work "Essay on Historical and Geographical Information on the Khiva Khanate from the Ancient Periods to the Present," published in 1877: "The city, which was called Al-Fir, consisted of three arches built from clay and fired bricks, one inside the other." All of them were of the same height and rose higher than the palace. Al-Fir was 10 miles away and could be seen from a distance. After Alexander the Great, in 616, Afrigh built a palace for himself in the north of the city of Al-Fir.

S. P. Tolstov reads these lines differently: "Al-Fir was a city near the city of Khwarazm, but it was built of clay and adobe brick, with three walls, one built inside the other, and the second higher than the first, the king's house was higher than all of them... and Afrigh built his palace inside Al-Fir in 660 after Iskander" despite the fact that this is read differently, it became known that the city of Khwarazm (Pyl, Kat) existed before the construction of Afrigh's palace in 305 and before the residence of the Afrighids was moved there.[2. Ya. Gulyamov. The history of irrigation in Khorezm. PA RUZ. Tashkent, 1959, pp. 116-117.]

From the name of the city, it is fully confirmed that from the 7th–6th centuries BC until 995, i.e., for more than one and a half thousand years, several initial capitals of the Khwarazmian state existed during the era of Kat. Beruni not only mentions that this city was the capital of the Afrighids but also mentions the names of the 22 kings who ruled on the throne of the city of Kat. Kat did not lose its status as a large city even during the Anushtegin dynasty and the Mongol invasion.

A number of authors, such as Yaqut and Ibn Battuta, have left information about the life of the city of Kat in the 12th–15th centuries. This wall, built of large adobe bricks more than two thousand years ago, reminds us of the word Kas in medieval written sources. In particular, Qyat, which was the capital between 305 and 995, was also known by the term Kas in medieval Persian-Arabic written sources. For example, according to the traveler-geographer Yaqut, who arrived in our region in 1216, the word "Kas" in the old Khorezmian language meant "hait" (courtyard). According to Academician V.V. Barthold's definition, the word "hait" denoted a space surrounded by a wall or enclosure in an open field; currently, such structures are called "tortkuls." After the Mongol invasion, Kat first belonged to the Ulus of Jochi, and then to the Ulus of Chagatai. During the reign of Amir Temur, complicated events occurred in the life of de Kat. After that, no major changes occurred in Kat's life.

The last ruler of Khwarazm, Anusha Khan, moved part of the population of Kat to the left bank and built a new city there. Subsequently, the name of the city of Kat was changed and began to be called Shaykh Abbas Vali after the name of the saint. (Shabbaz, until 1957)

According to written and archaeological materials, there were more than 40 medieval cities in Khorezm between the 9th and 14th centuries. In the Middle Ages, one of the major cities was the city of Qiyyat (Kat). The fortress consisted of three parts. The Ark and the Shahristan are also rabad.

The city of Qiyyat (Kat) is the current city of Beruni, the name of the city of Qiyyat, at – Tabari (VIII) Belazuri al-Istahri (930-933) al-Magdisi (985). Until 996, when the city of Qyat was called Khorezm or Al-Fir, Fil, Qass after the region, Qyat was the capital of Khorezm. Qyat was a political, cultural, and commercial center. Khudud al-Alem, the author of the 10th-century work "On Qiyyat," writes that the gates of the main city of Khwarazm, Turkestan, were a place for exchanging trade goods with the Turks. This proves that the city of Qiyot was a cultural center of trade with neighboring nomadic peoples. After 996, when the capital of Khwarazm passed from Gurganj (Urganj), the position of the city of Qyat in Khwarazm gradually began to decline. Therefore, according to Ibn Bakut, who visited the city of Qiyyat in 1333, Qiyyat is described as a beautiful city,

but it is still visible. Brief information about the city of Kyyat was recorded by the orientalists A.L. Kun and N. Karazin. In 1937, the archaeologist A.N. Terenozhkin measured and inspected the preserved walls of the city of Kyyat. In 1963, the old city of Qiyat was destroyed several times by the Amu Darya River. G. Khodjanliyazov, "Defense Structures of Ancient Khorezm," Tashkent, 2007, p. 22. (MITT, 1939, p. 435).

Let us recall the following information provided by Ya. Gulyamov in his work "History of the Irrigation of Khorezm" regarding Al-Fir, the ruins of the city of Kat: "Filkala is a large fortress built in a square plan, with a volume of approximately 220 x 220 meters. The fortress has been flooded several times, its walls have been severely eroded and destroyed, and the central part of the fortress is now occupied by a large reed-covered swamp. In the south-north corner of the fortress, there is a square shed (54 x 54) surrounded by a very thick and high wall (wall height 10-11 meters, thickness 6 meters). The walls were paved with large clay blocks. The inner part of the pavilion is pressed. A narrow entrance has been preserved in the middle of its rear wall. Among the people of Shabbaz, there is a tradition that in ancient times, the kings of Khorezm kept their elephants inside this structure. For this reason, the local population calls it an "elephant house."

At the beginning of 1221, as a result of the Mongol invasion, the city of Kat was once again turned into ruins. The high and imposing walls of the fortress became a symbol of Genghis Khan's artillery. Many surrounding towns were in a state of ruin, and life in many villages had fallen apart. The Arabic traveler Ibn Battuta provided information about this in the 1430s.

Despite this, the city of Kat was quickly restored within a short period and became the center of Southern Khorezm. During Amir Timur's first campaign (1372), the city of Kat was a well-fortified fortress. Regarding this, the chroniclers of that period - Sharafaddin Ali Yazdi and Nizomiddin Shami - each provided valuable information of historical significance in their "Zafarnama" books.

According to Al-Biruni, Qiyat was a strong fortified city surrounded by three high mud and brick walls built one inside the other. The governor's majestic palace rose high above the walls. Among the people living in the city of Qiyat, there were many scholars, artisans, builders, musicians, and healers. Medieval authors write that there was a large bazaar in the city and a large culture with wooden columns installed on a stone as tall as a man. Only the wall in the southwestern corner of the fortress has survived to the present day. The monument is of various angular shapes, with a total area of 44 hectares. The Ark was located in the southwest of the city. The length of the western walls is 621 m, the southern wall is 712 m, the northern and eastern walls are 660 m, the outer walls are reinforced with semicircular minarets, and the distance between the minarets is 33-34 m. The minarets protrude 6 m from the outer wall. There were four city gates with a thickness of 3.5-4 m, each of which was located between the city walls. The width of the gates is 13-16 m. From the outside, the fortress was surrounded by a deep moat 40-50 m wide. To the north of the central part of the fortress is the mausoleum of Sheikh Abbas Vali. The mausoleum, built in the 13th-14th centuries, was demolished at the beginning of the 20th century. Before the western gates of the city, the Guli Mama cemetery was located. Until 1902, a minaret was preserved in Qiyat-qala, which in its size was not inferior to the minarets of Old Urgench (the 14th century). Archaeological materials found in Qiyat-qala, especially ceramic vessels, date back to the 9th-14th and 15th-17th centuries in terms of their form, production technology, and patterns [3. Monets of P. I. Lerkh Bukharkhudatov, p. 44]

In the vicinity of the city of Qiyat (Kat), which dates back to the 12th-14th centuries, the settlements of auls have been preserved, but in recent years, they have been transformed into arable lands.

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