

ZHAJYK. ETERNAL CITY

Back in 2013 Murat Sdykov said, “Uralsk is more than 700 years old”. The city was established much earlier than generally accepted date, which is 1613! For the first time Yaitsk was mentioned in a written source in 1580, Karamzin wrote about our city in 1598. Who told you, that this is nobody’s land? One of the major discoveries in Kazakhstani archaeology of the XXI century is discovery of a cite of medieval settlement located 12 km. from modern Uralsk. History of Kazakhs in a new perspective The settlement “Zhajyk”, located to the south of Uralsk on the shore of the Ural River, consists of two parts. The first part is the city itself, whose area with visible traces of housing systems makes about 8 hectares; the second part of the settlement is represented by necropolis, located 2 km. to the west of settlement on the top of Svistun Mountain. During the course of more than ten-year explorations, Uralsk archaeologists together with their colleagues from Astana and Almaty, as well as scientists from Moscow and Kazan, achieved quite interesting results. Results surpassed expectations Lesser homestead Living space consists of 6 rooms, made up from mudbricks. Wall thickness is 70 sm. Homestead consists of two symmetric living sections. Living part of the homestead is represented by separately standing building, consisting of two living sections with symmetric layout, divided by main wall (the wall thickness is 0,8 m.). The homestead starts with a peculiar kind of “entrance hall”, which had been arranged for the utilities’ purpose, as there are some facilities used as rubbish-dumps. Next through the doors inside the central wall living rooms with heated sufas are arranged. The suite of rooms is enclosed with little rooms, obviously used as utilities. Assumably, they functioned as pantries. There was a big yard around the homestead with outbuildings to the north, west and east of the living section. Greater homestead The greater homestead consists of a suite of living and utilities rooms, and a big yard. It has many common features with lesser homeasted, but its sizes significantly surpass those of the lesser one. Outer walls are up to 0,8m. thick; they are made up of mudbricks. On the outside and inside they are covered with multilayer (up to 3 layers are recorded) plaster. The homestead consists of several buildings located near each other. Housing buildings were constructed from rectangular and square-shaped mudbricks. Living quarters were heated by kanas; tandyrns were used as kindling material. In addition, there were several rectangular-shaped stoves made up from burnt bricks in “greater homestead” and in one room of the “lesser homestead”. Public building: “oriental bathhouse called “hammam”.

Debris of the “oriental bathhouse known under the name “hammam” was located almost in the center of the settlement. Since the time it ceased functioning, the building was subjected to virtually complete destruction. Burnt bricks were wrenched out of the walls and floors for the purpose of reuse. At present, integrity of bathhouse constructions is such that we can record only separate layout fragments. Eastern peripheral area of the settlement was occupied by burnt bricks-manufacturing shops. Three kilns were discovered, two of them were used for burning bricks, and the other one was used for making lime. The brick kiln The

extant rectangular-shaped furnace of one of brick kilns was discovered as a result of excavations of a 10x10 m. area. Its inner sizes are 490 sm. at length, 325 sm. in width, and 180 sm. in height. In the times of the Golden Horde brick kilns with similar construction had been widely used in Middle Asia. They could be constructed not far from big building site, during construction of some architectural building, for example a mausoleum. Necropolis of the “Zhajyk” settlement Naturally, discovery and exploration of the “Zhajyk” settlement gave rise to a question about location and exploration of its necropolis. It is located on the top of Svistun Mountain in the form of a plateau. Necropolis is located on rising ground at a distance of 2 km. from the settlement. In the course of excavations two mausoleums were discovered; they were differentiated, conventionally, by their size as the greater and lesser one. Lesser mausoleum. The building was constructed virtually without laying the foundations. Its role was performed by two layers of brickwork. From the outside the mausoleum looks like rectangular room, measuring 9x12metres, topped with two domes. The southwest wall was designed as portal and was 2,25 meters thick, while all other walls were 1,75 meters thick. Thus, double-chambered “lesser” mausoleum was deliberately constructed for burying representative of aristocracy. It could be suggested that one of Genghis khan descendants, emir of the given ulus, lied in this tomb. During construction locally manufactured building and facing materials had been used. Greater mausoleum Double-chambered mausoleum, measuring 12, 80x19,40 meters was made up from square-shaped burnt bricks and decorated with polychromatic glazed tiles. The mausoleum itself consists of two main rooms, the first one (ziarathana) was square shaped, measuring 4,60x4,45 meters. The second room (gurhana) served as tomb itself, measuring 8,70x8,70 meters. In gurhana eleven burials were excavated, among them five were those of children. Main types of burials are those in ground pits, vaults and coffins.

The vault had bricks-made arch covering. Unfortunately, the majority of burials had been plundered. Only some details of mortuary gifts, such as the vault made from burnt bricks, coffin remains and fasteners, and shoe leather have been preserved. Golden earrings were found in a female burial. Coins as witnesses of Zhajyk dating. An interesting and truthful confirmation of Zhajyk dating is presented by numismatic material. Over the entire course of excavations three coins were discovered; two copper coins were found in 2002 and one silver coin was discovered in 2009. In the 2009 field season the coins dated to Uzbek khan rule were discovered; their mintage was performed in the second quarter of the 14th century. The date of mintage is represented by numbers, i.e. 737 A.H. (i.e.1336-1337). A silver coin was discovered inside a burial mound located in southeastern part of the necropolis. The coin is very rare for our region, as it is Khan Muhammad’s mintage. The coin was minted in 1370’s either in Kungur or Horde. Thus, discovered coins make it possible determine exact period of Zhajyk settlement’s existence as the middle of the 14th century. Moreover, as the city cannot emerge at once and has periods of formation and decay, we can make a suggestion that the period marked on coins is the period of the given city’s

prosperity. Therefore, such chronological frames as 13th-15th centuries are near the mark. Zhajyk as a historical precursor of Yaitsk town Uralsk It is most likely that favorable conditions facilitated emergence and growth of settlements and towns of the Golden Horde period both on the Volga and Dniester, and on the shores of the Ural River. The under-study settlement “Zhajyk”, a historical precursor of Yaitsk town Uralsk may serve as an example. The entire complex of artifacts, including ceramic material, memorial building of the necropolis, homesteads and public buildings of the settlement, as well as coins, give grounds for dating the town existence to 13th-15th centuries. Due to objective reasons, change of a town or big settlement’s location within the borders of a definite historical region was a typical occurrence in history of Middle Asian cities. It is quite probable that migration from Zhajyk settlement was called forth by natural and geographic factor. At some stage this locality could fail to satisfy citizens, and they decided to relocate the settlement to some more favorable place. It is to be noted that during excavations of living suite no signs of damage or fire, i.e. anything that could be interpreted as aftermath of tragic events, were recorded. Absence of the city’s traces can be explained by rapacious plunder of cities by Cossacks and criminals after break-up of the Golden Horde Local population became the main ethnic component of the process of urban population’s formation.

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