

# Archaeological Survey of "GANZAG": Beautiful Ancient Village in Ardabil, Iran

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**Abstract**—The GANZAG village an area of SAREYN district from Ardabil city, with geographical coordinates 48° and 8 min eastern longitude and 38° and 9 min northern latitude, is 3 km away from SAREYN present city. At present there are two types of old and new habitation models in rural areas. The old habitation model of this area includes historical cemetery and connected rock tombs and hills which the areas on – the ground evidence indicates the pre – Islam habitation. During Islamic periods, a brick – shaped and stratified house of the precedent period had been built on the old yards surface and it had been used as a living place which was destroyed by 1375 A.H earthquake and today this yard is obsolete and tombs have been buried a large number of debris.

All data from Ethnographic studies and archeological conclusions and various factors indicate that the most natural interpretation about this ruin is that this is remaining from a house of worship (a Mitraian temple) which had been a response to the man's emotional, meaningful needs, native traditions and some religious belief and basically such a collections has been designed for this and they had worked in this direction. This hypothesis is also reasonable that at least a part of performances and different communications– religious, symbolic, political, army – of these structures had been remained when Islam was advanced. Probably it has been used in middle – Islam centuries for various applications such as taking great pains (چله نشینی). Although Islamic period the worship role of this place had been in priority, but it is likely that that these tombs could be used as hiding place or temporary habitation place, that they had stopped there a short while migrating from one region to the other, or they had also been applied by shepherds to use pastures during a special season of the year.

**Keywords**—Ardabil, Village, GANZAG, SAREYN, Houses, Islamic era

## Introduction:

From the ancient period this area has been a residential place for people whose remains show their lives, and resident ways. The antiquity and historical

precedents of this area are appeared in works and objects obtained during various archaeological excavations and the industry and art reflected in these works shows that historical events have a great influence on the technology and art works. The availability of abundant water and springs in this area recall. The linkage between water and villages and integration of special architecture with water symbolize purity, life and emergence. According to the history, the area of Ardabil has been one of the oldest habitats and a place to great historical happening of Iran. The abundance and variety of the discovered objects and countless works of material culture, yards, and ancient habitats clearly denote the areas ancient greatness.

The old urban and rural habitats in this area preserved their identities both in migration development period and in middle ages and also in contemporary period. From researches on Ardabil human habitats from fifth century to about 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> A.D centuries, it is inferred that the texture of the old mountainous habitats in this terrain has been irregular and indisposed, but occasionally the earth's topography has given them a regular shape. Most buildings are a square – shaped and roofs are flat. Because of the livestock breeding in winter, the house and stable are wider relatively. The building is a combination of different parts and in a combined form. Often the stable is located below the living room. As in this mode some heat of the stable is transmitted to the living room and also the stable safety increased. In most buildings, departments or houses are not the same despite their similarities and their differences is in the grounds position or its size. Sometimes the ground shapes and sometimes its slope and unevenness are different. The architecture of these kinds of building is in a way which matches itself to these conditions easily. The flexibility is not just in forms and shapes, but it appears in the way of space combinations, in size, geometry and. sometimes the houses are separated and sometimes they are close to each other. The size of the spaces is proportionate to the human dimensions.

## Geographical location:

GANZAG, a village in SAREYN in Ardabil, with geographic coordinate of 48 degree and 8 minutes of east and 38 degree and 9 minutes of latitude is located there kilometers from the current city of

SAREYN (Figure. 1). This this village is limited to the lands of ERDIMOSA from north, the historical village of KALKHORAN from south, to the village AGBALE from east and to the SAREYN from west. It's altitude in 1550 m. there are two kinds of old and modern settlement patterns [1].

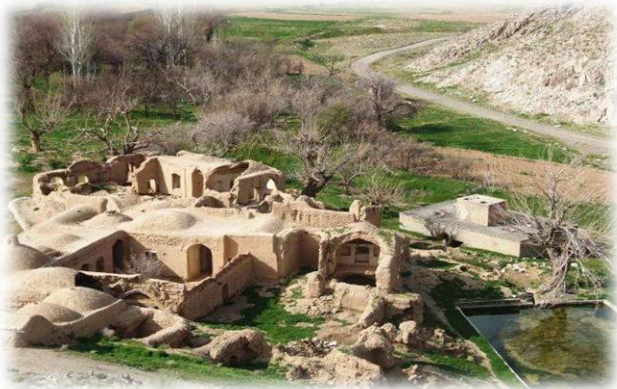


Figure 1: The village habitat of GANZAG, General outlook.

#### Describe location:

The mountainous village of GANZAG is located near one of the beautiful valleys of mount SABALAN with a dense context. Its overall context has a regular design and checked pattern. The underground crypts, with different dimensions and heterogeneous establishment, are considered as the main feature of the village. Some of the have cylindrical, circle or non-geometric and sky lights, in these rocky houses, there have been embedded shelves with arcuate or carved arch's (Figure. 2).



Figure 2: The village habitat of GANZAG, Rocky crypts.

You can observe some similar samples in traditional context of MAYMAND village in KERMAN.

The old pattern of life in this area includes the historical cemetery, hill and rocky interconnected crypts that the surface subterranean evident show the pre-Islamic settlement in Islamic era there has been built clay-walled and sun-dried bricked houses of the later period on the old areas which were used as a living places [1]. These houses were destructed in 1996 earthquake and currently this abandoned (dislocated) area and the crypts have disappeared under a pile of rubble (Figure. 3).



Figure 3: The village habitat of GANZAG, old houses (Destroyed in the earthquake of 1375).

The spaces carved in different forms in steep hills in form of crypts or underground houses are sedimentary rocks or compacted sand.

#### Settlement pattern and subsistence economy of the old resident of this habitat:

The habitat is built around water resources and springs. Subterranean Canal and etc. had formed the core of the village. Factors such as defense issues had no main role in forming it, the people were mainly farmers. According to common rules, the main seat of the village is on the steep and rocky slopes beginning from the valley. These steps are rather flat and the houses are built on them divided by short clay walls.

The central part of the village being near to the water resources like springs and subterranean canal was assigned to alfalfa and cereal cultivation. These land were plowed, then making them smooth, people removed the stones and mourned them regularly. Going off the central parts, the form of the lands changes to rectangles, they are irrigated by rain water only. They also let their lands lie fallow [1].

When the cattle pass on them they are manured. In areas that rain fed agriculture is common, there is no crop rotation, but in areas under centralized agriculture there had been crop rotation. The houses are built based on the rural family's needs and the living rooms are so formed and established that there is heterogenic in their details of dimensions and interior logic. This suggests that there was no common design and order and order and the result was using the spaces in a quite free manner. Never theless, the findings show that these old houses. Together have made a pleasant texture and their combination per se shows an increasing confidence in placing the buildings near each other to reach (archive) a relative coordination and symmetry, yet the land's topography has given a regular form and configuration to the old texture.

As the village was on a number of hills, its landscape was more open than valley villages, and most of the houses were rectangular and muddy with a flat roof, because of keeping the cattle during the winter, the houses, accessories such as the yard, store and stalls were rather large. The house was a combination of different parts with folds in between the living room or in the corner of a large yard. Some of the houses have large yards and small rooms. Some have small yards and big rooms, as can be deduced from the sizes and hierarchies.

As compared with the crowded homes, some of the houses were big despite of few people living in it. Some archaeological findings and ethnographical data, although with reservation, may provide a convincing explanation to this fact that erosion caused by wind, rain and flood, or other natural and cultural variables had led to destruction and physical transformation of this ancient habitat, extensive use of natural resources and agricultural potentials have caused agriculture and animal husbandry to be an inevitable subsistence economy in different areas of this place.

The reflection of social-political complexity from initial cultural dynamisms can be observed in architecture of some eras of this ancient place. Data analysis, the evidences and geographical condition of this valley, especially the amount of remaining architectural, shows that in spite of the evidence indicating the process of social complexity, this place has been the sample of the permanent settlement pattern and a small village which the house have been built around the larger units that can be the homes of the chief or a local khan.

#### **Analyzing the function of interconnected rocky crypts:**

All the data from ethnographical studies, archaeological inferences and different factors imply that the most common interpretation from these ruins is to consider it. As a remaining from the temple (a mithrayi temple or polytheism) which was a response to emotional needs, human semantics, native traditions and some of the religious ideas and beliefs,

and in fact some of buildings of this kind were designed and acted for this purpose.

The fact is that Iranian temples beside the natural springs and at the middle of districts built beside trees and canals document the spiritual presence of water in Iranian's lives [2]. The temple of ANAHITA, where water was worshiped, is the most extra ordinary building that human has ever built related to water. There was many works in Iranian architecture and other nations, inspired by water, but in all of them there is a functional aspect combined with other meanings. Water storing is an element for sign, Saqakhaneh for holiness, pool for beauty, and so on, but the temple of Anahita is the allocated 'place' to understand the meaning of water. All the spiritual dimensions of water worshiped there. This act human, building a place to worship the meaning of water he knows can be considered as the root of all the architecture for water. The essence of water architecture is emerged from the temple of Anahita. The prototype and the typified incarnation of the meaning of water is the temple of Anahita. This fact suggests the possibility that the rocky crypts of GANZAG have been built near the hot and cold springs of SABALAN hillside as a response to the religious needs and as an appropriate means to confirm allegiance to the beliefs it goes without saying that its simplicity is emphasized and its vast and empty surprises the visitors and reminds them that the routine work is left behind.

Although there is not enough archaeological evidence and none of the crypts of GANZAG has kept its original from this hypothesis seems logical that at least some of the functions and different connection if this place-religious, symbolic, political and military have been kept at the emergence of Islam and probably it was used for different purposes such as in Islamic middle centuries. Although in Islamic era the religious function of this place was emphasized, it is probable that these crypt were used as hideouts, gathering places, temporary settlement used during migration and a place, for shepherds when they used grass lands in certain seasons. The spaces and the elements are bent and sharp this is most likely due to influence from Ashkanid tradition. Although Mithraism was common much earlier than zoroastrian, the cultural and historical attachment of these works to pre-Ashkanid era is doubted. The result show that the feature of rock architecture until achemenian era was flat surface and direct without curves both in threshold and in roof coverings so, the arch and domed roofs and extensive use of it in this place is certain evidence that it belongs to Ashkanid era. A reason for change in form of architecture elements from flat to curved can be progresses in architecture, especially Iranians, progress in creating domed roofs using more common materials without the need to wood and also because of its durability, this change can be seen from part era [3] it should be hooted that the process of giving meaning to nature is as old as mankind during this period, humans in different parts of the world and

according to their hysterical conditions have given meaning and importance to the elements of the nature. Among historical components shaping human's mind, religion and dependent forms of it such as myth and tradition had the main role. Although the environmental conditions that depend on geographical location is considered the first identifying factor and forming human mind, the evolution of religious concepts during human life and the events determine it.

The understanding of human beings from environmental phenomenon like water was initially a response to satisfy his (vital) needs. Life depends on water. This minimum meaning of water has been evolved during human life. The water we use today is the result of hundreds of years of human civilization and history.

Iranians beliefs have created more complete manifestations about water. As sacred and an epitome of goodness, water is a main part in Iranian architecture. Placing pools and water fronts in fronts of facades or in the middle of the yard of many of Iranians, buildings such as mosques, schools, houses and caravans is a unique phenomenon. In this century, the west has reached a kind of architecture combined white water, that is named 'architecture front-water' this style have penetrated to urban areas and it is going to changes into a permanent style in public spaces designs in modern cities. While the history of architectural and European city planning shows no sign of water, we can find many samples in architecture and cities that show the presence of water and the nature as a long lasting tradition which has been confirmed in Islamic era as well.

Nevertheless, the ancient Persian word an-Ahita, that became Anahid in middle Persian and Nahid in modern Persian consists of the negative prefix an meaning 'not' and the Avestan word Anahita, meaning 'dirty' that means not dirty (clean and innocent) [4]. In addition to Anahita, which the fifth yacht is assigned to her worship, there is god in Iran's myth named Apam nepat (bon from water) that has been mentioned as the guard of water [5].

From what was said and according to climate, the amount of water resources and a unique location, and also some sporadic archeological evident about this place we can argue that:

1- In pre-Islamic era, the mentioned crypts were to some extent mythic and combined with religious associations, and had a specific application (usage) in worship ceremonies. They were a sign of gradual crystallization of the resident's tendency to find a suitable place for their religion and hence we can certainly assume that these places were used in religious architecture.

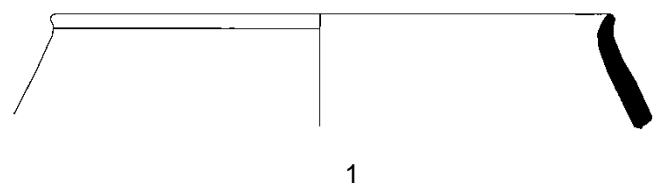
2- In Islamic Middle Ages they were used as a place to pass the Chelleh in performing the ceremony of seclusion, Tabattol (absolute break up, break up from worldly affairs and join God), a den to concentrate the power of mind, eliminate greed,

spiritual growth or approaching God and legal austerities. In addition or religious usage of the residents, the remaining sporadic archaeological evident associates the fact that in addition to the mentioned applications (usages), the interconnected crypts of GANZAG were sometimes used as a temporary place for resident farmers and immigrant ranchers, a shelter for local residents in military conflicts and conflicts on land take overs or pastures between immigrants and local people, and also a store for looted commodities of commercial caravans. Even assumes to accept what was said, it seems more correct to say that we can't conclude without new documents.

#### Ceramic:

Ceramic as the most significant data in archaeological studies has the maximum frequency among ancient remains of this area. In all levels and ranges of the hill and also in surrounding low – lying lands, the ceramic pieces are seen of which %21 are man – made and %79 are wheel wright. The ceramic are covered by dilute and thick muddy mucilage. The batching process of the ceramic is adequate and it can be acknowledged that due to the change in clay nature without forming a special tissue, have tolerated a temperature around 900c°. Furnaces in which this kind of ceramic had been baked had more suitable capabilities in controlling temperature and oxidation rete; moreover, the time duration to bake the ceramic had been higher so as the heat had been transmitted to the different surfaces of ceramic constantly and carbon resulted from organic material combustion inside the ceramics had been exited well and this didn't cause the ceramic centers burning.

These ceramic types include harsh, narrow and normal. Regarding the different sections from (%70), edge (%28) and floor (%2), these ceramic shapes is mainly: bowl, plate, small jugs, and rarely ceramic in large dimensions such as vat. Simple and ordinary ceramic (%95) have the highest rate of dispersion in superficial data. The carved pieces (%5) are existed in samples including ceramics with rail and bereaved dugs. The areas ceramics are in buff (internal wall %67 – external wall %67), red (internal wall %20 – external wall %18), black (internal wall %8 – external wall %8), cream (internal wall %5 – external %5) and orange (internal wall %0 – external wall %2) which are polished by muddy mucilage and the viscous substance of the studied sample are mainly include mineral, fine sand and plant materials (Figure. 4-10).



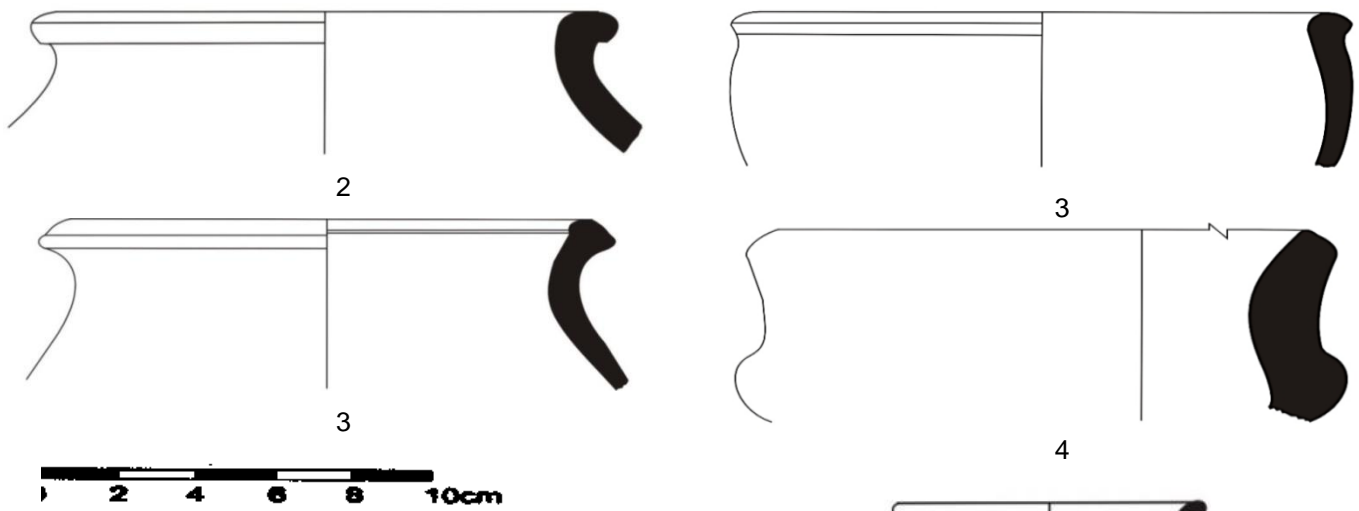


Figure 4. Rural settlements GANZAG: 1-3. Crock pieces ceramic with volume and high capacity [1].

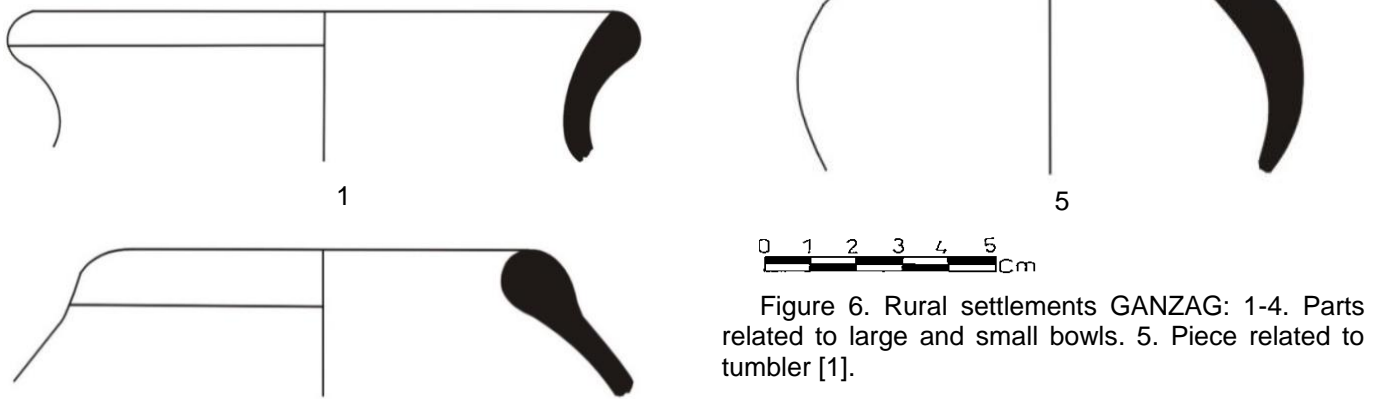


Figure 6. Rural settlements GANZAG: 1-4. Parts related to large and small bowls. 5. Piece related to tumbler [1].

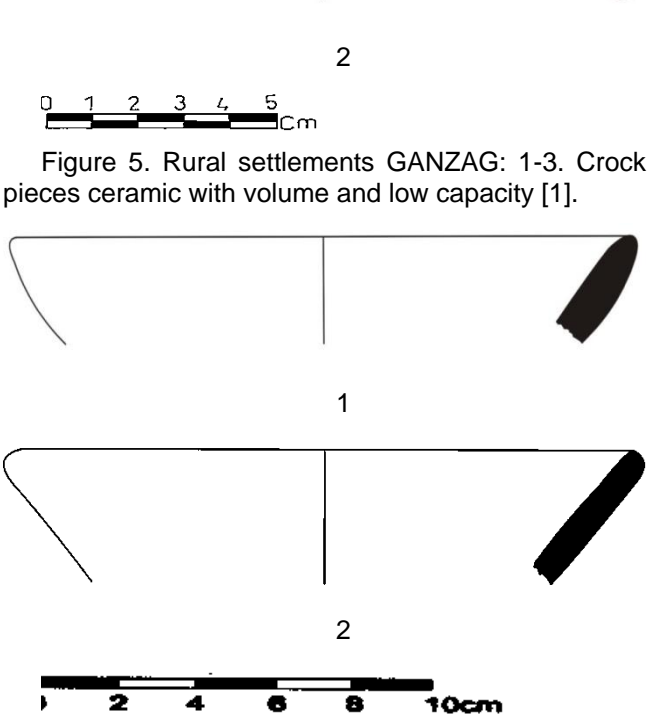


Figure 5. Rural settlements GANZAG: 1-3. Crock pieces ceramic with volume and low capacity [1].

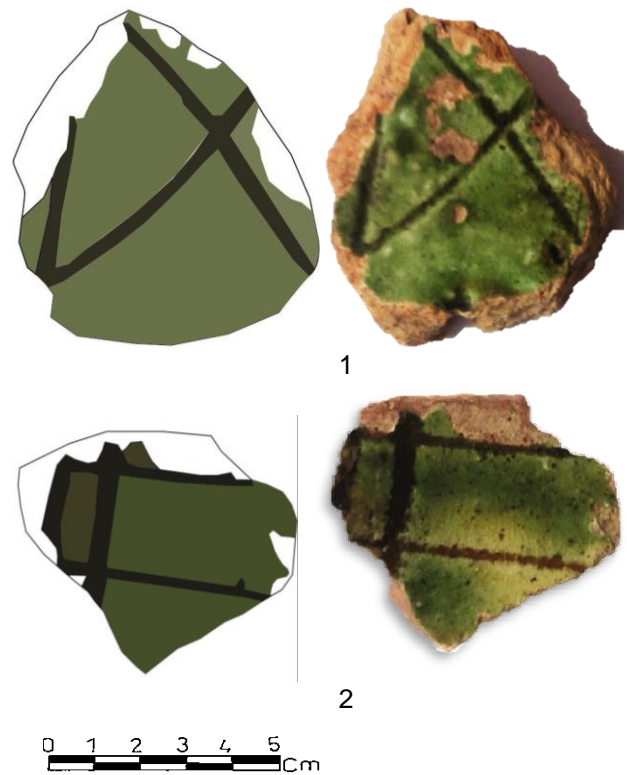


Figure 7. Rural settlements GANZAG: 1-2. Parts related to bowl or plate, samples ceramics with the carving technique in geläbe famous to sgraffit (Gross

type). Belonging to the se (5th and 6th centuries Ah) [1].

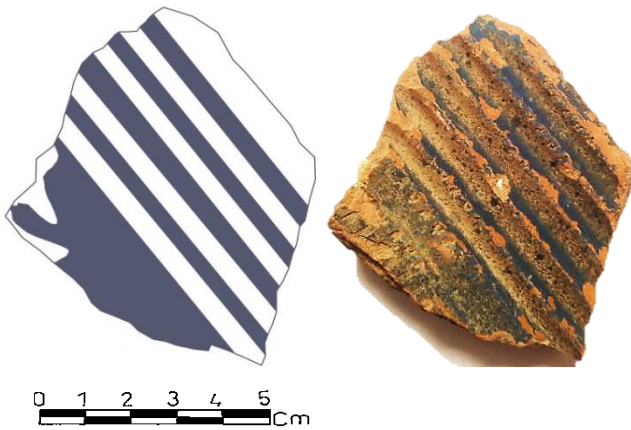


Figure 8. Illustrated ceramics with the carving technipue. Belonging to the Seljuk period (5th and 6th centuries Ah) [1].



Figure 9. Illustrated ceramics with the carving technique under glaze sprinkled. Belonging to the Seljuk period (5th and 6th centuries Ah) [1].

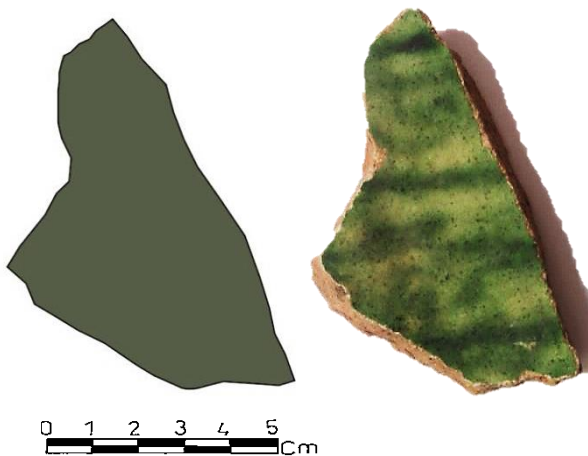


Figure 10. Illustrated ceramics with the glaze sprinkled. Belonging to the Seljuk period (5th and 6th centuries Ah) [1].

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