

SALMÂS

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Abstract: The remains discovered in 'Goltappeh' hill in the Iranian city of Salmas in West Azarbaijan, gives evidence to the fact that the area identified the city as being inhabited ever since the seventh millennium BCE

It is believed that the town of Salmas has been in existence from the third millennium BCE under the rule of the Assyrian King Salmasar III. Furthermore, according to historical accounts the town was known as 'Zarvand' during the Achaemenian Empire.

The famous 'Haftevan Church' is located in this region, where also the first school using modern methods in Iran was established by Saidkhan Salmasi. The tribal citizens of the region comprise of Kurdish, Turkish as well as Armenian descents.

The city of Salmas consists of 150 villages and seven districts and moreover it is well-known as a major producer of fresh and dried apricots in Iran.

Located in northwestern Iran, consisting of cultivating plains and mountainous areas, the historic central town of Salmas is an ancient region, being supplied by the rich waters of the Zolachai River.

The antiquated remains found in the Salmas region serve as a witness to the settlement of people in the area in the ancient past.

According to ancient tales, Salmas was initially established in the third millennium BCE and under the rule of the Assyrian King Shalmasar III. It was primarily used as a fort against attacks by tribes associated and united with the Babylonians. With the passage of time the castle gradually was developed into a town and the name was eventually shortened from Salmasar to Salmas because of its ease of pronunciation.

According to the artifacts found in the vicinity, Salmas had been a civilization and an inhabited region even before the Assyrian times, dating back to circa the seventh millennium BCE.

Around 1000 BCE, the migrated Aryan tribes settled in the area, and later became part of their first Iranian dynastic empire, the Medians. Since then is being occupied by Iranian peoples. Under the Median and Achaemenid dynasties, the city was known as 'Zarvand'.

In his travel accounts, Al-Moqaddasi has praised the city for its bazaars as well as its stone mosque. On the other hand, Yaqoob Hamouri in his account of Salmas, described it as a ruin of a city, at a later stage.

Hamdollah Mostowfi noted that the town's surrounding ramparts were improved under the rule of Ghazan Khan. In a book titled "Nezhat al-Qolub", Mostowfi wrote:

"Salmas is of the 'Fourth Domain'. Its length is extended from the 'Khaledat islands' or 'Khat-e Yad' and its width from the equator or 'Lozm'. It is a large city with damaged ramparts. The city was built by the order of a senior minister of King Khajeh Alishah-Tabrizi. "Salmas's circumference is 8,000 feet and its climate is rather cool.

Its water source comes from Mount Audiye of Kurdistan province and flows into Baheereh Urmia Lake. In the 10th century, all its habitants were Kurds. In 1900 A.D., it had 108 villages and at least 50,000 residents. Some parts of the

region were inhabited and settled by Christians only.

In an area close to today's Salmas, on top of a hill called Zanjir-Qaleh or Chain's Castle, there is an ancient building found by 'Kad Porter' which contain some stone tablets dating back to the Sassanid dynasty. On these tablets called "Ozdani" by the local people, shaped on stones are portraits of Sassanid Kings Ardeshir and Shahpur riding on their horses while Armenian rulers are kneeling down in front of them.

Apart from the said tablets, other interesting artifacts are also in Gurchin-Qaleh or Gurchin Castle. Near a village known as Tazehshahr there is a brick-made tower known as the Miri-Khatun (daughter of Arghanun-Agha) where an ancient dated tablet moreover exists. Salmas's Haftevan village, in ancient times had been the capital of Persian and Azari-Armenian pontiffs.

In Goltappeh hill near Salmas, one of the oldest proofs of human mass settlement and inhabitancy in the world has been discovered. What is notable about the collection of findings in this region, is that, surprisingly, this so-called 'permanent village' dates back to the seventh millennium BCE.

Flakes and cuts on Absidani mother stones discovered in this region indicate that this advanced village at ancient times had been an important center for producing tools such as knives, razors and some other cutting instruments in the Urmia Lake region. Finds such as stone dishes and various other stone tools and items, indicates that a lot of agricultural activities took place in this community as regards securing foodstuffs for the residents.

Dark-grey earthenwares with illustrations on them as well as other baked clay found in this region, match those of the same kind found in Nakhichevan which dates back to the Bronze Age in 2900 BCE. In addition, the evidence found in the upper layers of the Goltappeh hill provides evidence concerning the development in this area from three cultural eras from the 6th millennium BCE, the 5th millennium BCE and the 4th millennium BCE respectively as old as the Haj Firouz and Dalama civilizations in the Selduz Naqadeh region and the ancient Bronze Age in Nakhichevan Republic.

Even though this hill is of great cultural values, no considerable research has up to this time been done on any of the culturally and historically precious layers of the hill, and so far very little is known about the longevity of these layers. Another noteworthy point about this region is that large pieces of Absidani [abseiled] stones weighing up to 5 kilograms have been found there.

Shah Abbas the Great of the Safavid Empire fought a war with the Ottoman Empire, and history has shown that the Russian and Ottoman wars as well as other crises of post-World War I, damaged Salmas considerably. Also, the founder of the Qajar dynasty, Agha Mohammad Khan after the liberation of Armenia from Russian and Ottoman occupations, entered Salmas and stayed there for a while.

During the reign of Shah Abbas the Great, Salmas experienced both peace as well as development for a considerable period. The shah with his special political skills moved the exodus Armenians to the city as well as its surrounding villages and moreover settled the disputes which existed between them. He even ordered the Haftevan Church's restoration and additionally placed it under the care of the Armenian authorities.

Salmas lost its significance during the Qajar dynasty and a village close by named Dilmaqan was paid more attention to and was developed to some extent. However, unfortunately during a massive earthquake in 1930 both Salmas and Dilmaqan were totally ruined and destroyed and as an effect more than 4,000 people lost their lives.



Relief of Shapur I from Salmas
(Click to enlarge)

The first school using modern methods in Iran was established by Saidkhan Salmasi in Salmas, which was a catalyst to the establishment of similar modern schools in other parts of the country.

Heidarkhan Amoghli, the well-known figure during Iran's Constitutional Movement, and Mirza Aminolsultan, Mozafareddin Shah's (Qajar Dynasty) Prime Minister, were both from Salmas.

Currently, Salmas has seven districts and 150 villages with an average population density of 30 persons per square kilometer. Its economy is mainly based on agricultural products as well as livestock breeding.

The city's agricultural products are primarily wheat, barley, tobacco, oily seeds and beet. Livestock breeding plays a major economic role in this city's economic livelihood and at the present time apart from its leather making industry the city of Salmas has three large factories which produce and export dairy products.

Salmas is a major producer of apricots in the country and its dried apricot producing factories of Khosrow-Abad, Haftevan, Soureh, Khanekah and Tazehshahr form one of the main sources of dried apricots in Iran. The dried apricots produced in these factories are exported to Germany and Russia on an annual basis.

The city also has quarries of marble, tile, manganese and Tankal [borax], which is a substance used as a welding material in the goldsmith trade as well as in tin manufacturing and its chemical identification is "Borat 2 Sodium".

It should also be mentioned that Salmas has a healthy handicraft industry such as in handwoven gloves and kelims, which consequently has a positive impact on the economy of the rural households of the region.

source:

<http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Geography/salmas.htm>