



## ŠAHRESTĀN YAZDEGERD

**ŠAHRESTĀN YAZDEGERD**, the Sasanian city-fortress built by [Yazdegerd II](#) (r. 439-57 CE) in the province of Čol, attested by the 6th-century Syrian chronicle of [Karkā Bēt Selōk](#) (present-day Kirkuk) of the district of [Bēt Garmē](#) in northeastern Iraq (Hoffmann, p. 50; Pigulevskaia, p. 44). The chronicle relates that after the eighth year of his reign, Yazdegerd II went to campaign in Čol where he subjugated the local kings and built his city, Šahrestān Yazdegerd. Some scholars located the city on the eastern coast of the [Caspian Sea](#), to the north of the province [Gorgān](#) and the [Atrak](#) river (Marquart, 1901, p. 56; 1931, p. 57; Pigulevskaia, p. 44; Christensen, p. 287; Gubaev, p. 78; Kolesnikov, p. 97; Masson, p. 141). According to the [Šahrēstānīhā ī Ērānšahr](#), [Yazdegerd I](#) (r. 399-420 CE) strengthened the province [Kūmīs/Kōmiš](#) (Ar. Qūmes, modern [Dāmḡān](#)) in the northeastern part of Iran against the invasion of the Turkic tribe Čol (Marquart, 1931, p. 12), and this appears to be the reason for its location. The Turkic ethnic name was incorrectly compared with the name of the province Čol which has an Iranian origin (cf. Yagnobi *čol* ‘narrow gorge, pass’; Khromov, p. 134). But B. I. Marshak (pp. 58-59) and M. Gadjiev (1980, pp. 144-52; 2001, pp. 32-40) located the city on the western coast of the Caspian Sea where the province Čol/Čor was known.

The name Čol/Čor was used by early Armenian authors ([Agathangelos](#), [Movsēs Xorenac'i](#), [Elišē](#), [Łazar P'arpec'i](#), [Anania Širakac'i](#), [Movsēs Dasxuranc'i](#), [Sebeos](#)) for the designation of the [Darband](#) pass, Darband, and the fortifications in the pass – *kapank' Čoray* “pass/defile of Čor,” *durn Čoray* “gate of Čor,” *drunk' Čoray* “gates/fortress of Čor,” *pahak Čoray* “garrison/the sentry of Čor,”



*khalakh pahakin Čoray* “city of the garrison of Čor” (see Kettenhofen, pp. 13-14). This Armenian name is echoed in the Τζούρ/Tzour documented by [Procopius](#) of Caesarea as the name of the pass (*De bello Gothico*, 4.8.3-4); the gate of Ṭūrāyē in the *Chronicle* of [Michael the Syrian](#) (*Chron.*, ); the fortress Zōarou (Ζουάρου πύργου, gen. sing) in the Greek rendering of Čoray by [Agathangelos](#) (p. 116; cf. Lafontaine, 1973, pp. 178-79); Čor in the Georgian *Life of Saint Shushanik* of Yacob Tsurtaveli (p. 6, 9-10; Lang, pp. 44-56); and Arabic Šūl as the name of the gate (*bāb*; Ebn Kordādbeh, tr., p. 109; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 895-96), province (*nāḥiya*, *tagr*), country (*bilād*; Ṭabarī, I, pp. 895-96; Shikhsaidov, pp. 69-70), fortress (*kal'a Šūl* in *Ta'riḳ Bāb al-abwāb*, Minorsky, 1963, pp. 10, 52), and city (*madīnat Šūl* in *Darband-nāma* apud Saidov and Shikhsaidov, p. 26).

N. Kuznetsov (1893, p. 423) and [J. Marquart](#) (1901, pp. 96-100; 1903, p. 489) were the first who pointed out the connection between toponym Čol/Čor and Darband and Darband pass. This ancient name in forms such as Čulli / Čurul / Čor till recent times was kept in the Daghestan ([Dāgestān](#)) languages for the designation of Darband (Kuznetsov, p. 423; Kudriavtsev, 1979, p. 39; Gadjiev, 1980, p. 147). In accordance with the location of Čol/Čor in the area of Darband pass, Šahrestan Yazdegerd is identified as the large fortified settlement situated 20 km to the south from Darband, at northern suburb of modern settlement Beliji and known as Torpakh-kala (Turk. “Earth fortress”) and *Shehergah* (Pers. Šahrgāh, “Place of the city”) (Gadjiev, 1980, pp. 144-52; 2001, pp. 32-40; Gadjiev and Magomedov, pp. 276-77, 281-85; [Figure 1](#)).

The archeological monument was first mentioned by John Cook (I, p. 375; vol. II, pp. 363, 364) and Johann Lerche (pp. 304-305) who traveled to the coast of Daghestan in 1747 as members of Russian prince Golitsyn’s mission to Persia. Both authors report similar accounts according to which the site of the settlement appears as ancient “royal residence.” Obviously, this is the residence mentioned by Movsēs Dasxuranc’i in the 7th century in the story about bishop Israyēl’s mission, directed by the prince of [Albania](#) Varaz-Trdat in winter of 681-82, to Alp ʾlut’uēr, prince of the [Huns](#): short of the gate of Čor and Darband the mission arrived “at the site of the ancient royal residence where St. Grigoris, Catholicos of Albania and grandson of the great Gregory were martyred” (Dasxuranc’i, tr., pp. 154-55). Not far away from the site of the ancient settlement Torpakh-kala, in the village of Nyugdi, at the place of St. Grigoris’ martyrdom, there is an Armenian chapel named after him, which as early as the end of the 19th-beginning of the 20th century, was the preeminent



Christian shrine of the eastern Caucasus (Komarov, pp. 438-39; Gadjiev, 2001, p. 32).

The site of the ancient settlement is trapezoidal in shape and occupies an area of more than 100 hectares (Figure 2). The length of its swells is from 950 m to 1150 m, with a height of 7 to 8 m and a width of 30 to 39 m (Figure 3), and the total length of the swells comes to 4400 m. On the external side they have 144 semicircular ledges located every 28 to 30 m and fixing tower sites. In each swell there are breaks indicating, in some cases, that city gates flanked with towers were in these places. On the perimeter the settlement was protected with a now shallow moat 20 to 25 m wide. Archeological excavations showed that the massif of the swell represents the rests of the defensive wall built entirely of adobe bricks (40 x 43 x 10 to 12 cm). The wall is 10.2 m thick and now reaches 6 m in height. The shape of the excavated tower was semi-oval; its length makes 16-17 m, and the projection out of the line of the defensive wall is about 7.5 m (Gadjiev and Magomedov, 2008, pp. 282-83).

The construction features of the Torpakh-kala fortifications have the nearest chronological and ethno-cultural analogues in the adobe brick fortifications of Darband, built in the 440s under Yazdegerd II (Kudriavtsev, 1978, pp. 243-57; 1979, pp. 31-43; Gadjiev, 1989, pp. 61-76), and in the fortifications of the long Ghilghilchay (Ġilġičay/Gilgičay) wall, built under Kawād I at the beginning of the 6th century and identified with the Apzut Kawāt wall (Aliev, Gadjiev, et al., 2006, pp. 143-77; Gadjiev, 2017). The ceramic assemblage of the settlement, representing almost exclusively the so-called Sasanian pottery, as well as building materials and engineering features allow us to trace the construction of Torpakh-kala back to the 5th century CE. The date of this monument, its ethno-cultural context, its location within the Darband pass (the ancient province Čol/Čor), and also the analysis of the military-political situation in the region confirm its identification with the Sasanian royal city Šahrestan Yazdegerd (Gadjiev, 2011, pp. 239-64).

The construction of fortifications in the province of Čol/Čor (Darband pass) under the reign of Yazdegerd II marked the first stage of Sasanian fortification and city construction in the Caucasus (Gadjiev, 2006, pp. 25-27). It was caused by the military activity of the Huns and the preparations of Attila for the new invasion into the frontier of Ērānšahr (Priscus Panites, *Fragmenta* 8, p. 312). In 442, the Sasanians and Byzantines signed the long-term peace treaty which confirmed the obligation of Byzantium to make annual payment of consignments of gold to Iran for the protection of Caucasian passes (Darband



and Dar-e Alan, modern Darial) in the volumes stipulated by the agreement of 424 (see Marcellinus Comes, p. 75; [Byzantine-Iranian Relations](#)). That, obviously, made 500 litres (160 kg) of gold annually (Theophanes Chronographia, 207, 18-26). The sums were not only spent on the maintenance of garrisons, but also went to the creation of the echelon system of defense in the East Caucasus – building the adobe long wall and fortress in Darband pass and Šahrestan Yazdegerd (Torpakh-kala fortified settlement).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Agathangelos, *Patmut'iwn Hayots'*, tr. V. Langlois as “Histoire de règne de Tiridate et de la prédication de saint Grégoire l'Illuminateur,” in idem, ed. and tr. *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie*, Paris, 2 vols., 1868-69, I, pp. 105-94.

A. A. Aliev et al., “The Gilgilchay Long Defensive Wall: New Investigations,” *Ancient East and West* 5/1-2, 2006, pp. 143-77.

Movsēs Dasxuranc'i, *Patmut'iwn Aluaniç*, tr. C. J. F. Dowsett as *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, London, 1961.

A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen, 1944.

J. Cook, *Voyages and Travels through the Russian Empire, Tartary, and Part of the Kingdom of Persia*, ed. A. L. Fullerton, 2 vols., Newtonville, Mass., 1970 (based on Edinburgh, 1770).

Ebn Kordādbeh, *Ketāb al-masālek wa'l-mamālek*, tr. and comm. N. Velikhanova as *Kniga putei i stran* (Book of the routes and lands), Baku, 1986.

M. S. Gadjiev, “K voprosu o mestopolozhenii sasanidskogo goroda Shahrstan-i Yezdigerd” (On the location of the Sasanian city of Šahrestān Yazdegerd), in *Drevnie i srednevekovie arkeologicheskie pamiatniki Dagestana* (Ancient and medieval archaeological monuments of Dagestan), Makhachkala, 1980, pp. 144-52.

Idem, “Issledovania syr'tsovoy fortifikatsii tsitadeli Derbenta sasanidskogo



vremeni” (Investigations of the raw mud-brick fortification of Darband citadel of Sasanian period), in *Drevniaia i srednevekovaia arkhitektura Dagestana* (Ancient and medieval architecture of Daghestan), Makhachkala, 1989, pp. 61-76.

Idem, *Drevnii gorod Dagestana: Opit istoriko-topograficheskogo i sotsial’no-ekonomicheskogo analiza* (Ancient city of Daghestan: Experience of historical topographical and socio-economic analysis), Moscow, 2002.

Idem, “Gorodishche Torpakh-kala” (Torpakh-kala fortified settlement), in *Arkheologiia vostochnoevropeiskoi lesostepi. Vip. 15. Srednevekovie drevnosti evraziiskikh stepi* 15, Voronezh, 2001, pp. 32-40.

Idem, “Etapi gradostrinel’noi i fortifikatsionnoi deiatel’nosti Sasanidov na Vostochnom Kavkaze” (Stages of city-planning and fortification activity of the Sasanians in the Eastern Caucasus), in *Irano-Dagestanskii kul’turnie i istoricheskie sviazi: istoriya i perspektivi razvitiya* (Iran-Daghestan cultural and historical ties: history and development prospects), Makhachkala, 2006, pp. 24-38.

Idem, “Hunok és türkök támadásai és a Szaszanidák erdítési tevékenysége a Kelet-Kaukázusban” (Hunno-Turkic attacks and Sasanian fortification activity in the eastern Caucasus) in L. Marác and B. Obrusánszky, eds., *A Hunok öröksege (The Heritage of the Huns)*, Budapest, 2009, pp. 239-64.

Idem, “Apzut Kawāt Wall,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2017.

M.S. Gadjiev and R.G. Magomedov, “Torpakh-kala – Kuro-araxskoe poselenie i Sasanidskoe gorodishche v Iuzhnom Dagestane” (Torpakh-kala –Kuro-Araxes settlement and Sasanian fortified settlement in South Daghestan), in *Arhkeologia Kavkaza i Blizhnego Vostoka. Sbornik k 80-letiiu chlenakorrespondenta RAN, professora R.M. Minchaeva* (Archaeology of the Caucasus and the Near East. Collection dedicated to Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor R.M. Munchaev on the occasion of his 80th birthday), Moscow, 2008, pp. 276-97.

A. Gubaev, “Val Merz (k voprosu o severnoi granitse sasanidskogo gosudarstva)” (Rampart of Merz: On the question of the northern border of the Sasanian state), in *Izvestiia Akademii nauk Turkmenskoi SSR. Seria obschestvennikh nauk* 2, Ashkhabad, 1965, p. 75-8.



G. Hoffmann, *Auszüge aus syrischen Akten Persischer Märtyrer*, Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes 7/3, Leipzig, 1880.

E. Kettenhofen, "Darband," *EIr*, VII, pp. 13-19.

A. Khromov, "Novie materialy po leksike iazyka iagnobtsev" (New materials for the lexicon of the Yaghnohi language), in *Iranian Studies Presented to Kaj Barr on His Seventieth Birthday June 26, 1966*, Acta Orientalia 30, Copenhagen, 1966, pp. 129-35.

A.I. Kolesnikov, *Iran v nachale VII veka* (Iran in the beginning of the 7th century), *Palestinskii Sbornik* 22/85, Leningrad, 1970.

A.V. Komarov, "Peshchery i drevnie mogily v Dagestane" (Caves and ancient tombs in Daghestan), in *V Arkheologicheskii s'ezd. Trudy predvaritel'nyh komitetov*, Moscow, 1882, pp. 432-39.

A. A. Kudriavtsev, "O datirovke pervikh sasanidskikh ukrepleni v Derbente" (On the dating of the first Sasanian fortifications in Darband), *Sovetskaia arkheologiya* 3, 1978, pp. 243-58.

Idem, " 'Dlinnie steni' na Vostochnom Kavkaze," ("Long Walls" in the Eastern Caucasus), *Voprosi istorii* 11, 1979, p. 31-43.

N. Kuznetsov, "Derbent", in F. Brokgauz and I. A. Efron, eds., *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' XIX*, St. Petersburg, 1893, p. 423.

G. Lafontaine, *La version grecque ancienne du livre arménien d'Agathange*, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1973.

D. M. Lang, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints*, London, 1956, pp. 44-56.

Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, in T. Mommsen, ed., *Chronica Minora: saec. IV. V. VI. VII* (vol. II), Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Berlin, 1894.

J.J. Lerche, *Lebens- und Reise-Geschichte*, Halle, 1791.

Joseph Marquart (Markwart), *Ērānšahr nach der Geographie des Ps. Moses Xorenac'i*, Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, phil.-hist. KL. N.F. 3/2, Berlin, 1901.

Idem, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge: Ethnologische und*



*historisch-topograpische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840-940)*, Leipzig, 1903.

Idem, *A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ērānshahr: Pahlavi Text, Version and Commentary*, ed. Giuseppe Messina, Rome, 1931.

B. I. Marshak, “K voprosu o vostochnykh protivnikakh Irana v V v.” (To the question of Iran’s eastern adversaries in the 5th century), in *Strany i narody Vostoka* 10, 1971, pp. 58-66.

M. E. Masson, “Rasprostranenie monetnikh nakhodok chekana dinastii Sasanidov (224-651 gg.) na territorii sovetskikh respublik Srednei Azii” (Dissemination of the coinage of the Sasanian dynasty (224-651) on the territory of the Soviet republics of the Central Asia), in *Trudi Iuzno-Turkmenistanskoi arkheologicheskoi kompleksnoi ekspeditsii* 15, Ashkhabad, 1974, pp. 140-54.

V. F. Minorsky, *A History of Sharvān and Darband in the 10th-11th centuries*, Cambridge, 1958.

Idem, *Istoriya Shirvana i Derbenda X-XI vekov*, Moscow, 1963 (in Russian).

N. V. Pigulevskaia, *Siriŭskie istochniki po istorii narodov SSSR* (Syriac sources for the history of the people of the U.S.S.R.), Trudy Instituta Vostokovedeniya Akademii Nauk SSSR 41, Moscow and Leningrad, 1941.

*Priscus Panites, Fragmenta*, in Ludwig Dindorf, ed., *Historici Graeci minores* I, Leipzig, 1870, pp. 275-352.

Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, tr. and ed. H. B. Dewing, 6 vols., London and New York, 1914-40.

M. S. Saidov and A. R. Shikhsaidov, “*Derbend-name (k istorii izucheniya)*” (*Darband-nāma: On the history of research*)” in *Vostochnye istochniki po istorii Dagestana* (Eastern sources on the history of Dagestan), Makhachkala, 1980, pp. 5-64.

A.R. Shikhsaidov, “Kniga at-Tabari *Istoriia poslannikov i tsarey* o narodakh Severnogo Kavkaza,” (Al-Tabari’s book *History of Prophets and Kings* about the peoples of the North Caucasus), in G. F. Girs et al., eds., *Pamiatniki istorii i literatury Vostoka. Period feodalizma*, Moscow, 1986, pp. 66-87.



Moḥammad b. Jarir Tabari, *Ketāb ta'riḳ al-rosol wa'l-moluk*, ed. M.J. de Goeje et al. as *Annales quos scripsit...*, 3 series in 15 vols., Leiden, 1879-1901.

Theophanes, *Theophanis Chronographia* I, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 43, ed. by J. Classen, Bonn, 1839.

Tsurtaveli, *Muchenichestvo Shushaniki* (The Martyrdom of Shushanik), tr. K. Kekelidze, in K. Lordkipanidze and S. Chikovani, eds., *Gruzinskaia proza V – pervoi poloviny XIX veka* I (Georgian prose of the 5th- 1st half of the 19th century I), Tbilisi, 1955, pp. 3-13.