

Text: Zamina RASULOVA
Photos: by Sergey KIVRIN,
Asif MUSTAFAZADE



FAZIL VILLAGE
AND TEPEBASHI
NECROPOLIS



In addition to historical and architectural monuments of various periods, the territory of Sheki district, one of the ancient settlements of Azerbaijan, is also distinguished by its uniqueness, as well as multiple samples of archaeological. There is a world-class archaeological monument registered by the state in the district and about twenty local archaeological sites. Three of the registered archaeological sites, the Yonjali and Soyudler necropolises, the Tepebashi necropolis and the settlement located in the Fazil village of Sheki, were registered as archaeological monuments of national importance by Resolution No. 132 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 2 August 2001.

At present, the village of Fazil is a small settlement included in the administrative territorial district of the village of Ibrahimkand in Sheki district. The village is located on the banks of the Ayrichay river, in the Alazan-Ayrichay depression. According to the local population, the settlement was founded by a person named Fazil (4, p. 304). By Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 708-IQ dated 5 October 1999, the village of Fazil is a part of the administrative unit of the village of Ashagi Kungut in Sheki district. According to the collection of statisti-

cal data from the family lists of the Caucasian population published in 1888, the village is listed as one of the seven villages (Cholakhli, Ahmadbayli, Ibrahimkand, Evoglu, Garamaryan, Fazil, Garagobu) included in the rural community of Cholakhli. The same source states that the Sunni population consists of 34 men and 25 women and the Shia population includes 10 men and





five women. The number of houses in the village is shown as 16 (9, p. 70).

The first information about the archaeological heritage of the village of Fazil is found in the collection of *News of the Caucasian History and Archeology Society* published in 1884. Alexander Vissarionovich Komarov (1830-1904) (10, p. 815), in his article entitled "Brief Review of Archaeological Finds Discovered in the Caucasus in 1882" (10, p. 815), indicates that a cemetery was discovered by workers digging a water ditch on the estate of landowner Musa bey Hajikhanov located near the village of Fazil. The author, who noted that in addition to almost completely decomposed human bones, a large number of pottery vessels were found in the grave, believes that metal objects were hidden by the workers. Komarov, who met Musa bey Hajikhanov in the city of Yelizavetpol (now Ganja), learned that the graves were dug in bare ground without stone walls and headstones. The skeletons are so decomposed that it is impossible to determine the position of the deceased. Each of the graves contained at least three clay vessels and decorative copper objects. Komarov wrote, "While passing through Nukha (Sheki), I had the

opportunity to see ten examples of these vessels. They were in very good condition and made of thin, yellowish-red, well-fired clay. The shapes of the vessels were quite diverse and elegant. One of the pieces that attracted special attention was a completely flat amphora with two beautifully curved handles, patterns around the neck and the Roman numeral V on both sides. In addition, three vessels were found in the form of deep plates, with three legs and resembling a lion's paw. In one specimen, these legs were joined at half height. Other vessels consisted of jugs of various shapes. One of them had a strainer made of clay material at the mouth. These vessels were presented by the district chief to the governor of Yelizavetpol (Ganja), Major General Prince Nakashidze."

Continuing the article, Komarov, who obtained four vessel samples from the Fazil cemetery thanks to Colonel Zazulevsky, describes the sizes and shapes of those vessels (8, pp. 36–37.).

The first archaeological research in the territory of the village of Fazil began on the initiative of Nasib Mukhtarov (1951-2019) in 1984. This was when the Tepebashi necropolis was registered. Later, archaeo-

logical research was carried out in stages in the territory of the village in different years, as five archaeological monuments were identified (13). Three of them, the ancient Yonjali necropolis (inventory entry No. 1731), the Soyudlar necropolis (inventory entry No. 1732) and the Tepebashi necropolis and settlement (inventory entry No. 1733), are archaeological monuments of national importance (12).

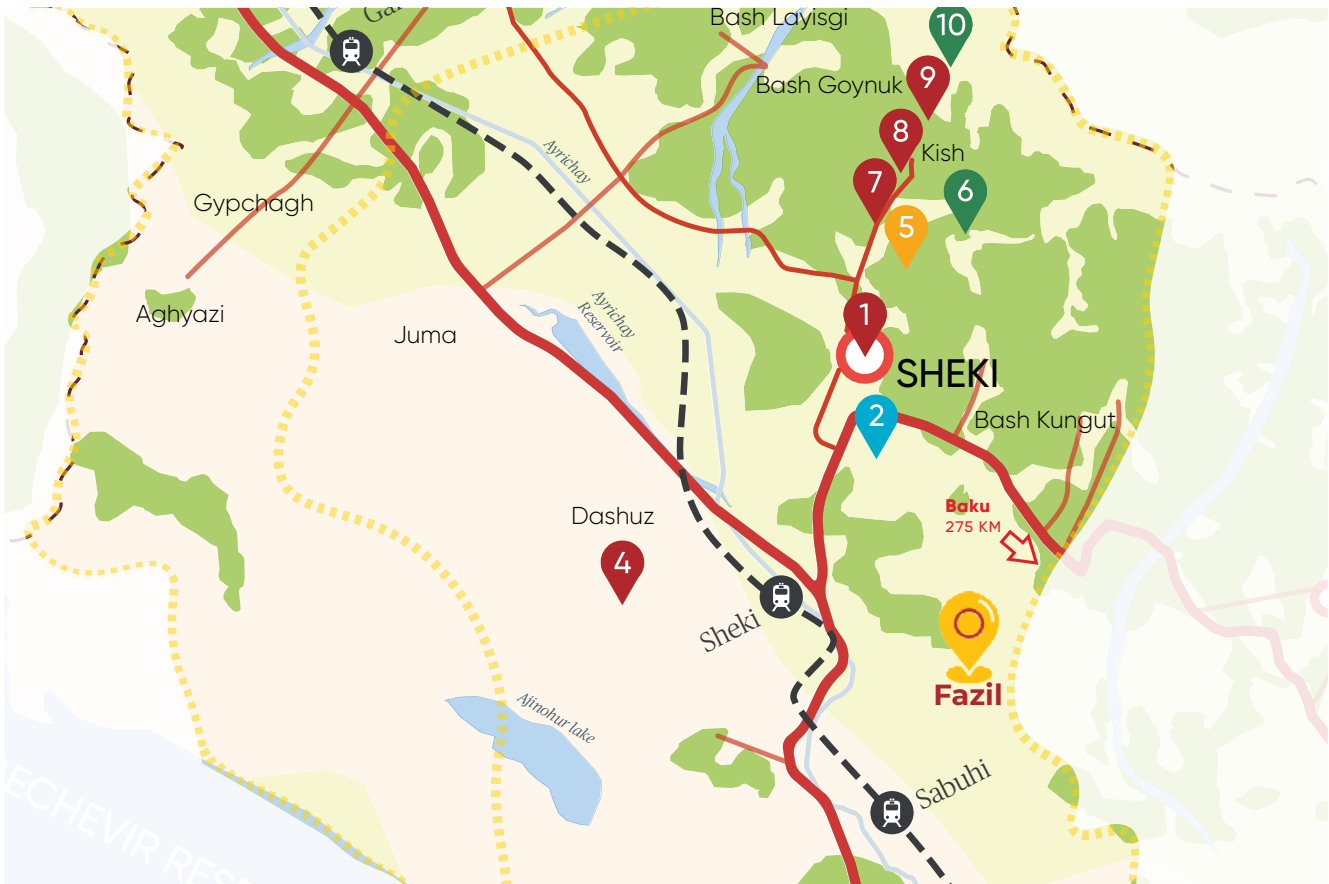
Among these monuments, the Tepebashi necropolis is particularly noteworthy. The samples of material culture discovered in the Tepebashi necropolis suggest that it covers a period of approximately a thousand years, from the early antiquity to the early Middle Ages. It is one of the monuments of great importance in the study of the Caucasian Albania period in Azerbaijan. The monument is located on a small hill in the territory of the village of Fazil, borders the Boyuk plain in the south and the Ayrichay river in the southwest (6, p. 150). As a result of the large-scale excavations carried out in the Tepebashi necropolis, up to 20 grave monuments were studied. Since the area of the necropolis was used for economic purposes by the village population before it was discovered, there were many graves that had been destroyed in the vicinity. For this reason, salvaging work was also carried out during archaeological



research. Although the graves are quite similar, they differ from each other by burial images. It is observed that people in the Tepebashi necropolis are mainly buried in the north (facing west). However, in the studied grave No. 1, the skeleton was buried in a fully bent position - in the position of a fetus in the mother's womb, with hands towards the chin and facing south. In grave No. 2, a person was buried on his back and in grave No. 3 on the left side. Grave No. 4 is completely different in terms of its burial characteristics. The person buried had been dismembered. Grave No. 8 is distinguished by the shape of its coffin measuring 90x125 cm. Grave No. 9 is associated with the custom of mass burial and has 20 human, four bovine, two dog skulls and various human bones. In general, the various burial forms of the graves studied in the Tepebashi necropolis provide important information about the religious beliefs, burial customs and social structure of the ancient society in the region. Experts associate the diversity of burial rituals with the gender of the buried person, sun, and darkness.

Along with the bones of various animals discovered in the graves, there are also pierced boar tusks used as ornaments, which M. Huseynova associates with boar worship.

During archaeological research, various samples of material culture, clay vessels and, in some cases, animal



and bird bones were discovered in addition to human skeletons. In particular, during the research of grave No. 1 located in the southeast of the necropolis, grave equipment consisting of 10 vessels was discovered. Two double-handled vessels, a small-handled tray-shaped red vessel, a red bowl, a red glass with a handle, a red

double-handled petal-shaped vessel, a light yellow vessel with a vertical hole on both sides instead of a handle (2, pp. 63-74) were discovered. In other researched graves, a duck-nose-shaped vessel, a water jug with a holed nipple, a tripod vessel, a crescent-shaped earring made of copper, and many other samples of material culture of various shapes and sizes were discovered. The vessel samples discovered in the necropolis not only resemble Komarov's descriptions, but also surprise experts with their uniqueness, aesthetics, artistic design, and visual appeal. Most of the material and cultural samples retrieved during excavations are exhibited where they were discovered. Some are preserved in the archaeology office in the city center. Among the most unique material and cultural samples discovered in the Tepebashi necropolis are clay idols and anthropomorphic figures. These idols are characterized by numerous rings on the arms, head and neck. Female and male idols are distinguished by the special emphasis on the hips and thighs, and in women on the chest and navel. A clay idol sample found in Fazil can also be seen in the exposition of the National Museum of Art.

The uniqueness of the red, gray, clove and black colored pottery vessels and samples of material culture



found in this archaeological monument is not related to their history and shape, but to the cosmogonic symbols of faith, images of the moon, sun and cross on them. The presence of pottery vessels and material culture samples in all the graves provides information about the belief in the afterlife and the worldview of the people.

In 2006, as a result of the work of archaeologists Nasib Mukhtarov and Intizar Badalova, an underground museum called "The World of Eternal Silence – the Labyrinth" was created in the territory of the Tepebashi necropolis (11). The museum mainly preserves and demonstrates grave monuments discovered as a result of archaeological excavations in their original state. The finds are presented to visitors in ten to fifteen installations, mainly in the form of preserved graves. The exposition allows visitors to observe in situ artifacts of the Yaloylutepe culture, which is associated with Caucasian Albania, clay idols in the form of women, weapons and jewelry, and animal and human osteological remains. Overall, these findings clearly demonstrate the daily life, religion and mythology, and socioeconomic system of ancient civilizations. This museum, which is of great interest to tourists, has the potential to make a great contribution to the study and promotion of Azerbaijani history.

The first archaeological material and cultural samples were discovered in the Fazil village of Sheki in the 1980s and the first archaeological research began in the 1980s as well. Archaeological excavations, research and salvaging work in the village were carried out in stages and continue to this day. The Tepebashi necropolis, the first officially registered archaeological monument, is currently protected as a national monument and has been transformed into a museum. The graves and samples of material culture discovered in the necropolis cover a thousand-year period from the early antiquity to the early Middle Ages and provide a broad idea of the craftsmanship, religious worldview and burial customs of the period. ✨

Literature:

1. Almammedov Kh. Tepebashi necropolis. Archaeology of Azerbaijan. (VIII, No. 1-4). Baku 2006. pp. 63-74.
2. Encyclopedic dictionary of Azerbaijani toponyms. Volume I. Baku: East-West. 2007. p. 304.
3. A.Mammadov, F.Khaligov. SHAKI. Scientists and Intellectuals. Baku: "Elm", 2007. pp.291-292
4. N. Mammadli. The history of the study of ancient



tomb monuments of the Sheki region. Young researcher's journal, 2024, No. 4, pp. 149-154, p. 150

5. Известия Кавказского общества и хориолии / Под редакцией Д. З. Баградзе и Е. Г. Вейденбаум. — Т. I, выпуск второй. — Тифлис: Типография Канцелярии Главного начальствующего гражданского части на Кавказе, 1884. — С. 36–37
6. Collection of statistical data extracted from family lists of the population of the Caucasus. Tiflis. 1888 str.70
7. Encyclopedic dictionary. Том XV А. С. Петербург. 1895. с. 815
8. An archaeological tourism route is being created. Culture.- 2015.- October 21.- P.9. <https://anl.az/down/meqale/medeniyyet/2015/oktyabr/459636.htm>
9. Decision of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on approval of the classification of immovable historical and cultural monuments placed under state protection in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan according to their importance. <https://e-qanun.az/framework/2847>
10. https://azertag.az/xeber/sekide_arxeoloji_tedqiqatlar_aparilmisdir-30138