



# GALA

ARCHAEOLOGICAL-ETHNOGRAPHIC

# MUSEUM COMPLEX

Kamil İBRAHİMOV  
*Doctor of History*









In the course of archaeological research on the territory of Azerbaijan numerous materials were found that make it possible to attribute the country to the number of regions where mankind formed. One of interesting places in Azerbaijan in terms of historical monuments is the Absheron Peninsula.

Absheron has a unique and complex historical, architectural and urban infrastructure. During the long history of the peninsula, a rich heritage took shape, in particular, the structure of population centers, caravanserais, baths, ovdans and sanctuaries, which have no analogues in the architecture of the Middle East, and the novelty for Absheron – estates. The appearance, formation and development of the historical villages of Absheron took place in the socioeconomic and political conditions of the influence of different states. In addition, the structure of the architectural planning of settlements was influenced by the climatic and geographical features of the peninsula.

The history of the settlement of Absheron dates back to ancient times. This is proved by barrows, traces of hearths, tombs and other monuments of material culture discovered during archaeological excavations. One of the oldest settlements in Absheron is the village of Gala located in the eastern part of the peninsula.

In order to promote and protect cultural heritage,



Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev issued a decree in 1998 to create the Gala historical-ethnographic reserve in the village. In 2008, at the initiative of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and under the leadership of its head Mehriban Aliyeva, an archaeological-ethnographic park – an archeological-ethnographic museum complex under the open sky – was created in the Gala reserve for the first time in Azerbaijan. It collects and restores

archaeological and architectural monuments found in various parts of the Absheron Peninsula. In addition, barrows, ancient dwellings and other monuments of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC are presented in their original form here.

This open-air museum, which occupies an area of 1.2 hectares, has perfect conditions for studying the history of Azerbaijan.







In the village of Gala and the surrounding area, there are 215 architectural and archaeological monuments. It largely preserves the atmosphere of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. In the village there are valuable architectural monuments of the period from the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC to the 20<sup>th</sup> century - 5 mosques, 3 baths, dwellings, kahrizes, wells, agricultural buildings, tombs, barrows,

sarcophagi and the ruins of a fortress. In the village of Gala, which has 5,000 years of history, there were several quarters, of which the quarters of Tarakama, Balaverdi, Haji Ramazan and Chambarakand have survived.

The creation of such an archaeological-ethnographic park at the reserve in the village of Gala is another step towards the improvement of the tourism infrastructure. For the development of archaeological tourism, it is first of all necessary to conserve the area of archaeological excavations and then create infrastructure around archaeological sites that need to be turned into tourism products. In all countries, tourists are interested primarily in historical monuments and ancient settlements. It is no accident that the village of Gala and the whole archaeological-ethnographic museum complex under the open sky is visited by a considerable number of tourists.

It should be noted that in the last few years, following the country's first archaeological park at the Gala reserve, Azerbaijan started giving a tourist nature to the archaeological excavations at sites in Gabala, Shamkir, Goytapa and Agsu, where large-scale work is under way to create archaeological parks. Based on international





experience and prospects of archaeological tourism in Azerbaijan, an archaeological park was opened at the conserved site of archaeological excavations in the Baku fortress – Icharishahar, which can also be called an innovation in this area.

Today there is considerable experience in archaeological tourism and in creating archaeological parks abroad. For example, the Roman Forum archaeological park set up near Rome is visited by all tourists coming to the city. Here they have the

opportunity to see a ruined monument found during excavations. In Italy, there are also such well-known archaeological parks as Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabiae. In addition, among the leaders of archaeological tourism are France, Germany, the Czech Republic and Turkey. After years of archaeological excavations in ancient settlements near Antalya, a vast area was conserved and is now used for archaeological tourism.

The comprehensive study of architectural and archaeological monuments found in the eastern part







of the Absheron Peninsula began in the 1960s. The numerous petroglyphs found in the area belong to the Bronze and Iron Ages. The rock paintings covering the period from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC to the Middle

Ages, discovered in Absheron, are diverse in themes and plots. They depict hunting scenes, human sacrifices, ritual marriages, etc. Some pictures show the figure of a goddess standing with upraised hands.





On the Bendustu monument, one of the religious centers in the eastern part of the peninsula, there are pictures of scenes of animal sacrifice and ritual marriages. On cave paintings, dotted and geometric signs, signs in the form of a khoncha, etc. occupy an important place.

Ancient barrows, tombstones, houses, temples and other cultural sites found in Absheron cover the period from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

On the territory of Absheron there are a number of barrows belonging to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> millennia BC. One of them, known as Dubandi (in the village of Dubandi), has ring-shaped masonry - cromlech – at its foundation. The burial is located in the center of the barrow, has a southwest-northeast stretch and is composed of four large stone slabs. In the southwestern part, near the masonry of the cromlech, there is a sacrificial chamber, one side of which is shaped like an anthropomorphic stele. Crockery, lamb bones, stone tools and ashes were found on the altar. Special ceremonies were performed



here after the funeral ceremony. The presence of numerous anthropomorphic steles in the construction of the barrow testifies to the religious beliefs of the ancient inhabitants of Absheron. It is assumed that the anthropomorphic monuments existing in the barrow symbolized the god of death, who accompanies the souls of the dead to the other world.

The barrows of Absheron relating to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC are very valuable for the study of the material and spiritual culture of the ancient inhabitants of these places. One of these barrows - the Turkan barrow (in the village of Turkan) - has a height of 60 cm and a diameter of 9 meters and represents a sandy-rocky hill. The foundation of the construction is a ring-shaped masonry in a row. In the center there is an angular vertical camera made of four stone slabs. The height of the anthropomorphic monument is 240 cm, the base is rectangular, the width is 80 cm, and the face is turned to the west. It has a head, neck and chest. In the waist there is a rectangular hole.





Near the village of Zira there is an ancient ring-shaped home built from stone slabs. The inhabitants of the building were engaged in animal husbandry, fishing and hunting, and the walls of the home protected from strong northern winds, strengthening them with boulders. In this area, a lot of porcelain, bone and stone

tools have been found. The spiritual views and beliefs of the inhabitants are reflected in the images of animals, humans and astral geometric signs. The dwelling belongs to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> – early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC.

In some cemeteries of Absheron, stone figures of sheep, typical of pre-Islamic Turkic culture, are found. In







addition, you can see Koranic verses, rhyming stanzas and verses about the deceased on the monuments. Gravestones were decorated with carvings or animal figures. Samples of tombstones belonging to the 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries still stand at Absheron's rural cemeteries. According to the results of archaeological excavations, human settlements in the village of Gala already



existed in the Bronze Age (5,000 years ago), but only domestic and farm buildings relating to the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries have survived. Due to the arid climate and lack of timber, buildings from local Absheron white limestone were constructed in the form of the dome-shaped suspended structures with chimneys. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, villagers began to prefer two-story rectangular houses with flat roofs.







Most of the old buildings in the Gala historical and ethnographic reserve are one-story houses with flat roofs and domes over the tandir and the hearth. The houses are equipped with stone gutters that collect rainwater from the sloping roof. Basically, such houses had two rooms. One of them served as a living room and the other as a kitchen. In the kitchen of the house

there was a tandir and a hearth for heating food and water. In the corner of the kitchen there was a sink for water in the form of a deep groove on the floor, in front of which a small area fenced with a 15-20 cm high wall was arranged. A hole was made on the edge of the area for water to flow out. This sewer was used for washing clothes and ablution before the Muslim prayer - namaz.





The living room was decorated mostly with shelves and other decorative elements. They put various copper and other kitchen utensils on the shelves. On special shelves they stacked bed linen, mattresses and blankets. One of the decorative elements of the interior of houses in the village of Gala was small niches, in which they put lamps and the Koran.

After baking bread or cooking food, the hot charcoal

was spilt into the mangal (national type of brazier), which was covered with a special warm blanket. A whole family warmed themselves under this blanket. The aforesaid shows that the formation of housing experienced a long process of evolution.

A number of crafts are developed in the village of Gala, including ancient pottery, which, according to various sources, existed in Azerbaijan in the 2<sup>nd</sup>





The main pottery instruments were the cleaver, pottery knife, shovel, pottery pencil and axle. The firing of products occupies an important place in pottery. Firing was carried out by different methods – in bonfires, tandirs, open and closed furnaces. All this proves that pottery has a long history in Azerbaijan.

Another popular craft is blacksmithing, which was developed in many parts of the country, including in Baku and Absheron. Small blacksmith shops – “horseshoe” shops – opened mostly on the roadside. They made various types of horseshoes called by regions - Karabakh, Lachin, Russian and Gazakh.

One of the most interesting monuments of ancient culture is the tambourine “gaval dash”. The secret of the extraordinary sound of the stone is that it rests on an air bag. The dry and light lime “gaval dash” touches the rock in two points, and the rest is hanging in the air. If you slightly hit it, there appears an unusual sound that does not cease for a minute.

Ancient rock paintings in Gobustan west of the Absheron Peninsula, the neolithic and Bronze Age caves, the archaeological excavations on the Agdash plain, Khashakhun and Dubandi near the ancient village of Gala in the east of the peninsula, ancient settlements, barrows, traces of hearths and other monuments all testify to the ancient history of Azerbaijan. 🌸

millennium BC. Discovered during archaeological excavations in many parts of the country, including in Gala, faience items are of great artistic interest. Usually potteries were on the outskirts of cities and towns. In the pottery traditions of Azerbaijan there are two types of pottery wheels: manual and treadle wheels.

#### REFERENCES

1. İ. Əliyev. F.Abdullayev. Naməlum Abşeron. Bakı, 2011
2. İ. Əliyev. Abşeron açıqlamaları. Bakı, 2010
3. F. Abdullayev. Qala və qalalırlar. Bakı, 1992
4. R. Əliyeva. Unikal Qala kəndi. Bakı, 2007
5. T. Səlimov. Qala. Bakı, 1997

