

Abbasgulu NAJAFZADEH
PhD in Art History

GAVALDASH

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS ARE DIVIDED INTO SEVERAL GROUPS DEPENDING ON THE TYPE OF SOUND: IDIOPHONES (THE ONES THAT ARE IN NO WANT OF MUCH TUNING), MEMBRANOPHONES (LEATHER, ARTIFICIAL LEATHER), PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS, AEROPHONES (WIND INSTRUMENTS) AND CHORDOPHONES (STRINGED INSTRUMENTS). IT IS BELIEVED THAT ACCORDING TO THEIR MORPHOLOGY AND TYPE OF SOUND, MOST ANCIENT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS ARE IDIOPHONES. THERE IS A PLENTY OF HISTORICAL, ARCHEOLOGICAL, LITERARY, LINGUISTIC AND ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL CONFIRMING THE ANTIQUITY OF THE HISTORY OF IDIOPHONES WITHIN THE TERRITORY OF AZERBAIJAN.

Well-known historian Nasir Rzaev wrote, "We can see the most ancient monuments of art only on rock paintings (engravings) of Gobustan." These images scratched on rock with sharp-pointed stones date back to the 13-10th centuries BC.

One of the prominent example of an idiophone is the so-called Gavaldash, which represents a stone tambourine – a block of rock in Gobustan. According to experts, the history of Gavaldash goes back to the Paleolithic age, i.e. 1-1.5 million years ago, when humans started separating from fauna. According to other sources, **Gavaldash has been known to humans since the Upper Paleolithic Age which began 35-52 thousand years ago, when the modern Homo Sapiens appeared.**



In 2006, in an effort to familiarize ourselves with this instrument created by Mother Nature herself, we, together with a group of repre-

The rock art engravings appeared in Gobustan 10-12 thousand years ago. They were discovered and studied by Azerbaijani ar-

ers and cattle-breeders living on this territory. Millennia ago our distant ancestors living in these places used to make bonfires around Gavaldash and perform a dance similar to "Yalli" to the accompaniment of musical instruments. This is evidenced by rock art engravings.

ACCORDING TO A THEORY, THE PLACE OF CHINGIRDAG IS DERIVED FROM THE TURKIC WORD "CHINGIR", WHICH REFERRED TO THE TAMBOURINE THE SHAMANS USED IN RITUAL CEREMONIES.

Doctor of Philology, Professor Gafar Herischi (1992-1997) has put forward a theory about the **origin of the Chingirdag place name. According to the theory, the place name is derived from the Turkic word "chingir", which referred to the tambourine the shamans used in ritual ceremonies.** There-

sentatives of TRT television company in Baku, traveled to Gobustan. While keenly reviewing the rocks of Gobustan, I couldn't help feeling the presence of our faraway ancestors. Scientists have established through numerous researches of these places that Azerbaijan is one of the ancient culture centers of mankind. As far as Gobustan is concerned, it is a kind of an outdoor museum of culture of primitive man that has a lot of valuable works of prehistoric art. These places are the cradle of music, the first ever dancing stage, the first art workshop... It is therefore no coincidence that UNESCO has registered Gobustan as a historical and art reserve.

cheologist Iskhak Jafarzadeh (1895-1982) in 1939. About 6000 ancient paintings, more than 10 sites of the Stone Age, dwellings, graves and other archaeological monuments were found in the Boyukdash, Chingirdag and Yazilitepe tracts. In 12-11th centuries BC, hunting tribes lived in Chingirdag, fishing tribes on the Kichikdash mountain and cattle-breeders had dwellings on the Boyukdash mountain. According to scientific researches, Gobustan had a subtropical climate in the Stone Age.

Therefore, the Chingirdag place name is directly associated with the natural musical instrument we describe as Gavaldash. It is worth recalling that there was an Azerbaijani musical instrument called dingir, which was similar to tambourine.

There is a Latin rock engraving on the Boyukdash mountain. It was left by the Romans in the 1st century AD. The inscription dates back to the rule of Emperor Domitian Titus Flavius (81-96) and provides evidence that the XII Roman Legion was in Go-

Gavaldash also served as a symbol of unity: ancient people used to conduct various religious and festive rites around it, danced to the accompaniment of Gavaldash and held meetings. It is beyond doubt there were also other musical instruments in ad-

GAVALDASH ALSO SERVED AS A SYMBOL OF UNITY: ANCIENT PEOPLE USED TO CONDUCT VARIOUS RELIGIOUS AND FESTIVE RITES AROUND IT, DANCED TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF GAVALDASH AND HELD MEETINGS.

bustan. This inscription also points to economic relations between Rome and Caucasian Albania.

dition to Gavaldash that were made of reed, leather, wood and other material.

There is another rock inscription dating back to the 14th century in Chingirdag. The Persian-language inscription says, "Imad Shaki came here, prayed and left." The identity of Imad Shaki is not known, but the inscription suggests that there was a shrine on this territory in the 14th century.

Prominent statesman, public figure and researcher of folklore Alihuseyn Dagli (1898-1981) provides interesting facts about Gavaldash in the third part of his "Ozan Garavelli" research. In an article called "Stone musical instrument, water accompaniment and natural singing", which is part of a comprehensive research, he described an interesting natural phenomenon he observed in Guba District – the sounds coming from the Tikh river. **"There, close to the Kusnat village, the fanciful mountain river creates**

There are two Gavaldashes in Gobustan: one in Chingirdag and the other on the Boyukdash mountain. It is quite possible that the Gavaldashes were used by hunt-



an amazing picture by its rapid streams – the water runs through solid rocks and looks as though it were flowing under a minaret. If you listen to the river carefully,

TRIBAL GUARDS USED THESE INSTRUMENTS IN THE EVENT OF WILD ANIMAL ATTACKS AND IN OTHER DANGEROUS SITUATIONS. IT IS BELIEVED THAT THIS IS HOW PRIMITIVE PEOPLE DISCOVERED GAVALDASH AND STARTED USING IT.

you will have the impression that someone is playing music inside a minaret. This melodious sound turns out to be the singing of the flowing water.”

In an article called “Rahi-Shebdiz”, in the third part of “Ozan Garavelli”, A. Dagli says that once there was a musical stone near to Baku. “Question: Has there ever been a musical stone in Gobustan other than the one of cloudy color? Answer: As a child, I was standing beside masons and watching them work. I was listening carefully to the ringing sound coming from under the picks. I loved the sound a lot and didn’t want to forget it. Even now I can still hear the sounds coming from the strings of the chongur saz, and recall those times.”

The white stone from the outskirts of Baku has a very special feature: when you smooth it out with an axe or a pick, it produces sounds reminiscent of a melody. Masons frequently come across stones that produce musical sounds. In pre-Soviet times, such incomprehensible phenomena were simply ignored. A block of stone possessing such qualities stood near the water storage at Bibi-Heybat station (formerly Shikh-verdi station) for a long time. I wrote a story about this stone, “Fearful rock”, that became part of the book “Words unheard of”. Unfortunately, the rock that was producing the sounds of the Saz was destroyed shortly before World War I.

Etymology. The word “gavaldash” is derived from the Turkic words “gaval” and “dash”. Gaval is a one-sided

musical instrument used by our singers. This word means “a vessel of festivity”, “a false vessel”. The second part of the word, “dash”, indicates that the instrument was made of stone. Be-

sides, the performer was striking the instrument with two small pebble stones.

The sound of Gavaldash is similar to the ringing sound of the gaval. It is for this reason that when the gaval appeared in the 12th century, it was called “Gavaldash”. At the same time,



it is also believed that it was called “dash alet” (“a stone instrument”) and “dashla chalinan alet” (“an instrument played with stone”), etc. Objects more or less similar to Gavaldash can be found in different countries, and there is a scientific term of “lithophone” (“lithos” meaning stone and “phone” meaning sound in Greek, so “lithopone” translates as “a sonorous stone”) used for such instruments.

Morphology and usage. Gavaldash consists of shell limestone. The instrument represents a flat piece of limestone. It leans against the rock only at two points and stands as if on an air cushion. Depending on the density of shells in the limestone, Ga-

valdash produces different sounds from various parts of its surface. The reason for this difference is the emptiness and porosity of shells. Ancient people looked for stones that could produce loud sounds and tapped on them with small stones thus obtaining different sounds. So how did ancient people discover Gavaldash?

It is common knowledge that primitive people invented first idiophones, i.e. instruments that needed no special tuning, by striking hollow stones or pieces of wood against each other. This is how they found out that it is possible to produce various sounds in this manner. There is a theory that **tribal guards used these in-**

struments in the event of wild animal attacks and in other dangerous situations. It is believed that this is how primitive people discovered Gavaldash and started using it.

This assumption is confirmed by the fact that Gavaldash is located far from ancient dwellings and reverberates to an area of 2-3 kilometers.

Performers play the Gavaldash by striking it with small pebble stones. By doing so, it is possible to elicit sounds of different tonalities and resonances.

Well-known performers. The Gavaldash was first played by virtuoso performer, merited artist of Azerbaijan Chingiz Mehdiyev (1932-1992) in a radio program in 1965. In





1978, he played the Gavaldash for viewers of the Azerbaijan television. Later on, this magical instrument was played on national television by People's Artist of Azerbaijan Sadig

Zarbaliyev, Merited Artist Natig Shirinov, Tahir Huseynov, Javanshir Gasimov and Eldaniz Hajiagayev.

It remains to be wished for all the performers of percussion instru-

ments and musicians in general to visit Gobustan at least once, see Gavaldash with their own eyes and listen to its melodies. ❖

References:

1. N. Rzayev. Voice of the centuries. Baku, "Azerneshr", 1974
2. S. Abdullayeva. Azerbaijan folk instruments. Baku, "Adiloglu", 2007
3. Dictionary of the Azerbaijani language, Vol. 3, Baku, "Elm", 1983
4. The ASE (Azerbaijan Soviet Encyclopedia), Vol. 7. Baku, 1983
5. T. Bunyadov. Sounds from the depth of centuries. Baku, "Azerneshr", 1993
6. I. Jafarzade. Rock engravings of Gobustan. Scientific Research Institute of the Azerbaijan SSR Academy of Sciences, Vol. 13.

