

IRS

Archaeology



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AZIKH CAVE – THE MOST ANCIENT HUMAN SETTLEMENT IN THE CAUCASUS



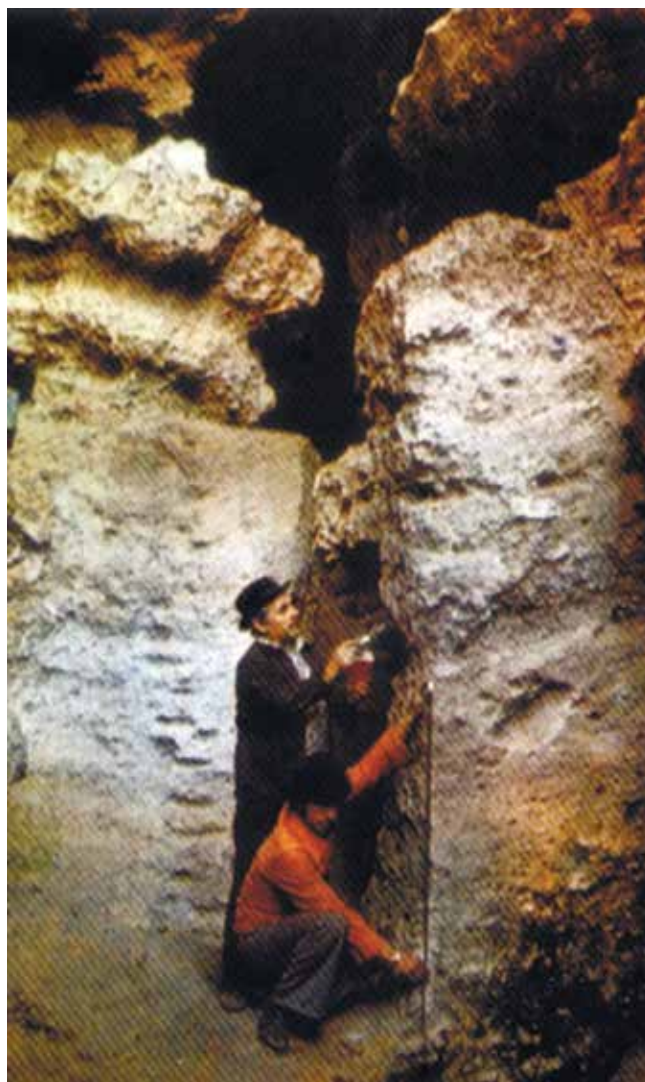
*Entrance to the cave (look from inside).
Photo of the 1970s*

The Azikh cave is a karstic cave in the historical Azerbaijani region of Karabakh in the South Caucasus and is known for the fact that a Paleolithic site of primitive man was established here. Thus, the Azikh cave, which such prominent scholars as I. P. Gerasimov, A. A. Velichko, V. P. Lyubin and N. D. Praslov have recognized as **a unique archaeological site, can be called one of the cradles of mankind**. The cave is located 14 kilometers north-west of the city of Fizuli on the left bank of the Guruchay River at an altitude of 900 meters above sea level (1, p. 12).

To date, many Paleolithic human settlements around the world have been explored, and the most famous of them are Olduvai (Tanzania), Koobi Fora (Kenya), the origins of the Omo River, Melka Conture (Ethiopia), Ubaidia (Palestine) and Walloon Cave (France). In the 1950s, Paleolithic sites in the South Caucasus were discovered in Georgia (Kudoro-1, Son cave) and Dagestan (Aynikab-1 and Mukhkay-1). The materials of these settlements confirmed the hypothesis that **man lived in the Caucasus in the Middle Acheulian** (2). The Azikh Paleolithic site was discovered in the 1960s and studied by M. M. Huseynov (3, p. 220) and then by M. M. Mansurov and A. K. Jafarov. This and other Paleolithic settlements on the territory of Azerbaijan were studied by well-known

Soviet scientists - representatives of various scientific disciplines. In parallel with the Azikh cave, archaeological research was carried out from the 1960s to the 1980s in the Taglar cave near the city of Shusha (3, p. 12, 4). Studies show that Paleolithic monuments in Azerbaijan are mostly located on the eastern slope of the Lesser Caucasus and Caspian coast.

The Azikh cave is **the most ancient cave-type settlement in the former USSR**. In 1968, a fragment of the jaw of a primitive man of the Acheulean period was discovered here - the first finding in the USSR and the second in the world proving that Azerbaijan is a region of the ancient settlement of primitive man. The tools of the pre-Acheulean Guruchay archaeological culture found in the Azikh cave, as well as fragments of residen-



Mammadali Huseynov at Azikh cave excavations

Mammadali Huseynov at Azikh cave excavations

tial structures, homes and “caches” represent the greatest scientific value.

In addition to the Azikh cave and the abovementioned Taglar cave, the open Paleolithic settlement of Damjili and Dash-Salahli are known in Azerbaijan. **The Azikh cave is the country’s only multi-tiered monument belonging to the lower antropogenic period, and it proves that ancient man inhabited the territory of Azerbaijan 2 million years ago.**

Since the advent of the Azikh man – Azikhantrop, primitive man in this region created the lower Paleolithic

Guruchay culture, the Middle Paleolithic Mousterian culture and the late archaeological cultures of the Stone Age. In the early stages of settlement in the Azikh cave, a hunting culture took shape, eventually giving way to other types of production. **The value of the Azikh site is that all stages of the history of the Stone Age are represented here and there are materials that reveal the emergence of primitive man and his way of life.**

For example, stone structures and a fragment of the jaw of a man who lived almost 400,000 years ago were found in it. In the 7th-10th tiers there are artifacts of the early



Stone Age: in the 3rd, 5th and 9th tiers, more than 15,000 Lower Paleolithic stone tools have been discovered (3, p. 12). All in all, **the cave has 10 cultural layers with a total capacity of 10-14 meters.** The oldest of them are the 5th-10th layers that belong to the pre-Acheulean period and represent the Guruchay archaeological culture (1.2 - 0.7 million years ago) (3, p. 62). Among them

are the first tools - cleavers, thrust and digging tools. **The oldest materials of the Azikh cave are similar to the materials of the Olduvai archaeological culture of East Africa** (3, p. 63; 4). Stone tools and gigantolites found here speak in favor of the theory about the universality of the general laws of the development of human society. Along with this, bones of 40 species of wild ani-



Lower jaw of Azikhantrop. NMHA

mals, including the gray bear, cave lion, rhino and horses have been found in the Azikh cave.

The results indicate that the Azikhantrop had discovered and learned to keep fire early. In the Azikh cave, the remains of a hearth made by our ancestors 700,000 years ago have been found. They used these hearths to warm up, protect themselves from attacks by wild animals and cook food. It must be noted that the anthropological Azikhantrop type occupies an intermediate position between the Pithecanthropus and Neanderthal (3, p. 10, 4). The materials discovered in the cave leave no room for doubt that the **Azikhantrop, like all humans of the early Acheulean culture, had consciousness, speech and some elements of spiritual culture.** It should be noted that in the late Acheulean period (about 100,000 years ago) the life of the Azikhantrop was strikingly different from previous periods: the late Acheulean layers not only contain a lot of tools, but are also full of objects that indicate the progress of spiritual culture.

Deer bones from Azikh cave. NMHA

In the Azikh cave, various stone tools belonging to the archaeological Mousterian culture of the Middle Bronze Age have been studied. The main technological achievement of this period is the Levallois technique of stone knapping, which can be called revolutionary. The appearance of the bow 10,000-12,000 years ago caused the same revolutionary turn in hunting and led to an increase in the shooting of animals. This process is proved by arrowheads, spears and lots of remains found in the cave of the Mousterian period. Primitive man began to



tame some of the captured animals for their meat – cattle-breeding was thus born. At the same time, people began to collect the seeds of wild plants and planted them, initiating agriculture. All of this greatly increased food supplies to primitive communities.

Mousterian man had a **significantly developed inner world and could understand the nature and ratio of colors**. This is proved by products with a different range of colors found in the Azikh cave (3, p. 146).

In addition to the materials of the Azikh cave, dolmens of Khojali, cromlechs of Khankendi, as well as numerous burial mounds, graves in the form of so-called stone boxes and other artifacts that reflect the course of social and spiritual development have been found in the mountainous and lowland parts of Karabakh. The development and territorial distribution of the Guruchay culture of the Stone Age and the subsequent Kura-Araz culture of the Bronze Age are clearly visible in Karabakh. Monuments of the Kura-Araz culture, dubbed by the Kura-Araz lowland in Azerbaijan, have been found **throughout the South Caucasus, as well as in north-western Iran, eastern Turkey, Dagestan and some other places of the North Caucasus**. Among the most important archaeological monuments of Azerbaijan rich in products of the Kura-Araz culture, we should mention Meynatepe, Uzuntepe, Shortepe, Khanbulag, Khankendi, Garakopek Tepe, Gunesh-tepe, Khantepe, Shomulutepe, Leylatepe and Uzerliktepe. Relics of this culture also include extensive walled settlements (6).

Unfortunately, during the fighting in Karabakh, which began as a result of Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan, the invaders created an armory in the Azikh cave. This war caused irreparable damage to the monuments of prehistoric culture in Karabakh. 🌟

Instruments of labor made of cobblestone and obsidian (3rd occupation layer)



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Azerbaijani scientists at the entrance to the cave

