



General view of the Sheikh Babi Yagub Mausoleum

By Leyla HUSEYNOVA,
Architect

WHO RESTS IN THE TOMB NEAR ARAZ RIVER?

An insufficiently researched historical monument that is a worship ensemble is located in the Babi village in Azerbaijan's Fuzuli District in the vicinity of the country's border with Iran. The facility is comprised of Sheikh Babi Yagub Mausoleum, a minaret, as well as a religious building and the fence walls adjoin-

ing it from the west discovered during archaeological excavations in 2011.

Sheikh Babi Yagub Mausoleum, which was built in 1272-73, is an octagonal stone-made structure covered up by a faceted octagonal dome. The tomb has a crypt and two doorways located opposite one another from

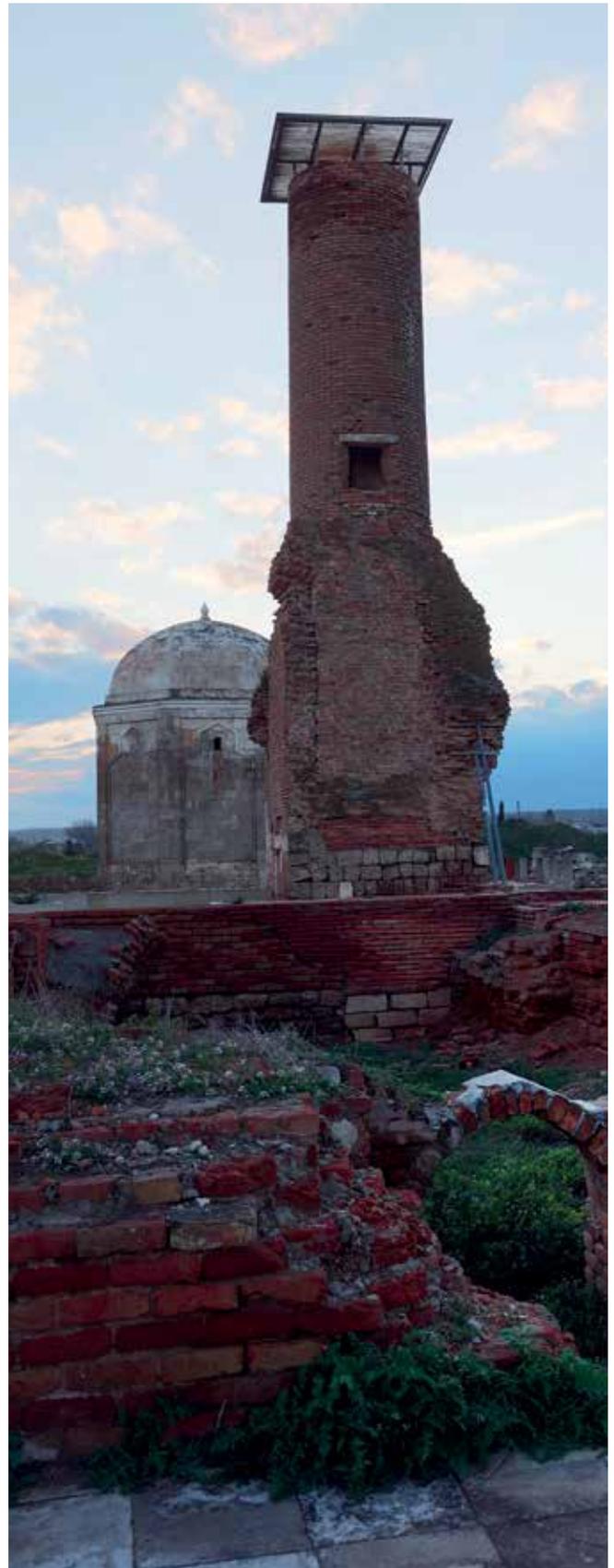
the north and south. An internal porch attached to the southern doorway is a distinctive feature of the tomb.

A dilapidated **building slated for worshipping** that has remained on the spot is a major historical monument located in the mausoleum area. The building was designed as a square-shaped structure sized 24.2m x 24.2m. There is a minaret in its north-western corner. The building consists of two halls with a longitudinal shape; the first facility is split up by two rows of columns. As a result, the building has a three-nave layout. The main entrance to the building is located in the northern part of the front side along the lines of the central nave; traces of a portal have been preserved in this area. There is a mihrab with a semicircular cross section and a radius of 31 cm on the southern wall of this hall, opposite the entrance. The mihrab is made of bricks and slightly recessed from the line of the walls. The walls were lined with properly processed limestone in the past. Large gateways adjoining the southern wall and the Q-shaped configuration of the columns form square-shaped space in front of the mihrab, which was evidently once covered by a dome or a cross-shaped vault. The other hall, sized 14.6m x 8.85m, is divided by stone-made attached columns and adjoins the first facility. There is a semi-circular depression, "bukhara", on the northern wall of the facility. The bricks on it have significantly burned down. There are two doorways between the first and second halls of the building.

A truncated octagonal mausoleum adjoins the second hall from the south. **The tomb has two burial sites, earmarked for men and women respectively.** There is a door leading to three rooms along the northern wall of the building in the left northern corner of the facility. The floor of the first room is on the same level as the hall, while the walls of the room are lined with the same white limestone as the whole building. On the right-hand side, there is a door in this room that leads to the two other rooms. The first one is small and covered with a vault, whence a low vaulted door leads to a spacious room. The ruins of its vaulted ceiling have been preserved to this day. The floor level in this area is significantly below the floor of the entire complex. Given the nature of the wall masonry, these two rooms, which were built later, are inconsistent with the mainstream three-aisled structure of the main premises.

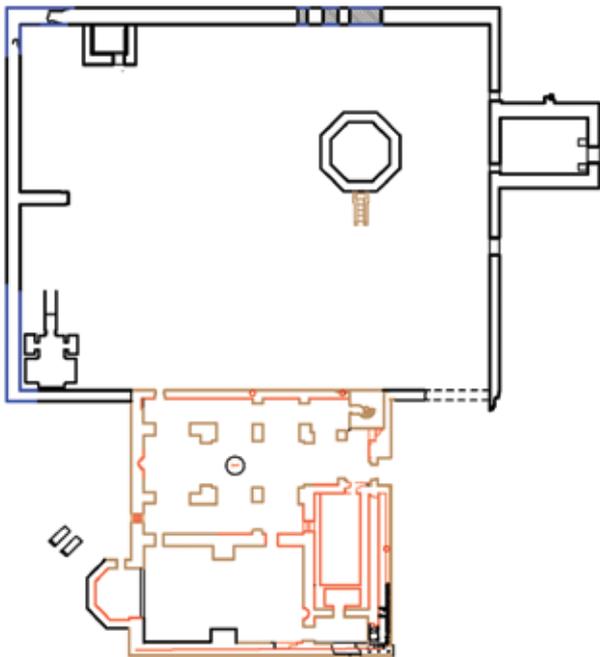
The religious building was constructed using baked bricks and lined on both sides with blocks of well-processed white limestone. Visitors may enjoy a thoroughly made, non-recurrent pattern of vertically

Minaret and adjacent structures of the complex





and horizontally stacked blocks, which form peculiar planes making the appearance of the facade special and unique.



Plan of the mausoleum in the village of Babi

The main front side in the north was processed with particular diligence. Unfortunately, the building is significantly damaged and the four rows of cladding blocks that have remained in some of its parts do not provide a comprehensive picture of the general design of the facades. Perhaps, masonry shifted into brick-laying at some point. This conclusion may be made considering the smooth masonry of the wall ruins and traces of vaults upon the minaret.

The **minaret** that is still seen in the northwestern corner of the building is mentioned in numerous sources as a damaged brick-laid structure which has retained the remainder of walls and five vaults of a large building. The minaret has a rectangular stone-made base, rising up to 1.2 meters, followed by a layer of square-shaped baked bricks. The western wall of the minaret is an extension of a wall of the shrine itself. The minaret entrance is a rectangular door on the south side covered with a stone-made lintel. A stone slab installed above the door lintel has preserved traces of an erased inscription. The height of the remaining part of the minaret is 12.7m. The 6.7m section of this part is comprised of a rectangular prism, which crosses over into the cylinder of the minaret body. Ruins of the walls and vaults preserved on the minaret stretch in three directions, except



Tombstones on the territory of the complex

for the western one, indicating that the minaret was an integral part of the temple.

The courtyard fence is made up of coarser limestone. From the east, the fence adjoins the shrine as if it furthers the structure. The foundation of the **parlor** was excavated on the north side, in front of the entrance to Sheykh Babi Yagub Mausoleum. A 1.5 m wide doorway was located in its northern wall. Flat stone slabs with square-shaped drilled holes were laid on the floor on the sides of the entrance; the bearing plates of the entrance gate were apparently inserted in them. The stone slabs of the building's floor covering have been preserved as well.

Another monument in the facility area is the **mausoleum crypt** located in the southeast corner of the courtyard south of the shrine. Initially, it was partially excavated in 1987. The crypt is a small facility designed in the shape of a cross. Evidently, its walls were lined with glazed tiles, which led to a conclusion that this may have been one of the rooms of a medieval bathhouse. The western side of the cross-shaped structure is stretched over 2 meters and there is a little room on each side. The central part of the "cross" had been designed as a square once covered by a dome. The room walls pass over to the base of the dome with the use of

sails and their parts have been preserved. The wings of the cross end in arrow-shaped vaults. On the western side, a staircase led to the crypt along a narrow passageway. A platform and several steps made of stone blocks and covered with bricks sized 36x36x6 cm have been preserved.

All the four burial sites of the crypt have been excavated as well. No graves were found in the small rooms on either side of the entrance, although there are minor depressions under the damaged flooring that are 30 cm deep.

The crypt walls are covered with turquoise hexagonal tiles until the height of 1.13m. The tiles are ornamented on all sides with decorative frames comprised of turquoise and dark blue stripes and a smaller pattern in between in the form of petals, bows and polygons. **These elements are very reminiscent of the details of the design of the mausoleum portals in the city of Barda and another tomb in the Garabaghar village near the city of Nakhchivan.** On the southern wall of the crypt, there are traces of a mihrab ending in a rectilinear arch, which was also decorated with intricate tile patterns. The crypt floor was mostly damaged, but the remaining cover suggests that it was paved with flat bricks.



The crypt of the mentioned tomb, which was fully excavated in 2011, is a valuable discovery in the history of Azerbaijani architecture. First, just a handful of monuments with decorative glazed tiles in the front and interior sides have been preserved in Azerbaijan's territory. Until recently, **the crypts of Akhsadan Baba Mausoleum in Barda** were in existence. Its walls, sails and dome were decorated with magnificent patterns made up of glazed tiles of different colors. Unfortunately, the tomb, itself, is no longer in place.

As for the crypt of another mausoleum in Barda dating back to 1322, A. Salamzade wrote that "traces of a former tiled decoration of the crypt interior design have been preserved only on the dome sails".

The crypt in the Babi village is the second monument in Azerbaijan's territory with preserved tiled wall cladding, though it is not as intricate as the one seen in Akhsadan Baba Mausoleum. Secondly, there is no mention in the literature about tiled lining inside the burial sites in tombs. A total of six burials were discovered during the archaeological excavations car-

ried out at the mausoleum in the Garabaghlar village, but these sites were not decorated. In contrast, the walls of two of the four burials in the mausoleum currently in question are lined inside with ceramic tiles of two colors, namely, dark blue and turquoise. Thirdly, **there is a mihrab in the tomb's crypt, which can be considered a unique discovery**. The only exception is a mausoleum shaped as an underground crypt close to the Sharafan village. The ruins of the latter were studied in the 1940s by I. P. Shchablykin. He wrote that a mihrab shaped as a shallow quadrangular groove had been set up at the front edge blade of the cross-shaped crypt. Fourthly, **no other crypts with burial sites set up separately outside the crypt chamber have been found in the Azerbaijani territory to date** (in the latter case, it was done in rooms with small graves).

How about the builder and timing of the facility's construction? According to M. Neymatova, **the complex was a khanegah of Sufi Sheykh Baba Yaqub**. Khanegah is a set of buildings that includes a crypt, i.e. the tomb of a saint with an adjacent cell, mosques, madrasahs and buildings housing rooms slated for meditation ("zikr") and dwelling for the novices. All these buildings had a single courtyard where collective "sama" meditation took place.

The shrine in question consists of a mosque, which is indicated by an available mihrab, adjoining halls and small facilities that were used for sermons and lessons, and a place for resident murids to spend the night. Possibly, one of the smaller rooms was used for individual daily meditation. There is also a courtyard with a tomb and two crypts on this site.

As mentioned above, Sheykh Babi Yagub Mausoleum was built in 1272-73, which occurred during the Ilkhanid rule. Following the death of Abaqa Khan in 1282, the state was bolstered by Tekuder, his brother. Tekuder was the first Ilkhan to adopt Islam. He was named Sultan Ahmad after his accession to the throne.

A chronicle of Rashid al-Din says "[Ahmad] revered Shaykh Abd al-Rahman to an extent that he called him father; he also referred to Ishan Mengli, a murid of Babi Yaqub, who lived in Arran, as his brother". According to the chronicle, he often visited Ishan's house, which was located nearby.

"There was music and dancing in the house as the dervishes indulged in rejoicing. Governance and state affairs were rarely addressed. His mother, Qutui Khatun, who was intelligent and charismatic, handled the affairs of the estate," Rashid al-Din noted.

Crypt in the courtyard of the mausoleum complex

Is it not Baba Yaqub whose tomb lies at the core of this article? The mentioned Yaqub died in 1272 and it is quite likely that the afore-mentioned Shaykh Abd al-Rahman or Abdurahman became his successor. Moreover, the Abdurahmanly village is still located in the vicinity of this area. However, Abd al-Rahman could not have been buried in the complex area, given that *“Ahmad arrived for a summer holiday in Aladagh and delegated Shaykh Abd al-Rahman as an ambassador to Misr (Egypt), but he was cast behind bars eternally in Damascus; he remained in prison until he passed away”*.

In 1284, Arghun Khan, who was Abaqa Khan's son, embarked on his struggle for the throne. “Ahmad resorted to the protection of Sheykh Babi and his associates and requested their support”. However, Ahmad Khan was captured and killed, and Arghun Khan came to power. **Literary sources cite insignificant information regarding the activity of Ahmad Khan and there are no references to any structures he had constructed.** However, D. N. Wilber mentioned “a burial site in Qara Qapchilgah” built by Sultan Ahmad Tekuder in a catalog of buildings he had come across in literature. Could this have been the facility located in the Babi village?

The facility in Babi was undoubtedly erected by a powerful and dominant leader who had significant funds, considering the impressive size of the buildings, the quality of materials used and decorative design. It is known for certain that the facility was built during

the Ilkhanid tenure at the end of the 13th century or the early 14th century. The identity of the person buried in the discovered crypt of the tomb is not known. It is possible that members of the Ilkhanid family or their closest associates were laid to rest in the two burials in the northern and southern sections of the crypt. This assumption is supported by the fact that a remainder of timber, copper-made tips and nails were found in the graves. ✨

Literature:

1. Бретаницкий Л.С. Зодчество Азербайджана XII-XV веков. М., 1966
2. Голубкина Т.И. Гробницы в усыпальнице Ширваншахов // Доклады АН АзССР, №1, 1947
3. Крачковская В.А. К истории изучения мавзолея Ших-Бабалы // Доклады АН АзССР, №2, 1946
4. Нейматова М. Эпиграфические памятники Карабаха. Баку, 2004
5. Рашид-ад-дин. Сборник летописей, т.III. М.-Л. Изд. АН СССР, 1946
6. Щелыкин И.П. Мавзолеи бассейна реки Акерачай // Архитектура Азербайджана. Эпоха Низами. Б., 1947
7. Вопросы реставрации памятников зодчества Азербайджана. Баку 1960
8. Wilber D.N. The Architecture of Islamic Iran. The Ilkhanid Period. New Jersey, 1955