

# A MONOGRAPHY

# VILLAGE KHINALIG



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MONOGRAPHY

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MAP OF KHINALIG



## **C O N T E N T S**

### **FOREWORD**

#### **THE VILLAGE**

General information — The name — Geography — Roads — Flora — Fauna — Climate — Residential pattern

#### **TRANCEHUMANCE ROUTES**

Khinalug and Köç Ethnographic Tourism Route (Köç yolu) — Khinalug—Susay (Ox Road) Tourism Route (30 km) — Khinalug—Galakhudat—Griz Tourism Route (20 km) — Khinalug — Gabala route

#### **FAITH**

Cemeteries — Places of worship — Tombs — Religious monuments - Islam — Mosques - Beliefs

#### **PEOPLE AND SOCIAL LIFE**

Employment — Economic activity — Public places — Reserve — Club — Population — Education — Rural women — Costumes

#### **HERITAGE**

Language — History — Archaeological excavations — Tales of the village

#### **AFTERWORD**

#### **GLOSSARY**

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## F O R E W O R D

Last year I accidentally discovered one of the parts of the Census of India (1961, Volume XIV, Published by the Indian Administrative Service in 1965, after British colonial power decline) containing a survey about a remote village in Rajasthan. The census format inspired me to develop this monography: playing with the tools of the state machinery and its colonial roots was a gesture that helped to reflect on the mechanisms of power in the past and their extension into the present.

Most previous written records on Khinalig were created by outsiders—researchers, journalists, and tourists—documenting local oral knowledge. I gathered and interpreted these materials that were issued in different languages and styles or were found only in online archives. After consulting the structure of the census entries, İzzət Bağırov, a co-author of this monography, wrote some texts on specific, previously undocumented topics.

Together with the format of the census, I have imported its limitations. A census is a shallow empirical report that shows a static image of the community. It can't dive deeper and describe the complicated relations within the community but is rather an outline for future engaged research.

Aesthetically, the census design impressed me: rigid layout with charismatic hand-drawn illustrations. Copying this format helped us focus on the content, filling in gaps rather than getting lost in endless options. The old-fashioned rigidity of the book felt refreshing, even sixty years after its release. Nika Larkba, an artist of Caucasian origin, studied archival photos and references from Khinalig to create the illustrations for this monography.

## P H O T O G R A P H S

1. After the hike
2. Shepherd with a goat kid
3. Waterfall
4. Gudyalchai river
5. In the village decades ago
6. In the village
7. Sheep on the way to pasture
8. Friendship of the species
9. Sheep and goats pasture
10. Bringing water
11. Making ayran
12. View of the village
13. Kids with a donkey
14. Trancehumance road
15. Night sky
16. Burial scene
17. Skull with a head ornament
18. Various findings from a museum collection
19. Cloak ornament
20. View on a neighboring mountain

Photos 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 18: Lali Bunyatova

Photos 1, 5, 8, 10: personal archive of Bayramgulu Bağırov

Photos 2, 3, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20: İzzət Bağırov

Photo 6: livejournal, username @varandej

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Trancehumance route	6
A village map	7
View of the village from the neighboring mountain	8
Flora of Khinalug	9
Mountain goat	10
Güldenstädt's redstart	10
Khinalig — Gabala route	12
Atësgah temple	38
Shepherd and his flock	39
Village houses	40
Women at work	41
Traditional male costume	42
Traditional female costume	42
Burial scheme	44
Archaeological findings	44
Woman baking bread	46

## General information

Khinalig is located just south-west of Quba, at 41°10' north latitude and 48°07'36 east latitude in the middle of the Greater Caucasus mountains that divide the Northern Caucasus in Russia from the South Caucasus. Khinalig is also the highest, most remote, and isolated village in Azerbaijan and among the highest in the Caucasus. The weather changes dramatically during summer and winter, ranging from -20 °C to 18 °C.

Khinalig has an area of 44.829,41 hectares. The length of village streets is about 5 kilometers. The development of Khinalig has gone beyond its historical part, and now a new residential area has been built on the banks of the Khinalig River.

The population of Khinalig village is around 2100 people. The main occupation of the population is animal husbandry. Folk art has developed. Tourism has been developing in recent years.



In the old quarters of Khinalig, 160 houses have survived until now, and 1604 people live in these houses. 82 ancient houses in Khinalig were completely or partially destroyed.

58 families live in 100 houses in the new housing estate of Khinalig. As of the beginning of 2011, there are 260 farms in Khinalig.

## The name

The name of the village, just like most of the Azerbaijani toponyms does not have a universal trans-

literation to English. Khinalig is an exonym, villagers call the village Ket, and themselves Ketsh. It began to be used approximately after the middle of the 19th century. According to the researchers, it is derived from the word "xeni" and the suffix "-lik" which means the concept of belonging in the Azerbaijani language, and means "those from Xeni, people from Xeni".

The toponym Khinalig is found for the first time in the 15th century in the manuscript "The events of Shirvan and Dagestan" written by Mahmoud Al Khinaligi.

There are several versions of the origin of the name of the village. According to legends, the village was named Khinalig because the mountain surrounding the village is colored henna when the sun rises. One possibility is that the name of the village is derived from the name of a henna-colored plant that grows only here. According to some assumptions, there is a connection between the name of Khinalig and the name of the town of Xeno (Xena, Xeni) in Albania in the 11th century. Currently, the remains of this city are located on the Dagestan side of Russia, on the border with Azerbaijan.

Khinalig village and its people call themselves Ketsh people (Kadid or kettid), and their village Ketsh or Ketish. Ketsh can be translated as a place where many kettids live. The meaning of these words is "holy".

## Geography

Khinalig is located on a plateau on a high peak of the Caucasus Mountains. Khinalig village, located at an altitude of 2350 meters and facing the Qibla in the Guba district, borders Gabala from the west and Gusar districts from the north and is surrounded by the mountains of Bazarduzu (4466 m), Gizil Gaya (3725 m), Shahdag mount (4243 m), Tufandag (4191 m) and Khinalig (3730 m). At the foot of Tufandag, 7 kilometers away from Khinalig, there are 3 different lakes at an altitude of 3500 meters. There are many springs and caves around the village.

## Roads

In the past, it would take a whole day to travel to the village as there were no roads. If it rained, the paths would get muddy up to the knees. The first automobile road to Khinalig was constructed in 1968, it was often

closed in winter, requiring people to travel on foot. In 2006, an asphalt road was constructed, due to the constant landslides and rockfalls, a repair team must constantly maintain the road.

## Flora

These plants can be found in the village:

*Khinalig — Azerbaijani — English*  
 Adı xala — Adı baldırğan — Hogweed  
 Bağayarpağı — Bağayarpağı — Plantago  
 Məhde gül — Boymadərən — Yarrow  
 Qujul — Cirə — Cumin  
 Çobanyastığı — Çobanyastığı — Mayweed  
 Muşkula — Daziotu — St John's wort  
 Dolme yarpağı — Dəvədabani — Coltsfoot  
 İnşel — Əvəlik — Dock  
 Miç — Gicitikən — Nettle  
 İtburnu — İtburnu — Rosehip  
 Kəklotu — Kəklikotu — Thyme  
 Tikani xala — Qanğal — Thistle  
 Qatırquyruq — Qatırquyruq — Horsetail  
 Qırxınbiy — Qırxbığın — Knotgrass  
 Quşəppəgi — Quşəppəyi — Dandelion  
 Quzuqlağı — Quzuqlağı — Dock  
 Ping Mucu — Marshmallow  
 Ping — Pitraqotu — Burdock  
 Nini qışız — Pişik otu — Southern globethistle  
 Sığırquyruğu — Sığırquyruğu — Mullein  
 Mızqə — Turşəng — Mountain sorrel  
 Vəhşi ciyələk — Yabani ciyələk — Wild Strawberry  
 Laha — Yarpız — Pennyroyal  
 Kində — Yerfindiği — Peanut  
 Alimink — Yemlik — Salsify

There is a forested area close to the yaylag area (summer pastures) at 2,300 meters altitude, a rare phenomenon for this subalpine zone. This area is called Muğoz and is considered sacred by the Khinalig people. The locals protect this small forest fragment, where felling trees is taboo for the community members.

## Fauna

The wildlife near the village of Khinalig is rich, consisting of many valuable species. Some of them are East Caucasian tur (*Capra cylindricornis*), Caucasian chamois



(*Rupicapra rupicapra* subsp. *Caucasica*), Bezoar ibex (*Capra aegagrus aegagrus*), mountain goat (*Capra aegagrus hircus*), lynx, brown bear and wild boar (*Suscrofa*), as well as different types of falcons and eagles. The region's birds are Caucasian snowcock, Güldenstädt's redstart, alpine accentor, rock thrush, and lammergeier (or 'bearded vulture').

The Khinalig people have certain spiritual beliefs regarding some of the animals and birds that inhabit the areas, hunting some species is considered taboo. The locals are respectful towards nature, by taking and giving back sustainably.



In the past, the inhabitants of Khinalig have been engaged in hunting mountain goats (*Capra aegagrus aegagrus*) and caucasian wisents (*Bison bonasus caucasicus*, nowadays extinct). Although the people of Khinalig hunted wild boar, they never ate the meat — they sent it to the neighboring villages. Hunters do not inform anyone about the time of hunting, divide the killed animals equally among themselves, keep the neighboring share, and if a stranger comes across, they also give them something.

#### **Climate**

The highlands (above 2700 m) experience a cold desert climate, while the lowlands (above 1500 m) have a cold winter climate with significant precipitation.



Khinalig has an average annual temperature of 6°C and receives about 575 mm of precipitation each year, with maximum daily rainfall reaching around 56 mm. Most of the rain falls during the spring, summer, and autumn months, while mid-summer and winter tend to be relatively dry. Winter brings substantial precipitation, primarily in the form of snow. In mid-March, the snow begins to melt, increasing the water flow in the mountain rivers, which can lead to flooding during the hotter months.

Although there are only a few landscape types in and around the village of Khinalig, since it is located in a high mountainous area, vertical zoning is visible. Alpine and subalpine meadows are widespread in the areas close to Khinalig and are the main habitats in its ecosystem. These meadows are spread both above and below the village, mainly at altitudes of 1800–3200 m. The mountain meadow ecosystem in the area contains mainly subalpine and alpine plants.

#### **Residential pattern**

The houses in the village are built very close to each other on the principle of cascade: the roof of each house is the porch of the house above it. Houses are built very close to each other in Khinalig. Such construction of buildings is important for the protection of apartments from the cold on frosty and blizzard days. Houses in Khinalig are mainly built of river stones and clay bricks — modern construction materials are not preferred. When someone is building a house in Khinalig, the whole community would row from the river

bed to the place where the house was built, and they would pass the stones one by one, from hand to hand, to the place where the house is being built.

In Khinalig, cow dung is used in the construction of houses and also used in the household as a fireplace starter in winter. To use it, it is mixed with clay and straw and pressed into bricks.

Traditional house has a column, supporting the roof and almost no furniture. Instead, Khinalig people use pillows, blankets, and mutakkah (long oblong-shaped pillows), as well as large and small-sized mattresses. By custom, the inhabitants sit on the floor and don't use tables.

The State Tourism Agency has renovated around 160 traditional houses in Khinalig, with 60 being in the most critical condition.

### **Trancehumance routes**

Ethnographic and historical tourism routes in the Khinalig area include:

- a). "Khinalig and Köç Road" route (200 km)
- b). Khinalig–Susay (Okuz road) route (30 km)
- c). Khinalig–Galakhudat — Gryz route
- d). Khinalig–Gabala route
- e). Khinalig–Haput route
- f). Khinalig–Laza route

#### **Khinalig and Köç Ethnographic Tourism Route (Köç yolu)**

Köç means nomad, and Köç yolu is the name of the Ethnographic Tourism Route. Nomadic animal husbandry is the main type of occupation that plays an important role in the lives of the people living in the Caucasus region. This occupation has become an indispensable part of the cultural identity of nomadic peoples for centuries. The nomadic way of life is reflected in their traditions, language, and beliefs.

The length of the Köç Road is 200 km, and it passes through the territory of 6 administrative districts (Gusar, Guba, Shamakhi, Gobustan, Hajigabul, and Absheron). More than 10,000 people and more than 400,000 cattle use the Köç Road every year.

This route is rich in natural colors and passes through steep canyons, presenting tourism products based on historical-cultural and ethno-cultural heritage. The numerous monuments of high historical and cultural value along the route enhance its appeal for ethno-cultural tourism. On September 18, 2023, the "Khinalig and Koch Road Cultural Landscape" in Azerbaijan was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This nomination document was prepared by the State Tourism Agency in 2021, focusing on the semi-nomadic culture of Khinalig.

The residents of Khinalig migrate seasonally between summer pastures and winter quarters twice a year, spending four months in the alpine and subalpine meadows of the Greater Caucasus mountains (1800-3500 m) and eight months in the winter quarters of the Central Aran region in Hajigabul.

The semi-nomadic culture has been preserved through unique rituals, knowledge of utilizing natural resources (such as pastures, plants, and water bodies), and risk management skills passed down through generations. Nomadism shaped the history, architectural heritage, communal management of resources, gastronomy, folklore, belief systems, and trade relations of Khinalig.

#### **Khinalig–Susay (Ox Road) Tourism Route (30 km)**

The Khinalig–Susay road has historically been used by the people of Khinalig for transporting wood, primarily for roofing materials. In the Khinalig language, the road is known as "Dohle Əuar," meaning "Wood Road" or "Road for Carrying Wood." The route starts at 2200 m and ascends to 3300 m.

Along this road, there are several archaeologically significant monuments, including the notable Qırıq Abdal shrine (a place of worship). Currently, this route is actively used by hiking enthusiasts.

#### **Khinalig–Galakhudat–Griz Tourism Route (20 km)**

This route consists of two parts. The first part covers the 9.5 km distance from Khinalig to Galakhudat. Along this path, travelers encounter a place of worship and a view of the Gudyalchay River valley. The second part extends for 9.3 km and is passing



through steep canyons. After 6 km, travelers are greeted by a Gurgur waterfall.

When passing the Khinalig–Gryz path, some part of the roadcare made in an old road construction technique. At the 7th km mark from Galakhudat, one can see the remains of an ancient bridge. The sides of the road are constructed from large stones and pieces of rock, with small stones filling the space between the two retaining walls, all covered by a thin layer of soil. Most of the road is still in use today. However, the section from Khinalig to Galakhudat was largely destroyed during the Soviet-era road construction in the 1960s, leaving only a small portion of the original road intact.

#### **Khinalig — Gabala route**

For Khinalig people this route has been one of the most vital passageways for centuries. From approximately the 4th century BC to the 1960s, this road retained its importance. One of the indicators of its significance is the historical archaeological mon-

uments found along the route. Artifacts discovered at these sites reveal that the road was used not only by the Khinalig people but also by trade caravans and was a point of conflict between the Sasanian and Byzantine empires. The variety of archaeological discoveries found in this area further supports this.

Along the road, there are several monuments and points considered sacred. The Muqoz forest, regarded as sacred, was a pilgrimage site for locals and travelers alike. There are underground shelters, and a large shelter area known locally as a caravansary. Remnants of the old road, pathways carved into cliffs, and an Arabic-inscribed stone tablet can still be seen along the route. This fascinating and mysterious road also features stunning natural scenery, including waterfalls, high cliffs, and sometimes impassable rivers. The journey can be completed in 2-3 days and is currently very popular among hiking enthusiasts.

#### **Cemeteries**

Khinalig has eight cemeteries from different periods. The vast number of graves can be seen from the top of a place known as “Giyad Tepesi,” stretching to its base, through the village, and along the banks of the Rutsoch and Deyirmanchay rivers. These cemeteries have not yet been fully studied. Many of the old graves in Khinalig are notably large in both width and length. The tombstones are inscribed either in the Arabic script or even older scripts. Open graves near the Rutsoch River stand as visible evidence of this. Some graves in Khinalig are built in layers, with up to 3–4 levels, meaning that graves are stacked on top of each other.

#### **Places of worship**

Khinalig is divided into eight districts or məhliə:

- Gəmiki
- Təpə
- Ķəmiki
- Gadaxe
- Yelqavan
- Orta
- Çuxur
- Palasa

Each district had its feast and its cemetery. Following this tradition, Məhlə residents bury only in their cemetery. Many clans (tayfa) dominate social life in Khinalig: Hacıqərib, Hamarğodurdur, Kuriğodurdur, Hatarğodurdur, Museğodurdur and others. These quarters roughly correspond to the clan organization of the inhabitants. Khinalig's inhabitants were Zoroastrians before converting to Christianity in the 4th century and then to Islam in the 7th century.

Ruins of a synagogue in the upper part of Khinalig, ruins of a Christian church in lower Khinalig, the name of a small tower (Atəsgah 'fireplace'), holy places called pir, and the massive presence of pre-Islamic traditions (e.g., the zulmatxana 'room of repentance') illustrate that contemporary Islamic culture (represented by a 12th-century mosque, a 15th-century mosque, and several ancient cemeteries) has superseded several other religious traditions.

Eight ancient graveyards surround the village, covering an area several times greater than that of the village. Most graves conceal three or four burial layers. The tombstones' inscriptions are written in various alphabets. To defend themselves in the 10th century against various nomadic tribes, special defense facilities, including a fortress, were built in Khinalig: the main watchtower also included the Zoroastrian Temple. Local elders relate that the priest who lived in this Temple was called "Piajomard" and that he used to watch an eternal flame burning there.

There are 31 mausoleums and shrines in the Khinalig area. 16 from Islamic period, the rest are pre-Islamic and have been sanctified by the local population.

### **Tombs**

- Tomb of Pira Comard, X century
- Khidir Nabi tomb, XV century
- Mohuj Baba Tomb
- Tomb of Sheikh Israfil, XVI century
- Tomb of Ibrahim Khalil, XIII century
- Tomb of Jabbar Baba, XVIII century
- Seyidqalam Baba Tomb, XVIII century
- Ahmed Efendi tomb, XIX century
- Tomb of Mugham Baba, XIX century
- Abdülrhman Baba tomb, XX century
- Tomb of Seydi Baba, XX century

### **Religious monuments**

Pir is a site of worship connected to ancient pagan religious beliefs in Azerbaijan. People believed that trees ( hawberry, elm, and others), mountains, large stones, and the graves and mausoleums of sacred religious figures and sect leaders had miraculous powers. Pirs has become a place of worship, giving vows and "treatment" for those who seek help for infertility, disability, mental and physical illnesses, and those who have good intentions.

List of Pirs in Khinalig:

- Blacksmith pir
- Zoroastrian pir
- Crimson pir
- Ox pir
- Dough pir
- A hundred pirs
- Thin pir
- Qibla girls pir
- Muqoz tree pir
- Black southern woodpecker pir
- Pir dere
- Ibrahim Khalil baba pir
- Sheikh birth baba pir
- Sheikh Shalbruz pir

In the lower part of the village, there are more pirs whose names have been forgotten.

### **Islam**

Islam began to be preached in Khinalig by Abu Muslim in the 8th–9th centuries. The Friday mosque, which still operates today, was built during that period. The locals call this mosque the Abu Muslim Mosque. At the mosque's entrance, on the right-hand side, at a height of two meters, there are two stones with inscriptions in runic script. It is believed that these writings were carved between the 3rd and 8th centuries. Although not fully translated, the inscriptions are thought to convey meanings such as "the rising of the sun" and "the beginning of a new history." Similar writings can be found on a large rock facing the waterfall near the Damdam River on the slopes of Mount Kundur.

Currently, seven mosques are open in Khinalig:

Name	Capacity	Built
Pir Comerd Mosque	192	980 AD
Abu Muslim Mosque	340	XI century
Sheikh Shalbuz Mosque	72	XVI century
Israfil Baba Mosque	72	XVI century
Khidr Nabi Mosque	96	XV century
Mohuc Baba Mosque	32	XV century
Neighborhood Mosque	72	XVIII century

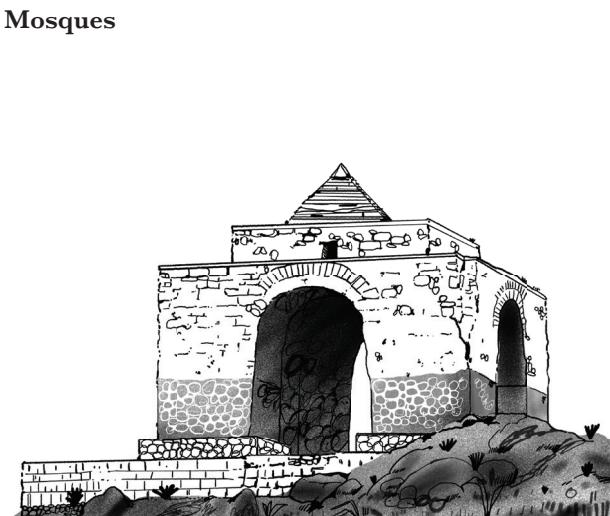
### Beliefs

Before converting to Islam, the people of Khinalig were pagans. Today, they belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. However, traces of pre-Islamic beliefs connected to nature can still be found in their daily life, such as a tradition of fortune-telling using fire. About 4–5 kilometers west of Khinalig village, there is a place where natural gas burns continuously day and night, which the locals call “Ateshgah” (Fire Temple). This site is often cited as evidence that the people of Khinalig were Zoroastrians. According to sources, Hindu Zoroastrians who came to Azerbaijan for trade and worship practiced their fire rituals not only on the Absheron Peninsula but also at this “Ateshgah” near Khinalig.

Khinalig people have rich traditions related to rain, agriculture, some domestic animals, weddings and mourning, and observation of celestial bodies. The customs and traditions in their daily lives are shaped by natural phenomena and their interpretations of these events.

Fire worship played an important role in their cultural practices: people of Khinalig still regard their “Ateshgah” as a sacred fire shrine

In Khinalig, many witchcraft and charms are also widespread in the household. Their history is very old. The Khinalig people believe that human breath is the soul, and when a person dies, they believe that the soul leaves the body along with the breath. Khinalig people counted the years by the increase of sheep herds. No one knows where this tradition started. For example, 1937 was the year when there were 70 thousand sheep in the village.



































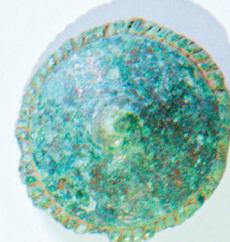
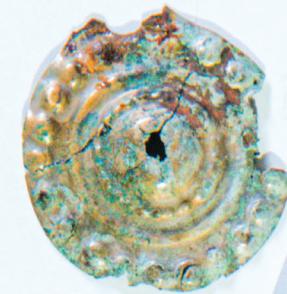


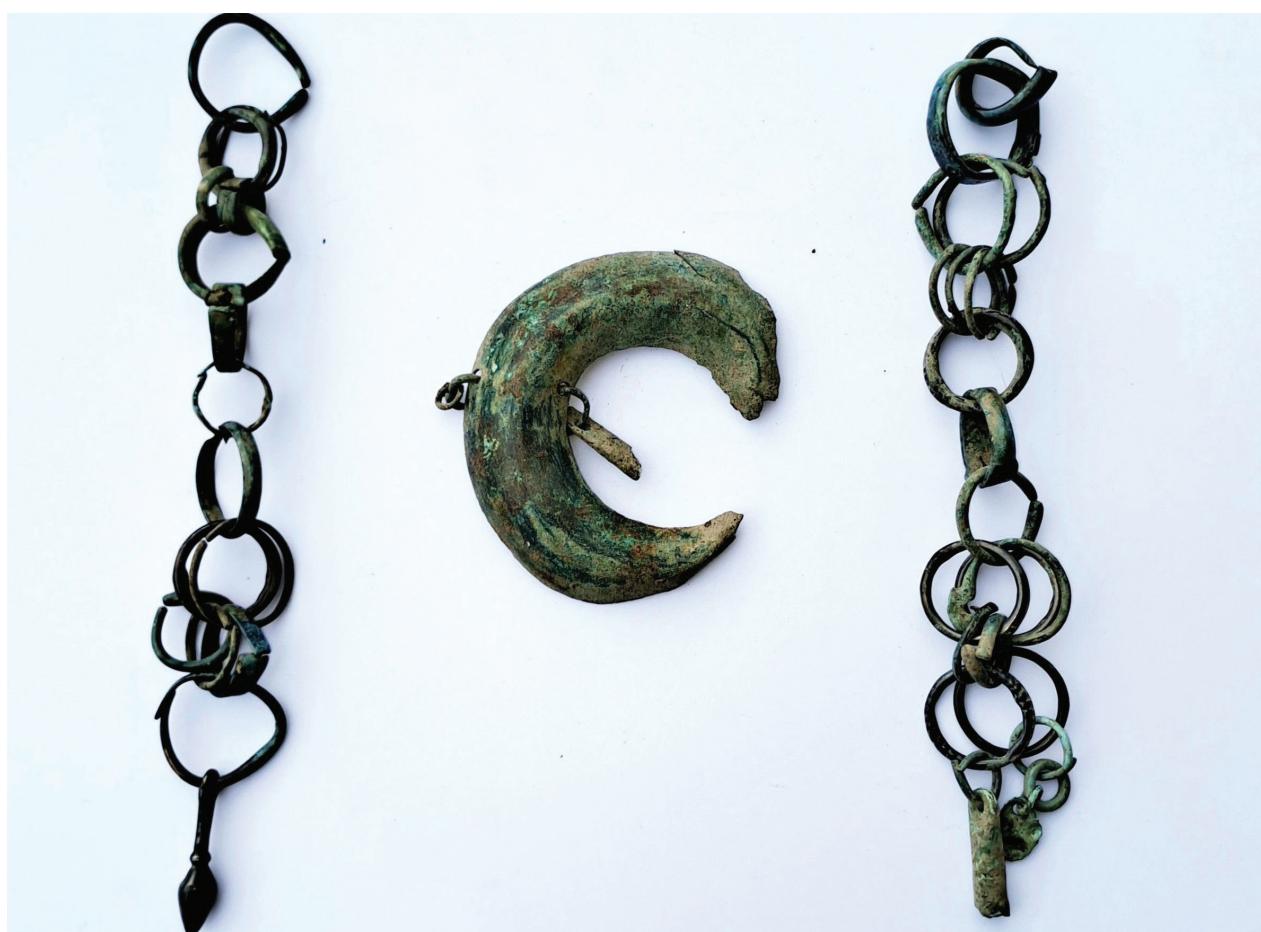














*"And back then, they lived in tents," recalls Ramim Alkhas. "That was before Soviet rule. And they counted time differently back then... By the flock of sheep." — "What do you mean?" — "Well, for example, I was born when there were seventy thousand sheep in Khinalig. And during my grandfather's time, there were one hundred thousand."*

— "Strange way of counting years, ". — "Although, on the other hand, how do people count time at all? From some significant event. From the flood, from the creation of the world, from the birth of Christ... For Khinalig, a sheep is life. So, it's time." — "When do you say you were born?" — "When the flock was seventy thousand sheep? What year is that in our era?" — "Nineteen thirty-seven." — "And what year is it now?" — "Twenty thousand sheep... So, it's the year nineteen ninety-seven."

Weddings and other ceremonies are held in strict conformity with the rites inherited from one generation to another. There are some traditions linked to rain and land cultivation, special attitudes to domestic animals, weddings, and funerals, as well as to celestial bodies.

The Khinalig tradition uses the flood to set up a period for the foundation of the village:

*'The Khinaligs consider themselves as the linelal descendants of the prophet Noah. According to the opinion of the Khinaligs, during Noah's flood, the village Ketsh was located on a slope of the Ketsh mountain. Then — by the will of Allah — there was an earthquake (and) none of the houses resisted, all houses were destroyed. A large part of the people perished. Those who were saved passed the river and stayed on a small hill. So Khinalig came into existence. The Khinaligs think that after the flood, Noah's sons Sim and Kham moved to different places, and only Yaphet stayed with his sons. From him, the Caucasian people have emerged.'*

## Employment

132 people are working in administrative jobs. 100 of them are employed in schools, 4 in healthcare,

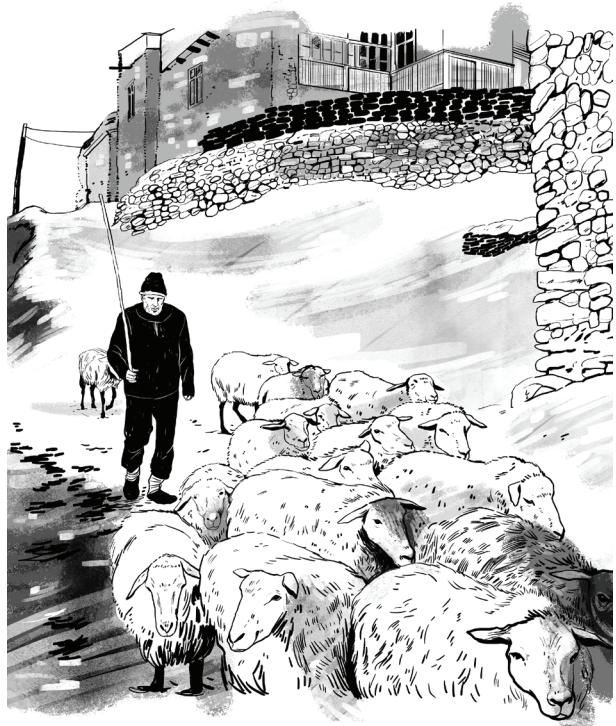
3 in the post office, 4 in the executive office, 5 in the cultural center, 2 in the library, 10 in the Khinalig reserve, 2 in phone provider companies, 2 in the stations of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

## Economic activity

Most of the people in Khinalig are shepherds. Even individuals who have other work, such as teachers and the doctor, own sheep which are pastured for them by others. Some people own as many as 300 sheep. Buyers from Quba town come to the village to purchase animals for about 1 shirvan per kilogram of meat, or 10 to 15 shirvan for one sheep. These buyers then take them to the district center, where they are resold to purchasers from Baku. The distinctive white honey produced in Khinalig is also sold for a substantial price at the bazaar in Quba.

During Soviet times, Khinalig village was part of a state-run collective farm.

The people of Khinalig have historically been practicing transhumance, moving their livestock between yaylaqs — highland summer pastures close to their ancestral village and qishlaqs—lowland



winter pastures in central Azerbaijan. The process of movement, which happens twice a year in spring and autumn, lasts around two weeks each time. The shepherds and their flocks from Khinalig join around 7,000 people and 400,000 sheep from other nearby settlements on the seasonal movement route, which starts from Khinalig village and ends in the winter pastures of Hajigabul and Absheron.

Collecting and drying mountain herbs is common, especially among children. Some residents of the lower parts of the village are beekeeping and selling honey.



## Public places

There are three museums in Khinalig, Khinalig History Museum, Khinalig Ethnography Museum, and a home museum established by a villager, Hacibala Badalov, who has gathered his collection during hunts. There is a club, library, several cafes and home hotels for tourists, a public school, medical clinic.

## Reserve

“Khinalig and Köç Yolu” State Historical, Cultural and Ethnographic Reserve, was established in 2023, funded from the state budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the State Tourism Agency.

The main activities of the Reserve are to exercise state oversight across the reserve’s territory, to ensure the protection and inviolability of historical and cultural sites, its sustainable development, and the preservation of the natural landscape.

## Club

The Khinalig club, established in 1946, initially was used as a cinema. In 1978, it was transformed into a Cultural House, expanding its activities to host various events and theatrical performances. This institution has played a crucial role in the cultural life of the village. It has been significant for Soviet workers and officials, providing an efficient and enjoyable way to spend their leisure time. Between 1973 and 1975, various artworks from the Guba Cultural Center were transferred to the Khinalig Cultural House, where they are still preserved and continue to attract significant interest. Additionally, the Khinalig Cultural House hosts meetings and gatherings organized by state institutions and conducts training sessions on various topics.

## Population

The first census of the Caucasus in 1859 recorded 330 houses and 2.3 thousand inhabitants in Khinalig. In 1886, 359 houses and 2.2 thousand inhabitants were counted: In the 1897 census, the Khinaligs were not distinguished from the group of Lezgin peoples. According to the Azerbaijan Agricultural Census of 1921, there were 367 farms in Khinalig and 1.8 thousand inhabitants. According to the 1926 census, the number of Khinaligs decreased to 1.4 thousand, of which 105 people called themselves Khinaligs with their native language being Khinalig.

Year	Number of houses/ households	Population
1830	266	962 (male population only)
1859	338	2315
1873	363	2196
1886	350	2430
1920		2196
1926		1448
1953	147	700
1959	147	700 – 800
1967		900 – 1000
1975	277	1943
1982	187	2149
1990	359	2090
1996	312	1684

In censuses the Khinalig people were not counted as a separate ethnic group. The fluctuations in the population figures may be due to actual shifts in population, seasonal migration, war drafting or the policies of government organs responsible for the census.

## **Education**

Interest in education in Khinalig has existed since ancient times. According to what the village elders heard from their fathers and grandfathers, during the Ottoman period, books were brought to these places from cities like Istanbul and Izmir in sacks. They say the village boys were educated in Istanbul, Tabriz, and Samarkand. There is a grave of the Khinalig people in Samarkand. In the 19th century, 90% of Khinalig male residents were literate. However, later this percentage decreased very much, and only in the 60s of the 20th century, the first Khinalig-based higher education was achieved.

The school was built in 1926. Currently, there are between 350 and 400 students and fifteen or sixteen teachers at the school. All the teachers are from Khinalig village and speak Khinalig as their first language. Most of them have higher education.

Pupils have Khinalig language class in the primary school. For this, a special lessons program was developed by a poet and the school director Rahim Alxas in 1995 and edited in the years after. In 2023 the first official textbook of the Khinalig language was published. Some school graduates continue their studies in universities all around Azerbaijan.



## **Rural women**

According to the data from 2005, from 1935 to the present day, mass illiteracy prevails among the female representatives of the Khinalig people. Even if women finish high school, 90 percent can hardly read and write. Currently, among the women living in Khinalig, there is not even a single person with a secondary qualification or higher education.

The girls in Khinalig do graduate from the eleventh grade, but they attend school less frequently after grade 7 or 8. Their parents keep them at home more during these latter years, so the girls usually come to school only two or three days out of a six-day school week. One teacher said that the parents consider it less important for girls to study than for boys. Girls always stop going to school entirely when they get married, but boys who marry before they finish school continue to attend until they graduate.

Throughout history, the occupation of Khinalig women has been that they helped their husbands, who lead a semi-nomadic lifestyle, to maintain the farm and work in subsistence farms. Knitting and carpet weaving are the arts belonging to Khinalig women exclusively. In addition, they are engaged in the preparation of various livestock products (cheese, cream, oil, etc.).

Today, Khinalig women typically marry between the ages of 18 and 20, usually to men aged 22 to 27. While it's uncommon for Khinalig women to marry outsiders, Khinalig men often marry women from other villages.

Nowadays, with accessible public education, there is a bigger number of literate women, few of which successfully finish school and enter universities in other cities.

## **Costumes**

The men's costume of the Khinalig people from the second half of the 19th century to the early 20th century closely mirrored the all-Azerbaijani or all-Caucasian men's costume. It included a short calico or dark nankin beshmet, a short knee-length chukha (outer dress of the Circassian type) made from homemade or purchased dark blue cloth, and

trousers made exclusively from homemade cloth. Underwear was crafted from coarse calico, calico, buckram, and rarely linen. Men wore a hat on their heads and charykhs (leather carbatina shoes) on their feet, often with knitted woolen socks and woolen windings. In the post-war years, the traditional men's suit began to be replaced by a pan-European (urban) type suit. Currently, only the hat and knitted socks have been preserved from the traditional elements, typically worn by old men with ordinary galoshes (resin shoes). Papakhas are now mainly worn by older men, while the rest wear caps.

There is no detailed description of the Khinalig women's costumes in historical literature. However, according to late 19th-century photographs, this costume consisted of a wide calico dress, a high-tied calico apron (almost under the armpits), wide calico pants, and several scarves of different sizes tied in a special way. In the 1930s, women's clothing included wide



pants (Khinalig: dzhugar), an undershirt (Khinalig: peirem), a wide gathered long skirt, short outerwear such as arkhalig (Khinalig: valag), and an apron (Khinalig: gabaglyk). Shawls were still in use, typically comprising five shawls: three kalagai, one ketva, and one lechek (lechek). The lechek was white, small, and worn downwards, topped by a small red ketva, fol-

lowed by a silk kalagai. The top shawl was usually made of checkered woolen material.

Women wore colored corabs and Çarıqs on their feet. The valchag, a dress sewn at the waist, was made from calico, coarse calico, and satin, with wealthier individuals using satin and velvet. Pants were made from homespun wool or purchased material (daraya).



In winter, women wore a fur coat (kholu), made of sheepskin with the fur inside and the outside covered with some material (velvet for the rich). The kholu had short sleeves and reached the knees. Monists served as decoration for Khinalig women. The costumes of older women included an undershirt, narrow woolen trousers, and a short coat made of black cotton fabric.

Today, the women's costume also has an urban look, although it retains some traditional elements.

#### Language

Khinalig or Ketsh is spoken only in the village of Khinalig. The neighboring villages also speak their

own language, unrelated to Khinalig.

Only around 2100 people live in the village and actively use the language. There are no close relatives to this language, Khinalig language forms a separate branch in the Northeast Caucasian language family tree. Ketsh speakers are mostly bilingual.

The phonetic system of the Khinalig language is quite intricate, comprising 59 consonants and 18 vowels. This complexity contributes to its unique sound structure, making it distinct among the languages in the Nakh-Daghestanian family.

Morphologically, Khinalig features 14 cases, which is characteristic of Nakh-Daghestanian languages. The language distinguishes four genders: masculine, feminine, animate, and inanimate. Furthermore, it employs various endings to convey case, number, possession, tense, and quantity.

## History

According to the preliminary research of historians, Khinalig village was built before our era. According to historical evidence and legends, the history of the Khinalig village is about 5000 years.

Ethnic groups such as the Khinaligs, Budugs, Kryz, as well as the Khaput, Cek, and Alik, living around Shahdag mountain, are also called “Shahdag ethnic groups” or “Shahdag peoples”. The first historical and ethnographic references to the Shahdag peoples date back to the 19th century, describing them as a “living antiquity” atop the Shahdag mountain.

Facts related to the initial settlement in the Khinalig area belong to the Early Bronze Age (the end of the IV millennium BC). As a result of archaeological excavations conducted in 2010–2012, an ancient settlement called “Zangar (Khinalig)” was discovered here. In the 8th century, the Khinalig people accepted Islam through Abu Muslim, the brother of Darbend judge Hisham.

Historically, Khinalig served as a crucial crossroads for the narrow mountain routes connecting the capital of Caucasian Albania, Gabala, located on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Moun-

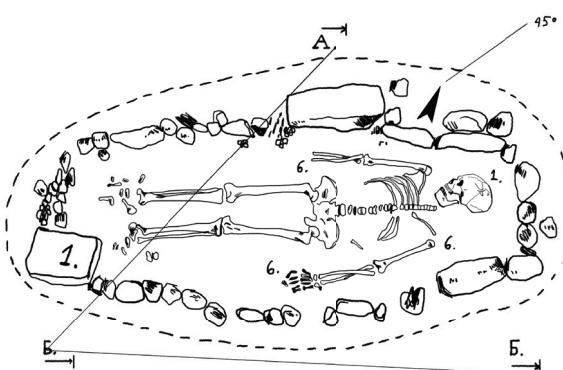
tains, to the North Caucasus and the Derbent region. Other minor mountain paths also converged in Khinalig. Even today, Khinalig plays an essential role as a meeting point for transhumance herders who traverse the same ancient mountain trails that their Albanian forebears followed for economic, political, or even military purposes.

## Archaeological excavations

Excavations and archaeological research have been carried out in Khinalig since 2012. The material and cultural samples found during the excavation are now kept in the scientific fund of the reserve, some of them are displayed in the local museum. The ancient epigraphic monuments and rare manuscripts are being studied. The ancient settlement of “Kima Ligebirish” is located 2 kilometers southeast of Khinalig, on the right bank of Gudyalchay, at an altitude of 1968 meters above sea level. This complex monument is in good condition because covers an area of more than 3 hectares. Fortifications were found on the north side, and numerous graves in stone boxes were found on the south side.

About 40 graves were investigated in the complex and are covering the V–VII centuries BC. All graves are made of river stone and covered with stone slabs. Dead were buried on their backs, in two directions (east-west), with small pottery vessels, weapons, and various ornaments (bronze bracelets, beads, earrings, etc.) placed next to them. Some items are believed to have been imported from Egypt. Some of the finds include bronze phaler with a Gorgon-medusa image, a part of a bronze belt set, an umbon, and a long Roman-style pelta (spear) tip. These material-cultural samples testify previously unknown evidence of Roman expansion in Azerbaijan.

Khinalig holds a significant position in the study of Early Bronze and Iron Age cultures within the Caucasus. Archaeological research in and around Khinalig indicates that this area played a vital role in the cultural development of the Caucasus, from the Bronze Age through various stages up to the Middle Ages. Comparing discoveries from Khinalig with findings from other settlements on the southern slope of the Greater Caucasus, such as Gabala and Shirvan, reveals evidence of complex social and political interactions. This highlights Khinalig’s role in broader regional connections.



The Kura-Araxes culture defines the Bronze Age in Azerbaijan, with bronze production supported by the region's rich copper mines and supplemented by imports from neighboring areas. Archaeological excavations in the vicinity of Khinalig confirm that the area has been inhabited since at least the Early Bronze Age. Recent road construction and housing projects uncovered ancient burial sites and settlements from the Bronze Age, and artifacts collected from these sites show significant population movements in and around Khinalig. The absence of agricultural tools among these artifacts has led scientists to conclude that these graves likely belonged to an ancient nomadic population.

During Antiquity, Caucasian Albania occupied the eastern and southern Greater Caucasus Mountains and developed a written culture with its own unique alphabet. Artifacts from the Kimeligerish archaeological site, dating back to Classical Antiquity, closely

resemble those of Caucasian Albanian origin found in locations such as Gabala, Minghechevir, Mollaisagli, and Shamakhi. This similarity suggests a political connection between Khinalig and Caucasian Albania; this was an active cultural and societal engagement, involving trade and shared spiritual beliefs with other provinces in the region. This supports the hypothesis that the residents of Khinalig were among the 26 tribes that made up the state of Caucasian Albania.

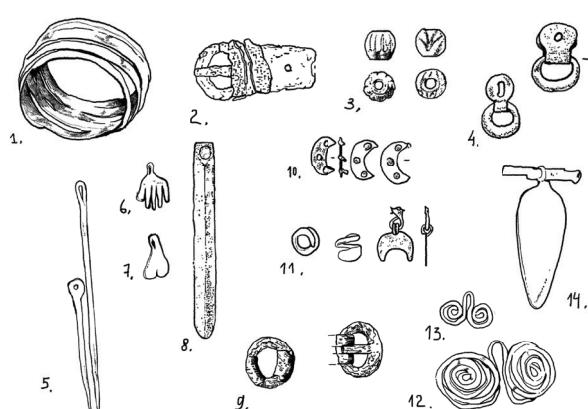
Further evidence of this connection is seen in palimpsest writings from the 6th and 7th centuries, written in the ancient Udi language, the official language of Caucasian Albania. Many terms from these ancient texts persist today in the contemporary Khinalig language. The Udi descendants in the village of Nij, located in Gabala District, continue to use a language strikingly similar to that of the ancient palimpsests.

Historically, Khinalig also served as a crucial crossroads, linking the Caucasian Albanian capital Gabala on the southern slopes of the Greater Caucasus with the North Caucasus and the Derbent region. Additional minor mountain paths converged in Khinalig, making it a meeting point for transhumant herders who traveled these routes for economic, political, and sometimes military purposes. Even today, these trails are used by herders, following the paths of their Albanian ancestors.

Numerous coins found in Khinalig further attest to its established trade connections with neighboring regions. These include coins from the Sassanid era, minted under Shah Khosrow II (591–628), as well as from medieval states like the Atabegs (1136–1225), Ilkhanid Mongols (1258–1336), and Ag Goyunlu (1468–1501). Together, these findings underscore Khinalig's significant role in the broader historical and cultural landscape of the Caucasus.

#### Tales of the village

It is said that once the village of Ketsh was located on the slope of the Ketsh mountain. Several hundred years ago, supposedly, an earthquake occurred in Ketsh. During the earthquake, the village of Ketsh completely collapsed. Many people died, but those who survived moved to the bank of the Damdam river and settled on a small hill. On this hill, they began to cultivate henna.



Since then, the village of Ketsch has been called Khinalig.

Once upon a time... Long ago, there lived a shepherd. It is said that the shepherd grazed his sheep on the White Rock. At noon, during lunchtime, he gathered the sheep. He milked the sheep into a bowl and began to eat bread. At this time, an old woman approached him. She approached and said to the shepherd: "Dear son, milk a little milk into this vessel for me too." When the shepherd was milking, some sheep droppings fell into the milk. The shepherd gave the old woman milk with the droppings. And the old woman, when she drank the milk, noticed the droppings in the bowl. She cursed the shepherd: "May you turn into stone." The shepherd, standing as he was, turned to stone along with his sheep.

Once upon a time, the Ustadegot family had a white horse. It is said that every day they would take the horse to the Kizaz Gorge to graze. It is also said that the horse would return home in the evening covered in sweat. The men of the family decided to find out who was riding the horse and driving it so hard: they smeared the horse's back with resin, took it to the gorge, and let it go. It is said that in the evening, the horse came home with a witch stuck to it. They took the witch off the horse and brought her into the house. To prevent the witch from escaping, they pinned her clothes with needles. One day, they were melting butter in a cauldron — so they say. In their house, there was a little girl. When the woman went outside, the witch said to the little girl: "Pull the needles out of my clothes, and I'll give you these beads." The girl pulled all the needles out of the witch's clothes. The witch jumped up, threw the girl into the cauldron of boiling butter, and escaped.

There were two friends, it is said. And it is said that one had an evil eye, and the other had an even stronger ability to curse. The first one said to the second: "Let's test our eyes." The second friend agreed, and they approached a large white stone and stopped. The first one said: "What a beautiful stone!" As soon as he said these words, the stone split in two. The second friend said: "What powerful eyes you have!" As soon as he said these words, the first friend's eyes fell out.

One day I was sitting at home. In the afternoon Vagif came to me and said: "Let's go to kill a snake".

We went down and wandered around for a while, but we did not get a snake. Then Vagif suggested: "Let's go swimming." After bathing we came back and saw the snake on a big rock. I threw it off the rock with a stick. Then we decided to kill it with stones, but none hit it. The snake ran away and hid under the rock.

They say that one day Mulla Nasreddin returned from the city. Passing by a garden, he glanced inside and saw a large watermelon. He immediately wanted that watermelon. He plucked it and ate half of it. Then he said: "Let people think that a khan passed by here." After a little while, he wanted another watermelon, so he went back and ate the other half. And he said: "Let people think that along with the khan, there was also a servant who ate the second half of the watermelon." After a bit more walking, he wanted another watermelon, so he went back and ate all the remaining rinds. And he said: "Let everyone think that even a donkey was here with the servant, and the donkey ate the rinds."

One day, a scholar and a shepherd went out to sea in a boat. The scholar asked the shepherd, "Do you know what philosophy is?" The shepherd replied, "No." The scholar then said, "In that case, a quarter of your life is wasted." Some time later, the scholar asked again, "Do you know what political economy is?" The shepherd replied, "No." The scholar responded, "Then half of your life is wasted." Suddenly, a wind rose at sea, and the boat was almost overturned. The shepherd asked, "Can you swim?" The scholar replied, "No." The shepherd concluded, "Then your entire life is wasted."

In the vicinity of Khinalig, there are various types of water. Black water is very common in Khinalig. However, black water is not suitable for drinking and does not freeze in winter. Among the diverse waters of Khinalig, there is also sulfur water, which emits a smell of rotten eggs. The locals use this water for medicinal purposes, especially for treating nervous disorders and some internal ailments. Patients often take baths made with this water and are advised to drink tea made from sulfur water during the bath. The best sulfur water can be found in the Topuz Gorge. The most delicious drinking water is near the Eternal Flame. Once someone tastes the water from the Eternal Flame, they are reluctant to leave, and if

they do, they will surely return for more. The waters of Khinalig can be very cold.

When horses reach the age of three, they can be ridden, but they need to be trained beforehand. First, a loop is made at the end of a long rope and thrown over the neck of an unbroken horse. Then, the rope is pulled towards oneself, tightening the horse's neck, and when it falls, a saddle blanket is placed on it. Next, a couple of sacks filled with earth are placed on the horse's back and left under this load for a day. On the following day, a person mounts the horse while another person leads it. After another day, one can ride the horse. Horses come in two types: lazy and fast. No matter how much you beat a lazy horse, it will still move slowly, whereas a fast horse, which doesn't need to be beaten, moves quickly on its own. There are two main types of horses in terms of movement: packhorses and racehorses. When riding a packhorse, a person doesn't get tired, while riding a racehorse can be tiring. That's why we prefer riding packhorses.

There was a fat sheep in the herd, which they decided to slaughter. After they placed it on a horse and brought it down, they knocked it to the ground and tied its legs. Then they took a knife and sharpened it, after which they turned the ram's face to the south and slaughtered it. If the ram's face isn't turned to the south, the meat won't be "clean", so they had to slaughter the ram on a sloping surface so the blood would flow onto the ground. Then they removed its skin, took out all the entrails, and discarded the dirty parts. Finally, they cut the meat into pieces and roasted it well.



## **G L O S S A R Y**

Məhələ — neighborhood

Pir — a place of worship affiliated with religious beliefs

Shirvan — 2 manats (Azerbaijani currency), used to be national

Yaylaqs — summer pastures

Qishlaqs — winter pastures

Papakha — wool hat

Corab or Jorabs — multicolored socks with intricate patterns, knitted from the toe-up.

Çarıq — a type of clothing intended for the feet. Protects the foot from physical damage and cold.

Calico — a type of plain-woven textile made from unbleached and often not fully processed cotton.

It has a rough texture and typically features simple, printed designs or patterns.

Valchag — cut-off dress sewn at the waist

Umbon — metal plate of a hemispherical or conical shape, placed in the middle a shield that protects the warrior's hand

Phaler or phalera — a sculpted disk, usually made of gold, silver, bronze or glass, and worn on the breastplate during parades by Roman soldiers who had been awarded it as a kind of medal.

## A F T E R W O R D

Khinalig has immense potential for further research and documentation. Many aspects of the village starting from archaeological findings and ending with language and archiving can take years of studying. Khinalig is one of the rare examples of a culture that has not been destroyed or assimilated by imperialism and globalisation since the village up until recently isolated and preserved in the mountains. Now, that Khinalig has its popularity, one needs to tackle institutionalization matters with consideration and cooperate with local scholars and enthusiasts.

The Khinalig culture has been for many years predominantly developed orally and through word of mouth. This is an important aspect that researchers should consider: the best source of information lies in conversations with locals. Khinalig being predominantly oral culture brings another project topic: since the language only recently gained its Extended Latin script. It is still tough to use digitally and design publications with it. Working with the script can be a challenging and inspiring task for designers.

This monography is an introduction to the village which imitates a census format used by post-colonial governmental administration workers. In this publication, the format is used more loosely so the publication can be used as an introduction to the research about Khinalig. There are many more untold stories and undiscovered parts of the village, which will be covered in our further publications.

## B I O G R A P H I E S

Nilufer Musaeva is an artist and designer with Azerbaijani roots currently based in Germany. She is graduating MA Digital Media in Bremen, awarded by DAAD grant. Has interface and graphic design skills, highly interested in finding non-profitable ways to use them, as well as research the institutions behind graphic design education. In her latest project she looks back to her origin, and offers her design and art mediation skills to the indigenous community of a mountainous village Khinalig.

Izzət Bağırov is a historian and researcher at the “Khinalig and Köç Yolu” State Historical-Cultural and Ethnographic Reserve. A native of Khinalig, he plays an essential part in exploring and identifying archaeological monuments within the reserve’s boundaries. His work involves in studying and promoting the cultural heritage of Khinalig village and the Migration Route as well as contributions to social projects focused on preserving the Khinalig language.

Nika Lakrba is a visual artist and designer with Abkhazian and Jewish roots, currently based in Moscow. A graduate of VGIK University, she goes beyond her background in theatrical decorative art and animation. Art for her is a free, unrestricted world where she can fully express her temperament and emotions. In her work uses diverse mediums like painting, ceramics, and photography. Deeply inspired by Mexican culture and primitive art her work explores freedom of expression through unconventional forms. Her artworks are her safe world.

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