



The World Zoroastrian Organisation

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[The Restoration of the Zingar Atashgah: the Atashkadeh at Jek, Azerbaijan - A report by Farroukh Jorat](#)

My article “**Atashgah of Khinalig. The highest fire temple of the world**” was published in the “**Hamazor**” (Issue 1/2017, pp. 8-12). The article highlighted my team’s work on the Atashkadeh (Atashgah) restoration with the **help and support of The World Zoroastrian Organisation and The Firuz Madon Foundation.**

The Restored “Atashgah of Khinalig” is located in Azerbaijan, 200 km away from Baku near the Khinalig village (Guba distr.) at an altitude of ~3000 meters on the slope of the Shah-dag mountain. This is the highest fire temple of the world and its eternal natural flame burns due to a field of methane clathrate (supramolecular compound of methane and water). It was listed in the “List of state-protected historical and cultural monuments of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, ID #4647.

After the article of Restoration of “Atashgah of Khinalig” was published in the Hamazor, Hasan Aghayev (local school teacher, who with his team of four builders restored the temple structure) and myself got a lot of positive feedback from Zoroastrians around the world.



Restored Atashgah of Khinalig, 3000 m altitude

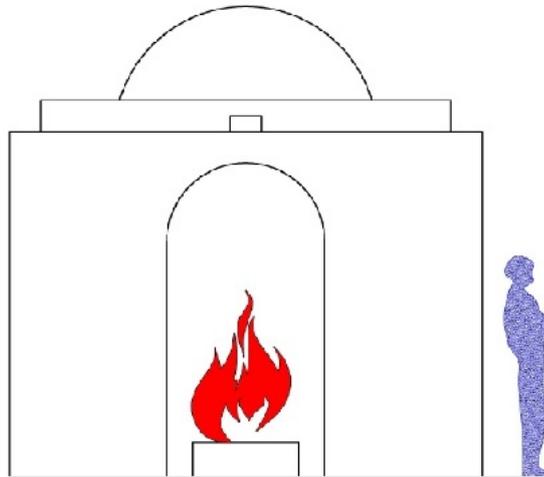
My team's effort to restore the abandoned "Zingar Atshagah" after the overwhelming support we received after the restoration of The Atashgah of Khinalig

Atashgah of Khinalig was not the only Atashgah in that area. Another abandoned Atashgah was located near Jek village (~20 km far from Atashgah of Khinalig and at ~1500 m altitude). Our team discovered that it was an abandoned Atashgah with no flame and covered by more than 1 m layer of stones, mud, sands and soils.



Farroukh Jorat at the Atashgah near Jek village, 1500 m altitude. (It is covered by thick layer of soils and stones)

The basic idea is to restore this Atashgah as a fire temple of traditional Sassanian style (“*chahartaq*” structure with “*gonbad*”).



Draft of “chahartaq” for Atashgah of Jek

Permission process

When the Atashgah of Khinalig was under restoration process, the use of modern materials was not allowed. If modern materials were used, it would not have been considered as the restoration of an ancient structure, but only as a construction of a new one. New religious buildings can be built only by registered religious groups of local residents. There is no officially registered local Zoroastrian community of Azerbaijan yet. Therefore the structure of the Atashgah of Khinalig restored earlier was of natural rock stone bricks as it was in ancient times. Same will be the restoration process of the Atashgah near Jek village.

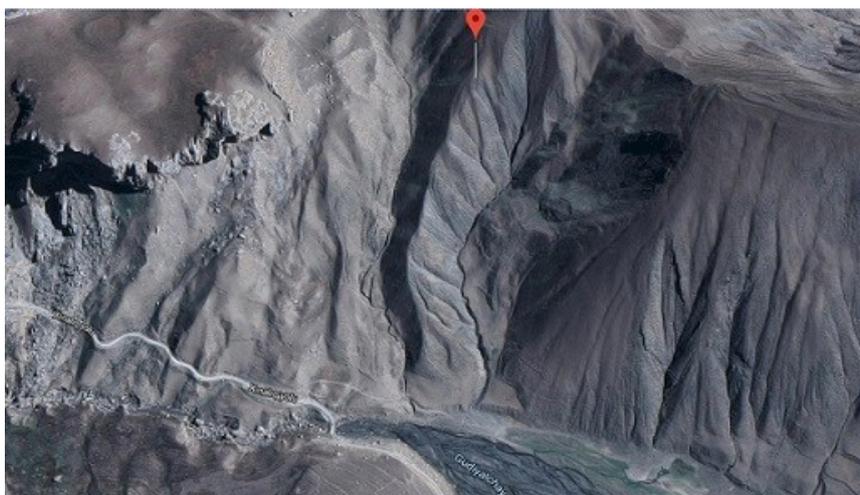
A major issue that my team faces is to obtain permission from the government to carry out restoration work. In Azerbaijan, up to April 2017, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was responsible for such projects. Our application for restoration of Atashgah and its drawing was sent to them in September 2017.

Step 1. Archaeological excavations

In December 2017, archaeological work was carried out by our team on the site. This work is carried out by a special group of scientists. Carrying out archaeological work was a necessity before obtaining the permission for restoration, according to the local law.

The Atashgah is located on the inclined surface of the Shahdag mountain spur between the village of Jek and the bridge over the Gudialchay river. **The place where this Atashgah is located is revered by the local inhabitants and is called “Zangār” (Zīngar).** According to their testimonies, the fire disappeared approximately 30 years ago because of a landslide which covered the place of gas outlet.

The coordinates (latitude and longitude, degrees and decimal minutes) of fire place are 41 11.1393, 048 13.0085.



Space survey of the territory



The adjacent area with characteristic traces of landslides

After digging to a depth of more than 1 meter, it became evident that the fire temple foundation was originally a quadrant with a diagonal about 4 meters.



The process of excavation, December 2017



Ancient stonework

The upper surface layer of the earth consisted of a clay-rubble layer 20 cm thick, below the ground was a burned 1 m layer of clay, crushed stone and sand of black color.



Central crater with no flame (1 m depth)

The height of the uncovered existing masonry is 40-45 cm; width is 50-60 cm. No flame occurred after the initial digging. Therefore the depth of the central gas outlet excavation was enlarged 120 cm deeper. As a result finally we saw the flame and weak water flow.



Finally we uncovered natural burning flame (2 m depth)

Step 2. Paving the way. Working on-site

Three months after excavation works, in order not to waste time, we decided to perform some preparatory works that do not require permission. Our team worked on the creation of an access road, removal of a layer of excessive soil and water drainage.

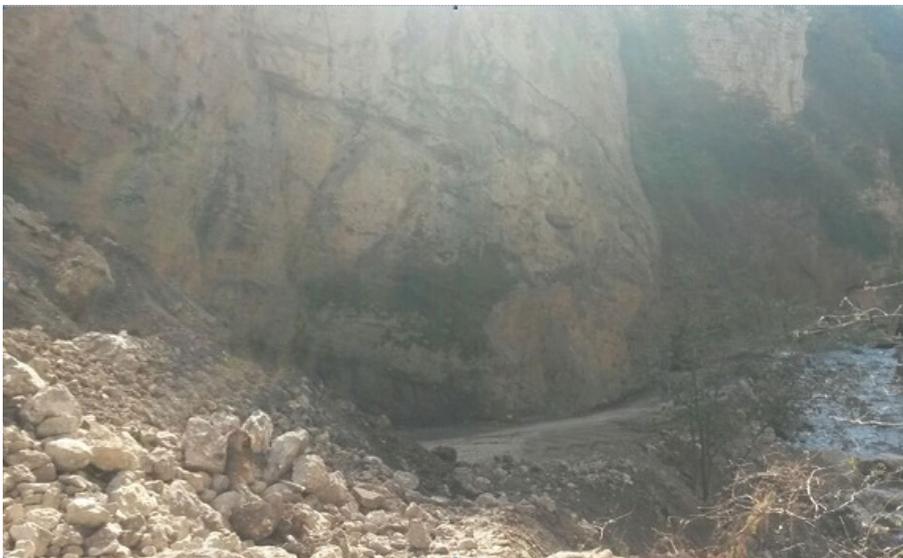
Despite our team removing the mudflow by digging more than 1 m in depth, the flame is too weak yet and therefore we must remove 1 m of soil again on the construction terrace. This will be used for leveling the fire temple and nearby site area of 20 m².



Removing the mudflow from nearby zone for the future leveling the construction terrace

Clathrate decomposes into methane and water. Methane burns as altar flame, water saturates the soil and seeps away as a spring or small river.

Rock debris in the spring time made it impossible to access the construction site for logistic vehicles that were to bring sand, stones, cement and tools.



Stone debris on the driveway to the top of the mountain

Therefore we cleared a ~2 km driveway place from the “Guba – Khinalig” road to site.



Laying the way



Step 3. Still waiting for permission

While we were performing archeological excavations, our application was under consideration by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, due to the new decree of the President of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was abolished in April 2018. The newly created State Tourism Agency is now in charge of the restoration of monuments. We had to submit a fresh application to this new State Tourism Agency.

However, our application to the New State Tourism Agency is still pending from April 2018 till date. The State Tourism Agency has not given our team a negative answer and has verbally expressed its agreement for the restoration work. However, official permission for the legal construction work has not yet been issued.

However, our team does not despair the situation and we are sure to get permission and are ready to continue the restoration.

Special acknowledgements:

I would like to express my special appreciation and thanks to Mrs. Smita Crishna-Godrej for her trust and patience. She visited the restored Atashgah of Khinalig in September 2017 and kindly agreed to be a Financial Patron of The Atashkadeh at Jek Restoration Project. She has sponsored all costs of works performed by our team, including the government fee for the archaeological expedition, on-site preparation works and road laying.

I would also like to thank The World Zoroastrian Organisation Chairman Mr. Shahpur Captain and other members for their support.

Thank you all!



Farroukh Jorat (name at birth – Akper Aliev, variant of spelling Akbar Aliyev) is an aerospace engineer and professor of material science at the National Aviation Academy (Baku, Azerbaijan).

He was born in Baku in 1978 and in 1985 moved in Moscow, Russia. Post graduated in Bauman State Technical University (2001), worked there as an assistant and then at “Tupolev” Aircraft Design Company as an aerospace engineer. He was initiated into Zoroastrianism in Moscow in 2005 by Mobed Kamran Jamshidi and Anjoman Bozorg Bazgasht. Since 2010 he lives in Baku.

Farroukh is best known for his contributions in research of the history of Zoroastrianism in CIS countries and is a member of Russian Anjoman (blagoverie.org). Farroukh is a Life Member of The World Zoroastrian Organization.

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Kind Regards,

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