



## Section 5. Psychological aspects of historical events

DOI:10.29013/EJEAP-26-2-33-36



### SHEKI – OSSIKA. AN ANCIENT CITY OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA

*Zemfira Hajiyeveva*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Institute of History and Ethnology named after A. A. Bakikhanov,  
National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan

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**Cite:** Hajiyeveva Z. (2026). *Sheki – Ossika. An Ancient City of Caucasian Albania*. *European Journal of Education and Applied Psychology* 2026, No 2. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJEAP-26-2-33-36>

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#### Abstract

Ossika is recognized as one of the ancient cities listed in Caucasian Albania, as documented by the ancient Greek cartographer and geographer Claudius Ptolemy during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. It has been proposed by Minorsky that Ossika could potentially be equated with the vanished city of Sheki. In the latter half of the 19th century, I. Yanovsky used Ptolemy's map and coordinates to determine the approximate location of this city. According to Yanovsky, Ossika is situated southwest of Nukha and in close proximity to the village of Shekili. However, Minorsky casts doubt on other proposed identifications.

**Keywords:** *Azerbaijan, Caucasus, Ossika, Caucasian Albania*

In 1924, at the Eastern Faculty of Azerbaijan State University, a course of lectures delivered by V. V. Bartold was devoted to the history of Caucasian Albania. Localizing the territory of Caspiana, V. V. Bartold attributes this region to the area at the confluence of the Araxes and Kura rivers, where the city of Baylakan was later located, while the territory of Albania was "located directly near the Caspian Sea."

A more interesting brief article by V. Bartold on the history of medieval Arran was published in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. According to V. V. Bartold, Arran corresponded to Albania; its territory extended from Der-

bent to Tiflis, and to the south and southwest it ended at the Araxes River (Araz – Z. G.). Later, Arran was the name for the region between Shirvan and Azerbaijan (the interfluvium of the Kura and Araxes). The city of Partav (Barda), to which the capital of Albania was transferred in the 6th century AD, was located on the Terter River. As late as the 10th century, in the area of the city of Barda, people spoke "Arrani," i.e., "Albanian." Arran was conquered by the Arabs under Caliph Uthman (644–656). V. V. Bartold says nothing about the settlement of tribes and socio-economic relations in medieval Albania.

In 1926, the scientific work of A. A. Bakikhanov, "Gulistan-i Iram" (The Rose Garden of Iram), was published, where he first describes the history of Azerbaijan from ancient times up to its incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1813. In his research, A. A. Bakikhanov localizes the ancient settlement of Caucasian Albania at the site of present-day Derbent, Niga at the site of Nukha, the Albanus River as Samur, and the Casius River as Manas. He identifies Kemakhiya as Shamakhi, and Kabala or Kabalaka as present-day Gabala. As the ancient Roman erudite writer Pliny the Elder wrote in the 1st century BC, this was one of the ancient cities of Caucasian Albania, the main city, i.e., the capital.

In an article on the history of Sheki, published in 1927 in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, V. Minorsky also touches upon the history of Caucasian Albania. In ancient times, the Sheki region was part of Albania, which was a confederation of multilingual tribes (Z.G.: presumably living in Caucasian Albania). The remnants of these tribes are the Udi people, originating from the region of Otena, which was located on the territory of present-day Ganja, Shamkir, and Tovuz. The Udi language is related to the Shahdag group of languages (Khinalug, Budukh, etc.). According to Vladimir Minorsky, Kabala and the Albanian Gates correspond to Gabala and the pass leading to the Samur valley (the road from Khachmaz and Kutkashen (Gabala)).

Ossika is one of the listed ancient cities of Caucasian Albania, according to the ancient Greek cartographer and geographer Claudius Ptolemy (1st-2nd centuries AD). Ossika, as Minorsky suggested, may correspond to the vanished city of Sheki. In the late first half of the 19th century, I. Yanovsky, based on Ptolemy's map and coordinates, determined the location of this city, i.e., Ossika, as southwest of the city of Nukha, not far from the village of Shekili. However, according to Minorsky, other identifications are doubtful. The toponym "Nukha" itself appears only in the 18th century after its destruction by a natural disaster. However, considering the construction of cities by the Sasanians and Arabs, they probably meant the restoration of settlements that had existed before them.

It is necessary to analyze a short but substantive article by A. E. Krymsky on the histo-

ry of Caucasian Albania concerning the cities of Kabala and Sheki. A. E. Krymsky asserts that the territory of Albania was located on the left and right banks of the Kura River from Iberia to the Caspian Sea. Albanians lived on both banks, despite the political border that sometimes ran along the Kura. Subsequently, Albania or (Aghvania) was called Arran and covered both banks of the Kura River from Derbent to Georgia. Later, Arran is localized only on the right bank of the Kura, between the Kura and Araxes.

Regarding the toponym Niga, researchers' opinions differ: S. S. Veliyev, following A. A. Bakikhanov, believes that Ptolemy thus designated ancient Sheki – Nukha, destroyed by the earthquake of 1772 (Bakikhanov A. A., p. 13). Muravyov localizes Niga in the area of Dzveli Anaga in eastern Georgia, near Tibaani (Veliyev S. S. 1976, p. 132).

Not far from the Sheki region of Azerbaijan, in 66 BC, on the bank of the Aldzhigan-chay (i.e., this river), the fiercest battle took place between the Albanians and the Roman legions. The work of B. Dorn contains interesting information about the reason the Romans named this river Albanus. The fact is that in Latin, "alba" means "white." During the flood, streams flowing into the Albanus River – Aldzhigan-chay – carry white, foamy water. The author draws an analogy with the name of the Kura River valley, which in Azerbaijani sounds like Agdash, due to the white sand covering it (Krymsky A. E., p. 342). It is appropriate here to recall the words of the French geographer and sociologist Jean Jacques Élisée Reclus that "rivers carry on their waves both the history and the life of peoples."

Thus, regarding the localization of Ossika, the analogy with the name Sheki is simply obvious. This name is associated with the ancient Eastern tribe of the Saks – one of the branches of the Scythians, whose totem was the deer. Their name also gave rise to the name of ancient Sakasena – one of the regions of Caucasian Albania, which occupied the right bank of the Kura and part of the plain of Garabagh.

Sakasena (Greek Σακασηνήν, Sakasena from Persian Saka-šayana – "inhabited territory of the Saks" Bartold V. V., 1925). is a historical region on the territory of modern Azerbaijan. It was the former core of the

Scythian kingdom of Ishkuza that existed in the 7th-6th centuries BC (Bartold V. V., 1925). It received its name from the Scythian tribes (Saks in the Eastern tradition) (Bartold W., 1913). At the end of the 6th – beginning of the 5th century BC, it was part of the satrapy of Media under the Achaemenids (Krymsky A. E.).

In this regard, when analyzing written sources, we consider only those ancient authors whose information touches upon issues directly related to the ancient cities of Caucasian Albania. Thus, in Strabo's "Geography," consisting of 17 books, Book 11 (P. 490–533) is devoted to the study of the Caucasus, Hyrcania, Parthia, Bactria, Media, and Armenia. In his account of the ancient cities of Caucasian Albania, Strabo mentions only two cities in Utia – Ainiania and Anariaca: "The Ainianes in Utia built a city." The Ainianes were a Thessalian tribe, and therefore, from Strabo's text, it can be concluded that Greek settlers lived in the territory of Utia. A clear example is the writing on stone stelae with inscriptions in ancient Greek discovered on the territory of Sheki (in the village of Dekhne).

The first information about the cities of Caucasian Albania is found in the encyclopedic work of the ancient Roman writer Pliny the Elder (22 or 24 BC – 79 AD), who considered Kabalaka-Khabalaka (Gabala) one of the main ancient cities of Caucasian Albania. According to the ancient Greek geographer and cartographer Claudius Ptolemy (who lived in Alexandria in the 2nd century AD), this city was located between two rivers, the Albanus and the Casius. Ptolemy also indicated the existence here of six settlements besides Kabala: Khobota, Moziata, Misia, Khadana, and Alama. The author mentions two settlements in the interfluvium of the Casius and Herrus: Tiauna and Tabilaka. Regarding the city of Tabilaka, according to V. V. Latyshev, the manuscripts of Ptolemy instead of this name contain Pliny's word Cabalaka. The last city on Ptolemy's list is Tilbis, located between the Herrus River and the Soana River.

In his work "On the Question of the Borders of Ancient Albania" (Moscow, 1937, Vol. I), S. V. Yushkov points out that the Soana River is the Terek River, Herrus is the Aksay, Kaysiy is the Sulak, and Albanus is the Samur. He also stated that the entire mod-

ern territory of Dagestan was entirely part of the state of Caucasian Albania (Yushkov S. V., 1937). As Ptolemy reports, the Albanus River originates in the upper reaches of the Caucasus Mountains, and these two rivers flow into the Caspian Sea. Between these two rivers, Ptolemy lists the following settlements: Mosisa, Iobula, Iuna, Embolayon, Adiabla, Ablana, Mamekhia, Ossika, Sioda, as well as Samunida, i.e., Samunis (Mingachevir – Z.G.). Along with Samunis at the mouth of the Kura River, Ptolemy places the ancient city of Baruka, and along the western shore of the Caspian, cities such as Taleiba, Gelda, Albania, and Gaytara. Ptolemy's text on cities states: "Beyond the mouth of the Soana River – the city of Telayba, at the mouth of the Albanus River – the city of Gaytara or Gangara, beyond which is the mouth of the Kura River." The ancient city of Gaytara or Gangara – the existence of this city suggests Baku; according to K. V. Trever, the ancient city of Baku grew up on the site where this ancient city once stood. Academician V. V. Bartold argued that Gaytara was located south of Baku, on the site of Alat, where "the railway from Tiflis approaches the Caspian Sea," beyond which is the mouth of the Kura River, at the mouth of the Pirsaat. Ptolemy also provides a list of cities and settlements indicating their location between specific rivers and with degrees.

According to Strabo, before the emergence of a unified Albanian state in the second half of the 2nd century BC, a state was formed as a result of the unification of 26 tribes and nationalities speaking different languages and having their own king. Ptolemy reports the existence of 29 settlements in Caucasian Albania: "the Alban people hold the whole plain along the Cyrus" ("planitium omnem a Cyro usque Albanorum gens tenet").

Until recently, archaeological evidence for written sources was insufficient. However, excavations conducted on the territory of Sheki in two necropolises, "Tepebashi" and "Yonjaly," in the village of Fazyl, confirmed the fact that ancient Scythians lived here. During the period of Alexander the Great and the fall of the Achaemenid Empire, the territory of Sakasena was incorporated into the territory of Atropatene, and then into Caucasian Albania. We know that the first Albanian king, Aran, was from the Sisak tribe. Written

sources and found artifacts confirm that the state structure of Albania was based on the state structure of the ancient Scythians. Here we clearly observe the Early Iron Age, the Iron Age, and the gradual transition from the Sakian era to the ancient period.

Archaeological excavations in the village of Fazyl reflect the culture of various Turkic peoples united in the states of Mannaia, the Scythian Kingdom, Atropatene, and Albania, which played an important role in ethno-political history, as well as in the process of forming a single people on the territory of

Azerbaijan. In Albania, various ethnic groups and religions met and interacted, forming a distinctive and rich culture. Along with the worship of the moon, sky, sun, and the single god Tangri, Christianity gradually developed. Evidence of this is the church in the village of Kish – the mother of churches in the Caucasus, founded by Elisaeus in the 1st century AD.

In the 21st century, one of the oldest cities in Azerbaijan – Sheki – became part of the UNESCO cultural heritage. Having absorbed many cultures, the city of Sheki remembers its ancient history.

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submitted 03.04.2025;

accepted for publication 17.04.2026;

published 30.06.2026

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Contact: zemfira.hajiyeva@outlook.com