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# DİPLOMATİYA ALƏMİ WORLD OF DIPLOMACY

58/2022  
SPECIAL EDITION

## ***SHUSHA***

***Cultural Capital of Azerbaijan  
Past and Present***

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**SHUSHHA**  
Cultural Capital of  
**Azerbaijan**  
P a s t   a n d   P r e s e n t

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## Introduction

The present special edition of the World of Diplomacy presents to its distinguished readers a unique city of Azerbaijan- Shusha, which played an exceptional role in the cultural and socio-political life of the country and broader South Caucasus region. It is issued on the occasion of the “Year of Shusha”, marked in 2022.

Founded in 1752 by Panah Ali Khan Javanshir (1693-1763), head of the Karabakh Khanate, Shusha is located on the hill of a picturesque mountain overlooking the surrounding area. It was first called “Panahabad” after its founder. Later, it was renamed Shusha, deriving this name from an Azerbaijani word “şüşə” (a glass), reflecting its crystal-clear air.

By virtue of its distinct architecture, Shusha is a city-museum. It is also the birthplace of many famous Azerbaijani writers, poets, musicians, artists and political figures.

The peculiar geographic location, picturesque landscape of the city, and, most importantly, its vibrant residents and their life and creativeness led to spreading of the city’s fame beyond the boundaries of Azerbaijan. The city was sometimes called the “cradle of Karabakh”, “pearl of Azerbaijan” or the “conservatory of the Caucasus”.

Shusha is more than an ordinary city and therefore the preservation of its historical heritage has been a matter of special importance. In 1977 Heydar Aliyev, the National Leader of the Azerbaijani people, initiated the adoption of the decision “On declaring the Historical Part of the City of Shusha a Historical and Architectural Reserve”.

Though Shusha is not as ancient as many other cities of Azerbaijan it has been through many challenges since its founding. In this regard, it cannot but be mentioned the military occupation of Shusha by the armed forces of Armenia that took place on May 8, 1992.

During the almost three-decade-long occupation, Shusha witnessed the ethnic cleansing of all its Azerbaijani population, the physical destruction, desecration and looting of its rich historical and cultural heritage. The purpose behind this behaviour was to change the Azerbaijani identity of the city. Fortunately, this policy was not destined to succeed.

On November 8, 2020, Shusha was liberated by the armed forces of Azerbaijan. This meant the restoration of justice and the triumph of international law. It paved the way for the end of the nearly three-decade-long conflict and laid conditions for the sustainable peace and development of the South Caucasus.



Following the end of the conflict, Azerbaijan embarked upon the reconstruction and rehabilitation works in the de-occupied territories, including in Shusha.

A number of decisions were adopted to facilitate further legal and organizational measure for the restoration, development, protection and promotion of the city. Thus, on May 7, 2021, the President of Azerbaijan, H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, signed a decree declaring the city of Shusha to be the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. On May 31, 2021, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the cultural capital of Azerbaijan – the city of Shusha” was adopted. On January 5, 2022, the President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree declaring 2022 as the “Year of Shusha”.

The ongoing large-scale reconstruction works, international festivals of music and poetry, exhibitions of carpet weaving and paintings and many other similar events held so far in Shusha demonstrate the dedication of the Government and people of Azerbaijan to the cause of the revival of Shusha. All these activities leave no doubt that the city will regain its former glory and spirit and become again a symbol of human creativity and development.

The present edition of the World of Diplomacy offers a reading journey to the past and present of Shusha. In this respect, the authors share their views on the history of the founding of Shusha, its mesmerizing architecture, famous music school, rich traditions of carpet-weaving and other activities of the cultural figures originated from the city. In doing so, they show the importance of Shusha for the culture of Azerbaijan and its impact beyond the boundaries of Azerbaijan. The articles also shed light on the catastrophe that Shusha faced at the end of the 20th century and how those tragic events grasped the world’s attention and inform the readers about the process of the city’s revival now.

The editorial team takes this opportunity to thank all the authors for their contribution to the present edition. Special gratitude should be expressed also to Professor Karim Shukurov, Director of the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Science, who by comments and suggestions rendered the needed support to the editorial team.



# Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Declaring Shusha the Cultural Capital of Azerbaijan\*

The city of Shusha has historically been one of the key centers of the historical-cultural and social-political life of Azerbaijan. In 1977, upon the initiative of Heydar Aliyev, the National Leader of our people, a decision was made on “Declaring the Historical Part of the City of Shusha as a Historical-Architectural Reserve”. As a result of the decision the important steps were taken for the protection of monuments and perpetuation of memories of the prominent cultural figures in Shusha.

On May 8, 1992, the Republic of Armenia, as a result of its military aggression against Azerbaijan, occupied the city of Shusha and implemented the policy of destruction of the historical and cultural heritage of our people in the city.

Historical justice was restored with decisive struggle of our Army and on November 8, 2020, the city of Shusha was liberated from the military occupation. An inventory of the damage caused to the city, its historical-cultural heritage and nature has been immediately carried out, and restoration works has started. Great attention has also been paid to the public administration in Shusha to ensure the flexibility and efficiency in organizing reconstruction works. The Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the territories liberated from the occupation has been first appointed to the district of Shusha.

Shusha should be treated with special care and sensitivity due to its historical and cultural significance and exceptional spiritual value for the Azerbaijani people. In this regard, further improvement of public administration and legal regulation in Shusha, along with ensuring the restoration and preservation of the historical and cultural heritage in the city, will create favorable conditions for its continuous development.

Guided by Article 109, paragraph 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in order to restore the historical appearance of the city of Shusha, return its former glory and traditional meaningful cultural life as well as to promote it internationally as a bright pearl of Azerbaijan’s centuries-old rich culture, architectural and urban planning, I hereby decide as follows:

1. The city of Shusha is declared as the cultural capital of Azerbaijan.
2. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan is instructed to resolve the issues arising from this Decree.

**Ilham Aliyev**

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Baku city, May 7, 2021

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\*The present text is an unofficial translation of the Decree from the Azerbaijani language. The original can be accessed on <https://president.az/az/articles/view/51394>



# Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Declaring 2022 as the “Year of Shusha” in the Republic of Azerbaijan\*

Shusha, the crown of Karabakh, is a sacred place for our people. Love for Shusha is an integral part of the spiritual existence of every Azerbaijani.

The city of Shusha, which was founded in 1752 by Karabakh Khan Panah Ali Khan and its 270th anniversary will be celebrated this year, has passed rich development path and played an exceptional role in the cultural and socio-political life of Azerbaijan and the entire South Caucasus.

This city, which has always preserved its unique historical appearance and the peculiar environment, has inscribed the names of great personalities it has brought up in the remarkable pages of our literary, cultural, scientific and social thought chronicles.

The rapid development of the city of Shusha in the 70s of the last century is closely associated with the name of our National Leader Heydar Aliyev. It is upon National Leader’s initiative that the special decisions with regard to the development of the city were adopted. Since that time, construction works in Shusha were expanded and important steps were taken to perpetuate the memory of our cultural figures.

Shusha, which had a strategic position, was occupied by the armed forces of Armenia on May 8, 1992, following its military aggression against Azerbaijan. As a result of the acts of vandalism hundreds of historical and cultural monuments in the city were destroyed during the occupation.

On November 8, 2020, the brave Azerbaijani Army liberated the city of Shusha in the 44-day Patriotic War that was fought for the cause of justice. The Shusha victory paved the way for the capitulation of Armenia, became a triumph of the heroic spirit of our people and was engraved in our history as the Victory Day.

Immediately after the Shusha victory, the restoration of historical and cultural monuments in the city, along with infrastructure construction, has started, a serious attention has been paid to the issue of state administration to ensure flexibility and efficiency of the reconstruction works and the Administration of the Shusha City State Reserve has been established.

Huge projects are being carried out today to restore the true historical appearance of the city of Shusha that has been declared to be the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. Preparation of the Master Plan of the city of Shusha, the restoration of the original appearance of the bust of the great poet

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\*The present text is an unofficial translation of the Decree from the Azerbaijani language. The original can be accessed on <https://president.az/az/articles/view/55197>



Molla Panah Vagif and his museum-mausoleum complex, the opening of the house-museum of Bulbul and the statue of Uzeyir Hajibeyli, as well as the process of restoration of historical, religious and architectural monuments here constitute the parts of the full-fledged works in the cultural capital of our country.

The restoration of the tradition of holding “Kharibulbul” music festival and the Vagif Poetry Days in front of the magnificent Mausoleum of Vagif in the Jidir Duzu plain also shows that Shusha is rapidly reviving and returning to its full cultural life that it had before.

Guided by Article 109, paragraph 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and taking into account the historical importance and high cultural and spiritual value of Shusha for the people of Azerbaijan, I hereby decide as follows:

1. 2022 is declared as the “Year of Shusha” in the Republic of Azerbaijan.
2. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan is instructed to develop and implement an action plan on the “Year of Shusha”.

**Ilham Aliyev**

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Baku city, January 5, 2022



# AZERBAIJAN'S CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SHUSHA IN THE FOCUS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

*Yashar T. Aliyev\* Tofiq F. Musayev\*\**

At the end of 1987, during the existence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Armenia made unlawful and groundless territorial claims on Azerbaijan's autonomous province of mountainous Garabagh. These claims, which were camouflaged with alleged care of Armenians living in the area, but, in effect, were part of the long nurtured plan of annexing and ethnically cleansing the ancestral Azerbaijani lands, marked the beginning of the assaults on the Azerbaijanis and their expulsion from both the autonomous province and Armenia itself.

As a result, more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis, who had remained in Armenia out of once half-a-million population living in the Azerbaijani Khanate of Iravan, were brutally expelled from their homeland at the end of the 1980s and their historical and cultural heritage consistently and deliberately eradicated. Those monuments, buildings and religious sites that survived until the late 1980s have since been destroyed or subjected to the so-called "reconstruction" in such a way as to alter their Azerbaijani authenticity. All Azerbaijani historical localities were renamed throughout Armenia, and all Azerbaijani cemeteries in that country were destroyed and desecrated.

That those actions were apparent manifestations of violent and racist policies and practice at the State level has been evidenced in the same deliberate methods applied by Armenia to the territories of Azerbaijan during the almost 30 years of their occupation.

In the early 1990s, Armenia launched an aggressive war against Azerbaijan and seized – through the use of force in violation of international law – the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan consisting of the former autonomous province of mountainous Garabagh, the surrounding seven districts (Aghdam, Fuzuli, Gubadly, Kalbajar, Lachin, Jabrayil, Zangilan), seven villages in the Gazakh district (Baganys Ayrym, Kheyrymly, Ashaghy Askipara, Barkhudarly, Sofulu, Gyzylhajly and Yukhary Askipara), and the village of Karki in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Among the occupied areas in mountainous Garabagh was the city of Shusha – one of Azerbaijan's significant historical and cultural centers, where Azerbaijanis constituted 98 per cent of the population before the war.

\* Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations.

\*\* LL.M. in International Human Rights Law (Essex).





Shusha was founded in 1752 by Panah Ali Khan Javanshir – the ruler of the Garabagh Khanate. There are many unique historical, cultural and religious sites in the city, such as Panah Khan Castle, Gara Boyukkhanyim Castle, Yukhary Govhar Agha, Ashaghy Govhar Agha, Saatly, Khoja Marjanly, Merdinli, Kocharli, Julfalar, Hajy Yusifli, Chol Gala, Taza Mahalla and Chukhur Mahalla mosques, the caravanserais and mosques of Mashadi Shukur Mirsiyab and Mashadi Huseyn Mirsiyab, the madrasas of the Yukhary and Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosques, the House of Natavan, the Shusha Museum of History, the Shusha Museum of Carpets, the Garabagh Museum of History, the Garabagh Museum of Literature, the State Gallery of Pictures, the Museum of Uzeyir Hajybayov, the Museum of Bulbul, the Museum of Mir Mohsun Navvab and the mausoleum of Molla Panah Vagif.

In particular, the construction of the Ashaghy (Lower) and Yukhary (Upper) Govhar Agha mosques in the city was begun during the reigns of Pahah Ali Khan Javanshir and Ibrahim Khalil Khan Javanshir in the eighteenth century and was completed in the late nineteenth century. Named after the poetess Princess Govhar Agha, these mosques are considered to be symbols of Shusha and masterpieces of Oriental architecture.

In the nineteenth century, Shusha became the flourishing cultural capital of Azerbaijan, as many of the greatest poets, singers, musicians, composers and artists were born and lived in the city. Among them, the poetess Khurshidbanu Natavan – daughter of the last ruler of the Garabagh Khanate, Mehdi Gulu Khan (who ruled from 1806 to 1822); the composer and author of the first opera in the Islamic world and of the national anthem of Azerbaijan, Uzeyir Hajibayov; the scientist, artist, musicologist and poet Mir Mohsun Navvab; the writers Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev and Najaf bey Vazirov; the tar performer and composer Mirza Sadigjan; the folk singers Jabbar Garyaghdioghlu, Khan Shushinski and Seyyid Shushunski; and the opera tenor Bulbul.

The National Leader of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev characterized Shusha as a great historical monument.<sup>1</sup> In 1977, the city of Shusha was declared a State Historical and Architectural Reserve of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan.

Shusha is home to one of the leading schools of Mugham – an ancient Azerbaijani genre of vocal and instrumental music. In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed the Azerbaijani mugham as a “Masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity” and, five years later, included it on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Shusha is also well known for its carpet-weaving and its legendary Garabagh horses.

Shusha was perfidiously seized by Armenian forces in May 1992 at the very moment when the peace talks at the highest level in Tehran were ongoing. As a result, the city and the surrounding villages were ethnically cleansed of their 24,000 Azerbaijani citizens, 195 civilians were killed, 165 were wounded and 58 went missing.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://azertag.az/xeber/Ulu\\_nder\\_Heyder\\_Aliyev\\_Susa\\_eziz\\_bir\\_seherdir\\_eziz\\_bir\\_torpaqdir\\_eziz\\_bir\\_qaladir\\_eziz\\_bir\\_abidedir-1689597](https://azertag.az/xeber/Ulu_nder_Heyder_Aliyev_Susa_eziz_bir_seherdir_eziz_bir_torpaqdir_eziz_bir_qaladir_eziz_bir_abidedir-1689597).



The capture of the city prompted the President of the United Nations Security Council, on behalf of all members of the Council, to express on 12 May 1992 deep concern by “violations of cease-fire agreements which have caused heavy losses of human life and widespread material damage, and by their consequences for the countries of the region” and to call “to take all steps necessary to bring the violence to an end”.<sup>2</sup>

However, this appeal and further statements and resolutions adopted by the Security Council, condemning the use of force against Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territories, reaffirming respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the inviolability of international borders and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory and demanding the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and the compliance with international humanitarian law,<sup>3</sup> were ignored by Armenia, whose armed forces continued to advance, seizing new territories of Azerbaijan and killing and expelling more civilians. After the establishment of a ceasefire in 1994, Armenia directed all its efforts at consolidating the occupation and colonizing the captured territories.

Most occupied districts, cities and villages of Azerbaijan were razed to the ground. Azerbaijani cultural heritage considerably suffered in those territories. Thousands of cultural objects, including monuments of world and national importance, mosques, temples, mausoleums, museums, exhibits, art galleries, archaeological sites and libraries were looted, desecrated and destroyed. Out of 67 mosques and Islamic religious shrines, 65 were destroyed and 2 were significantly damaged. Furthermore, 900 graveyards were vandalized in those territories.

In the city of Shusha, nearly 160 cultural and historical monuments, 16 mosques, 170 residential buildings, 29 schools, 31 libraries, 17 cultural clubs and 8 cultural centres were looted and destroyed.

Furthermore, some 40,000 museum exhibits and numerous other cultural objects were stolen and taken out of Azerbaijan. Thus, on 20 February 2021, 71 of 160 valuable carpets stolen from the Museum of Carpets in the city of Shusha were exhibited at the Alexander Tamanyan National Museum-Institute of Architecture in Iravan. Likewise, in the Khudavang cloister complex located in the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan, the fresco on the east wall of the Arzu Khatun church inside the complex, as well as crosses, bells and icons, were removed and illegally transferred to Armenia. Armenia refuses to return these and other objects of cultural property that were stolen and illegally transferred to Armenia.

The acts of barbarism varied in methods and also included construction works, archaeological excavations and so-called “reconstruction” and “development” projects.

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<sup>2</sup> Note by the President of the Security Council S/23904.

<sup>3</sup> Notes and statements by the President of the Security Council S/24493 (26 August 1992), S/24721 (27 October 1992), S/25539 (6 April 1993), S/26326 (18 August 1993), S/PRST/1995/21 (26 April 1995); and Security Council resolutions 822 (30 April 1993), 853 (29 July 1993), 874 (14 October 1993) and 884 (12 November 1993).



The sole purpose of such a behavior, which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity,<sup>4</sup> was to alter the authentic architectural style and unique characteristics of buildings and cultural and religious sites in the occupied territories and thus to falsify cultural, historical or scientific evidence, misappropriate cultural objects, erase any signs of Azerbaijani cultural and historical roots from these areas and permanently change their demographic composition, cultural structure and identity.

Azerbaijan has constantly and continuously protested against Armenia's aggression in the United Nations. Since March 1992, more than 600 communications were circulated as the official documents of the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and over 200 statements were delivered in the same organs of the United Nations, not mentioning hundreds of interventions in the Main Committees of the General Assembly and at other United Nations meetings and international conferences.

As a matter of particular importance and concern, Azerbaijan has repeatedly brought to the attention of the international community the atrocities committed against its historical and cultural heritage, appealing to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, UNESCO and other international organizations to take urgent measures to ensure the protection of this heritage.

In as early as 1992, the delegation of Azerbaijan to the United Nations urged the Secretary-General to use all his influence and authority to halt the destruction of Shusha, preserve it for future generations and bring about the complete and immediate withdrawal of Armenian forces from the city.<sup>5</sup>

Since then, Azerbaijan has provided the United Nations with voluminous evidence attesting to the scale and character of Armenia's wantonly destructive conduct and highlighting the need for accountability.<sup>6</sup>

In his legal opinion on third party obligations with respect to illegal economic and other activities in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Professor Alain Pellet characterized such a conduct as deliberate, deplorable and illicit.<sup>7</sup> Another distinguished international lawyer, Professor Malcolm Shaw, in his report on war crimes in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia's

<sup>4</sup> See the *Report on war crimes in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia's responsibility*, U.N. doc. A/74/676-S/2020/90 (7 February 2020), Section 6: "War crimes relating to the destruction of cultural heritage", paras. 216-229.

<sup>5</sup> Letter dated 12 June 1992 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan addressed to the Secretary-General, U.N. doc. S/24094.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, U.N. docs. A/58/594-S/2003/1090 (13 November 2003), A/62/691-S/2008/95 (13 February 2008), A/64/760-S/2010/211 (28 April 2010), A/70/1016-S/2016/711 (16 August 2016), A/71/880-S/2017/316 (26 April 2017), A/73/878-S/2019/406 (20 May 2019), A/74/676-S/2020/90 (7 February 2020), A/75/872-S/2021/429 (6 May 2021), A/74/881-S/2020/503 (5 June 2020), A/75/899-S/2021/512 (28 May 2021) and A/76/681-S/2022/93 (4 February 2022). See also *War against Azerbaijan: Targeting Cultural Heritage – The Series of "The True Facts about Garabagh"* (Baku, 2007), available at [www.mfa.gov.az/files/War-against-Azerbaijan-Targeting-Cultural-Heritage.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.az/files/War-against-Azerbaijan-Targeting-Cultural-Heritage.pdf); and *Voluntary report of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the violations of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (the Hague Convention) and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999) by the Republic of Armenia during the occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan* (7 October 2021).

<sup>7</sup> U.N. doc. A/71/880-S/2017/316 (26 April 2017), p. 44, para. 188.

responsibility, concluded, inter alia, that “[t]hroughout the conflict, Armenia has violated its obligations to respect and protect the cultural heritage of the occupied territories”.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the facts and documents were submitted to the United Nations under the item “The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan”, which was included in the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly on the initiative of Azerbaijan in 2004 and, throughout the following sixteen years, played an important role in the efforts aimed at invalidating illegal policies and practices pursued and developed by Armenia during the years of occupation.<sup>9</sup>

During the years of occupation, Azerbaijan has repeatedly requested UNESCO to dispatch a fact-finding mission to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In his 1999 report on the action taken by UNESCO in regard to the return and restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin, the Director-General of the Organization informed the United Nations General Assembly on the allocation of funds for the compilation of an inventory of stolen property in Azerbaijan.<sup>10</sup>

However, Armenia has consistently denied access to UNESCO for such a mission. Thus, in its report on the activities undertaken from 1995 to 2004 on the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols, UNESCO pointed out the following:

“54. The Government of Azerbaijan has informed the Secretariat of its concern over the protection of cultural property in Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied territories adjacent to it, and has requested the despatch of a fact-finding mission. However, the Secretariat has been prevented from sending a mission to verify the state of cultural property in the area, as other specialized agencies of the United Nations have not been able to enter these territories since their occupation by Armenian military forces. The Secretariat will reconsider sending a mission once a peaceful settlement has been reached by Armenia and Azerbaijan.”<sup>11</sup>

Instead, Armenia has publicized the seizure of the territories of Azerbaijan and the destruction of its cultural heritage as a “glorious victory”; every year it has ostentatiously celebrated the capture of the sacred city of Shusha and venerated war criminals and convicted terrorists as national heroes.

Thus, among numerous notorious examples of this kind was the erection, in the city of Shusha, after its occupation in May 1992, of the statute of Vazgen Sargsyan, the former Minister of Defence and Prime Minister of Armenia in the 1990s, who was previously a field commander responsible

<sup>8</sup> U.N. doc. A/74/676–S/2020/90 (7 February 2020), p. 60, para. 223.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the letters dated 2 September and 27 September 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, respectively, U.N. docs. A/75/1013 and A/76/359–S/2021/831.

<sup>10</sup> *Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin*, Report of the U.N. Secretary-General, A/54/436 (4 October 1999), annex, p. 5, para. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Report on the activities from 1995 to 2004 on the implementation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols, p. 7, para. 54.





for the seizing and ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijani territories and the brutal killings of their civilian residents.

Armenia's reliance on endless impunity has made the heavy defeat of its annexationist policy irreversible.

In response to Armenia's renewed act of aggression on 27 September 2020, Azerbaijan launched a counteroffensive operation and put an end to the occupation of its territories. The liberation of the city of Shusha by the Azerbaijani Army on 8 November 2020 paved the way for the conclusion of the three-decades-old armed conflict.

In order to hold Armenia accountable for its violations of international law and redress the harm caused by these violations, on 23 September 2021, Azerbaijan instituted proceedings against Armenia before the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, concerning the interpretation and application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). In its application, Azerbaijan, inter alia, submitted the evidence of Armenia's "overarching policy of 'cultural erasure' in the Occupied Territories in an effort to remove any trace of Azerbaijani ethnicity or traditions, by [...] looting and destroying Azerbaijani cultural heritage sites, and conducting propaganda campaigns denying and distorting Azerbaijani history, culture and ethnic identity".<sup>12</sup>

Immediately after the end of the war, Azerbaijan prioritized the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the liberated territories, including the restoration of all historical and cultural sites destroyed and damaged during the conflict and occupation. Large-scale works are now under way there to ensure the safe return of the displaced population and high standard of living.

It is notable that, in its order on provisional measures under the CERD, the International Court of Justice, inter alia, rejected Armenia's request to prevent and prohibit restoration works by Azerbaijan in relation to monuments located in the liberated territories.<sup>13</sup>

Life is now returning to Shusha. In a short period of time, several historical and cultural objects have been restored, and last year the Khari-bulbul music festival and the Vagif poetry days were held in the city. This March, Shusha hosted the conference to mark the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan's membership in the United Nations, with the participation of United Nations and Government officials, to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and discuss post-pandemic and post-conflict recovery priorities.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> International Court of Justice, *Interpretation and Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Republic of Azerbaijan v. Republic of Armenia)*, Application instituting proceedings filed on 23 September 2021, pp. 8-9, 34-42 and 56-57, paras. 11, 56-64 and 82-83.

<sup>13</sup> *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan)*, Provisional Measures, Order of the International Court of Justice of 7 December 2021. See also the letter dated 20 December 2021 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, U.N. doc. A/76/612-S/2021/1078 (22 December 2021).

<sup>14</sup> [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Shusha\\_hosted\\_meeting\\_on\\_30th\\_anniversary\\_of\\_Azerbaijan\\_UN\\_partnership-2059331](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Shusha_hosted_meeting_on_30th_anniversary_of_Azerbaijan_UN_partnership-2059331).

On 7 May 2021, the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, signed a decree declaring the city of Shusha to be the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. On 31 May 2021, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the cultural capital of Azerbaijan – the city of Shusha” was adopted. These decisions were made to set out further legal and organizational measures for the restoration, protection, study, development and promotion of the city.

This year, Azerbaijan will celebrate the 270th anniversary of Shusha. On the occasion of this remarkable page in Azerbaijan’s history, on 5 January 2022, President Aliyev declared 2022 as the Year of Shusha.

The following historic statement by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, made on the day of the liberation of Shusha eloquently reflects the everlasting significance of the city and its historical and cultural heritage for the people of Azerbaijan:

“Dear Shusha, you are free! Dear Shusha, we are back! Dear Shusha, we will reinvigorate you! Shusha is ours! Garabagh is ours! Garabagh is Azerbaijan!”<sup>15</sup>



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<sup>15</sup> See <https://president.az/en/articles/view/45756>.

# Deliberations in the United Nations Security Council following the occupation of Shusha

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*Excerpts from the book “Diplomacy under the Roar of Guns: the First Diplomatic Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan” authored by Hasan Hasanov\**

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## **[...] News about the seizure of Shusha. Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is included in the agenda of the Security Council**

Our Permanent Mission to the UN officially began its work on May 6, 1992. [...] On the same day, I presented my credentials to the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. On Sunday, May 8, at 6 a.m., the doorbell of the apartment rang. A man from the security personnel of the Permanent Representative of Turkiye said that Mustafa Akshin asked me to come to the office at the earliest moment.[...] When we met, Mustafa Akshin announced the tragic news: armed forces of Armenia seized Shusha, a historical and cultural center of Karabakh, founded by Azerbaijani Khan and populated by Azerbaijanis, with strategically important location. He learned about this from a telephone conversation with Turkiye’s Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, who, in his turn, received this news from Baku.

Having reached Baku by phone, we learned the details of the next crime perpetrated by Armenian aggressors and realized how tragically the situation turned out for Azerbaijan. We were shocked. But we could not abandon ourselves to despair. Work at a relentless pace helped to cope with terrible stress. We found out that the Supreme Council (Parliament) of the Republic issued the statement addressed to all countries and governments of the world regarding the occupation of Shusha, and thus, we decided to use this document as an official appeal to the Security Council [...]

On May 9, in the morning, we conveyed the statement of the Parliament of Azerbaijan to the Security Council with a request to dispatch a UN fact-finding mission to the conflict area and, based on the results of its work, condemn the aggression of Armenia. Our entry into big politics in the UN system started from this tragic moment. Thus, the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was included in the UN agenda. My letter of May 9 (it was issued on May 10, 1992) to the Chairman of the Security Council referred to the dangerous situation as a result of the increasing

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\* *“Diplomacy under the Roar of Guns: the First Diplomatic Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan”*, authored by Hasan Hasanov, the former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, was published in 2022 with the support of the Center of Analysis of International Relations (AIR Center). Hasan Hasanov, based on his personal experience as the first Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, describes the process of adoption in 1992-1993 of the UN Security Council resolutions and other documents related to Armenia’s armed aggression against Azerbaijan. The book has been published in Russian language and recommended by the Academic Council of the ADA University as a supplementary textbook for students studying international relations.



attacks by Armenian forces. I reported that these attacks had led to the capture and destruction of the city of Shusha and had been accompanied with a large number of human casualties. It was noted that the massive offensive carried out with the support of tanks was a flagrant violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and it was reported that the Armenian side shelled the city of Shusha, one of the centers of the spiritual and cultural life of Azerbaijan.

On May 10, I held my first press conference at the UN press center. It was attended by 41 correspondents from the world's leading news agencies. [...] For the first time in the UN building, I presented in the most detailed way the background of the issue, current situation, as well as the role of Armenia in the current state of affairs and the position of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Interest towards the press conference was great. A hail of questions was directed towards me. Instead of the allotted 30 minutes, the press- conference lasted for more than an hour. It would have continued longer if the staff of the UN Secretariat had not politely asked the journalists to conclude their questions and leave the hall for the next event.

[...] After Shusha was seized by the armed forces of Armenia, Azerbaijanis lost not only one of the centers of the spiritual heritage of our people, but also the strategic superiority in this district.[...]

#### *Preparations for the meeting of the UN Security Council*

After the seizure of Shusha, I made every effort to bring up the issue of the aggression of the Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan to the discussion at the Security Council.[...]

[...] I headed for a meeting with Peter Hohenfellner (Austria), the Chairman of the UN Security Council. It was the first ever visit to the Chairman of the Council in the history of our diplomacy.[...]

Dialogue with the Chairman of the Security Council proceeded with different pace. As a reaction to my dynamic information and concrete requirements, I received a non-committal response. I did not feel the possibility of bringing up the situation to the Security Council for discussion. I stood my ground and continued convincing, or more likely dissuading by citing concrete facts. Finally, we agreed to meet again. A day later, we met and continued on discussing the situation related to the capture of Shusha. The main subject of our negotiations was the issue of adoption of the document that would give ground for dispatching the UN fact-finding mission to the conflict zone [...]. Concluding the conversation, Mr. Hohenfellner said that he intended to convene a meeting of the Security Council and make in the course of it a statement that would call the warring sides to cease the fire. Taking a note for my own record that some progress had been made, I said that it would be fair to include into the agenda of the Security Council meeting the issue of recognizing Armenia as an aggressor.[...] Mr. Hohenfellner said that this would be possible after a special mission visits the conflict zone and collects necessary facts.

Further events were hastening the meeting of the Security Council, at which for the first time the ways of settling the conflict were to be discussed.





Permanent Mission of Armenia that had been created shortly before ours, had been observing my actions and thinking over its own steps. They tried to launch a counterattack and impose their interpretation of events, i.e. to blame Azerbaijan for increasing the tension in the region.

[...] Before Armenia circulated Ter-Petrosyan's letter, we managed to send a letter to the UN Security Council calling to curb the aggressor and condemn the barbaric seizure of Shusha. Thus, the Security Council received official appeals from two conflicting states on the same issue but with totally opposite content.[...]

[...] I insisted that the UN mission had to be sent to the conflict zone with a clear mandate to establish the facts of aggression. We informed about this the UN Secretary-General, as well as the Chairman of the Security Council.

[...] On May 12, 1992, at 5:00 pm EST, a meeting of the Security Council was held. For the first time the issue of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict [...] was brought up for discussion.

According to the practice based on the rules of procedures and methods of work of the UN Security Council, members of the Council hold discussions during open or closed meetings. They may also conduct unofficial consultations in full composition.

The Chairman, calling for silence and attention, uttered the traditional phrase that the Council was meeting in accordance with the understanding reached earlier during the consultations. He read out the text of the statement made on behalf of the Security Council.

None of the issues raised by the Armenian side were reflected in it. What did we achieve? Very important and topical issues for us were reflected in this statement. First of all, the Security Council "calling upon all concerned" recalled the statements made during the admission of Azerbaijan and Armenia to the UN, in particular the references to the principles of the Charter regarding the peaceful settlement of disputes and the non-use of force, thereby making it clear that it considers the conflict to be international, i.e. between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Secondly, the statement says about the need of immediate dispatch of an official UN mission to the conflict zone to study the situation on the ground, including finding out possible ways of providing urgent humanitarian assistance.

Moreover, it must be taken into account that the statement was made after the capture of the city of Shusha by the armed forces of Armenia. It is in this context that the Council expressed its deep concern "by recent reports on the deterioration of situation with regard to Nagorno-Karabakh and violations of the ceasefire agreements, which have caused heavy losses of human life and widespread material damage, and by their consequences for the countries of the region...". Thus, it can be said that the statement regarding the seizure of the city of Shusha by Armenia became the first decision of the UN Security Council on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and laid the foundation for more strong language in the subsequent decisions of the Security Council. [...]

# The city of Shusha - a monument of history, culture, urban planning and architecture\*

*Sabina Hajiyeva\*\**

## 1. Introduction

The city of Shusha is a very precious historical, urban, architectural and natural monument. In the mid-18th century, Shusha became the center of the Garabagh Khanate. The founder of the city is the Khan of Garabagh— Panah Ali Khan Javanshir. The foundation of the fortress surrounded by steep cliffs on three sides was laid in this site of Garabagh in 1752. Buildings and a palace for khan were built inside the fortress. Local residents named the city after its founder Panahabad that later was called Shusha. The next prominent ruler who took the leadership after the death of Panah Ali Khan and strengthened the power of the Khanate was Ibrahim Khalil Khan. Both Panah Ali Khan and Ibrahim Khalil Khan had been building Shusha, the capital of the Garabagh Khanate, in accordance with the best traditions of the Azerbaijani architecture of the ancient and medieval period. The city aroused the admiration and approval of all visitors due to its picturesque location high in the mountains, on an unscalable rock, covered with forest, wide application of natural stones in the construction, including in paving of city streets, interesting architecture and, finally, rich greenery.

In terms of architectural monuments, Shusha is one of the richest cities of Azerbaijan. It is an open-air museum. Due to its rich diversity of architectural monuments, Shusha was declared a Historical and Architectural Reserve in 1977. Shusha has a unique urban planning system that is characterized by a combination of multiple quarters which is typical for eastern cities. According to the List of Historical and Cultural monuments protected on the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan that was approved in 2001<sup>1</sup>, there are 44 monuments of national importance located in the district of Shusha, including 5 defensive structures, 24 palaces and residential buildings, 2

\* In the autumn of 2019, the staff and students of the Faculty of Architecture of the Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction launched the Shusha project, dedicated to the study of the historical past, architectural monuments and the unique urban structure of this pearl of Azerbaijani architecture. As it was needed to collect a large amount of archival materials, there were obstacles in finding them due to the fact of military occupation of Shusha and because it was the students who developed the project during non-study time, the project was completed only a year later. It so happened that the end of the project coincided with the liberation of Shusha. The project, launched at the request of students and presented to the public in 2021, also includes proposals for the urban development of the city and the restoration of individual architectural monuments. The project was attended by students of the Faculty of Architecture: Abdurrazagova Gultakin, Ramazanova Nuran, Malikova Susan, Karimova Husniyya, Mehdiyeva Leyla, Habibli Aghakarim as well as teachers of the Faculty of Architecture- Sabina Hajiyeva, Professor of the Department of Architectural Constructions and Restoration of Monuments, Honored Architect of Azerbaijan and Yegana Hajiyeva, Professor of the Department of Design, Honored Architect of Azerbaijan. Professor Gulchohra Mammadova, Rector of the Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction, Honored Architect of Azerbaijan, provided all kind of support and assistance at all stages of the project. Sketches of certain monuments in the present article had been designed by students as part of the abovementioned project.

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<sup>1</sup> The list of the immovable historical and cultural monuments approved by the Decision N 132 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated August 2, 2001 <https://e-qanun.az/framework/2847>





mausoleums, 3 mosques, 5 caravanserais, 1 spring and 2 religious schools-*madrasahs*, etc. 30 of these monuments are situated in the Shusha State Historical and Architectural Reserve.

Many of these monuments date back to the 18th-19th centuries. Every house and street as well as huge fortress walls, mosques, well-proportional minarets and ruins of huge fortresses of the city are reminders of the past. During the Soviet times, a production plant, a weaving facility of the Garabagh silk plant, a factory for the manufacture of oriental musical instruments, an agricultural college, a pedagogical college, the Museum of the History of Shusha, the Memorial House of the composer Uzeyir Hajibayov, sanatoriums, vacation houses, pioneer camps and a tourist center operated in Shusha.

## 2. Architectural and urban heritage of the city of Shusha

### 2.1 Urban structure of the city



*General view of the city of Shusha. Photo dated the late 19th century<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> War Against Azerbaijan: Targeting Cultural Heritage. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Azerbaijan; Heydar Aliyev Foundation. 2007, p.22-23



*Jidir duzu* <sup>3</sup>

Shusha's urban-planning was primarily shaped by the realities of the landscape and geographical features of the area where it is located. The mountain plateau, at an altitude of 1300-1600 meters above sea level, is surrounded by hard-to-reach rocks on the southern, western, and eastern sides. In the southern part of the city, there is a plain called Jidir duzu, which falls through sharp rocky landscape to the basins of the Dashalty and Khalifali rivers. There are Tursh Su mineral springs at a distance of 2 km from the Shusha plateau and 18 km from the Isa-bulaghi spring. In the 19th century, Shusha was one of the largest cities of the Caucasus. Ten caravanserais located here indicate that the city used to host a large number of travelers.

Shusha has been a city famous for its streets, paved with stones, wooden lattice balconies, stone houses on steep terrain, colorful carpets, silk, thoroughbred horses and, most importantly, for the art and culture personalities.

It should be noted that one of the important pieces of research in the study of the urban and architectural heritage of the city of Shusha is the works of Professor Elturan Avalov<sup>4</sup>. The author in his study conducts a deep analysis of the urban development of the city of Shusha, examines the first historical center of the city in 1837, introduces the general plan of 1855, which already includes such significant buildings and structures as Ashaghy (Lower) Bazaar, Ashaghy Square, Rasta Bazaar, Yukhary (Upper) Mosque, citadel-Gala, Ganja Gates and Divankhana. We see the creation of the city center of Shusha, where the central axis of the Sheytan Bazaar meets the central axis of Rasta Bazaar. We also see the central axis of Ashaghy (Lower) Bazaar corresponding to the model of the city that had already been formed in the area considered to be the center of Shusha. Over the years, the territory of the city had been expanded. Places like Bazaar-bashi, the Trade Row, Gapan Square, Yukhary Mosque, Ashaghy Mosque, the House of the Khan's daughter Natavan, the Caravanserai of Hajy Amiraslan and many others were established. The central part of Shusha became even richer, where a madrasah, the caravanserai of Mashadi Shukur Mirsiyab oghlu, the palace of the Safarov brothers, the Khoja Marjanly mosque, a new center for shopping, workshops and springs were formed. This is how the development of the city of Shusha continued<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Photo by author

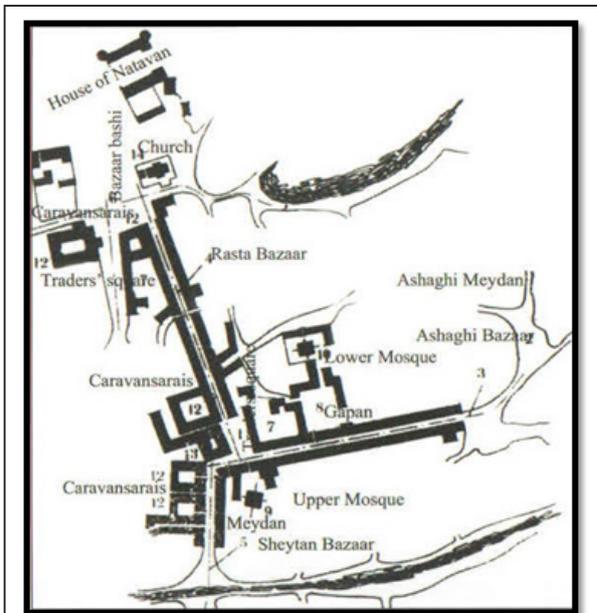
<sup>4</sup> Avalov, E.V. (1978). *Arhitektura goroda Shusha i problemy sohraneniya ego istoricheskogo oblika* [The architecture of the city of Shusha and the problems of preserving its historical appearance], Baku, Elm, p.112

<sup>5</sup> Hajiyeva, E. Hajiyeva S. (2021). *Gradostroitel'noe razvitie i restavracija istoriko-arhitekturnogo nasledija goroda Shusha* [Urban development and restoration of the historical and architectural heritage of the city of Shusha], Baku, Journal Memar. № 30, p.108





During the construction of the medieval cities of Azerbaijan, the following classical system was applied: the central street began at the main gate and went through the whole city. This street and those adjoining it eventually became large shopping centers, with a long line of merchant shops that were covered by sheds from sun and rain. The streets ended up with squares where the mosques, madrasahs, baths and caravanserais were located. For this reason, the main trade streets in Shusha were called bazaars: Sheytan Bazaar, Rasta Bazaar, Ashaghy Bazaar. The main street- Rasta Bazaar- was built up with shopping lines and artisan workshops. The architecture of the street was formed by covered galleries framed by stone columns. All this was complemented by rather large market squares adjoining its main line. The main square- Meydan, elongated along the axis of Rasta Bazaar, had a rectangular shape and was built up with religious and commercial buildings. The architectural ensemble of Meydan was formed by rows of one-story trading shops, a two-story caravanserai and a notable city mosque with two minarets. The vertical minarets of the mosque dominated the architectural and spatial composition of the city.<sup>6</sup>



A fragment of the general plan of the city of Shusha in 1855, according to E. Avalov<sup>7</sup>

The urban structure of Shusha consisted of quarters – called “mehelles” in Azerbaijani, each of which had its own local center in the form of a square – meydan around which religious and public buildings were placed, such as a mosque, a madrasah, a bathhouse, dukans (shops), a spring and etc. There were 17 quarters in Shusha: Julfalar, Guyulug, Gurdlar, Seyidli, Chukhur, Dordlar Gurdu, Hajy Yusufli, Dord Chinar, Chol Gala, Merdinli, Saatly, Kocharli, Mamayi, Khoja Marjanly, Damirchi, Hamamqabaghy and Taza Mehelle. A huge number of national monuments, their diversity, and distinctive features give reason to call Shusha the pearl of Azerbaijani culture.

Shusha throughout its history developed in accordance with the principles of urban planning typical for each new historical period.

<sup>6</sup> Avalov, E.V. (1978). *Arhitektura goroda Shusha i problemy sohraneniya ego istoricheskogo oblika* [The architecture of the city of Shusha and the problems of preserving its historical appearance], Baku, Elm, p.112

<sup>7</sup> The English version of this plan has been retrieved from the book by Qajar, C. (2014). *Old Shusha*, Baku, “Sharg-Garb”, p. 83

## 2.2. Fortresses

**The Shusha fortress** surrounds the historical center of the city of Shusha. Shusha became the third fortress built by Panah Ali Khan of Garabagh. He decided to build a new fortress-city because the previously built fortresses of Bayat and Shahbulag did not fully meet the defense needs of that time. The terrain was the main factor that was taken into account during the construction. The territory on which the Shusha fortress was built is a mountain plateau in the form of an amphitheater from the west covered by numerous hills. The highest area of the plateau is 1600 meters and the lowest is 1300 meters above sea level. The construction of the fortress wall was necessary only for the defense of the northeastern part of the plateau, where protection was apparently poor. The city of Shusha was the main fortress of Garabagh, which withstood a series of assaults and sieges since its foundation. The defensive walls of Shusha were 2.5 km long and were built of stone. Shusha fortress was continuously reconstructed and expanded. As a result, by the 19th century, its original appearance was partially changed. The new defensive towers were added to its fort. Shusha fortress had several main gates, such as the Ganja Gate, Iravan Gate and Aghoghlan Gate. The fortress as well as the gates have lost their original appearance during the military occupation by the armed forces of Armenia in 1992-2020.

On a hill, not far from the fortress, which was built in accordance with the town-planning traditions of the medieval East, was the citadel-palace of Panah Ali Khan. The inner citadel of Shusha was located on a high hill near the Ganja gates. The inner citadel built by Panah Ali Khan was a palace resembling a fortress with towers and walls. Shusha, built by Panah Ali Khan, the ruler of Garabagh, is a rare monument of medieval culture, urban planning and a living encyclopedia of Garabagh architecture.



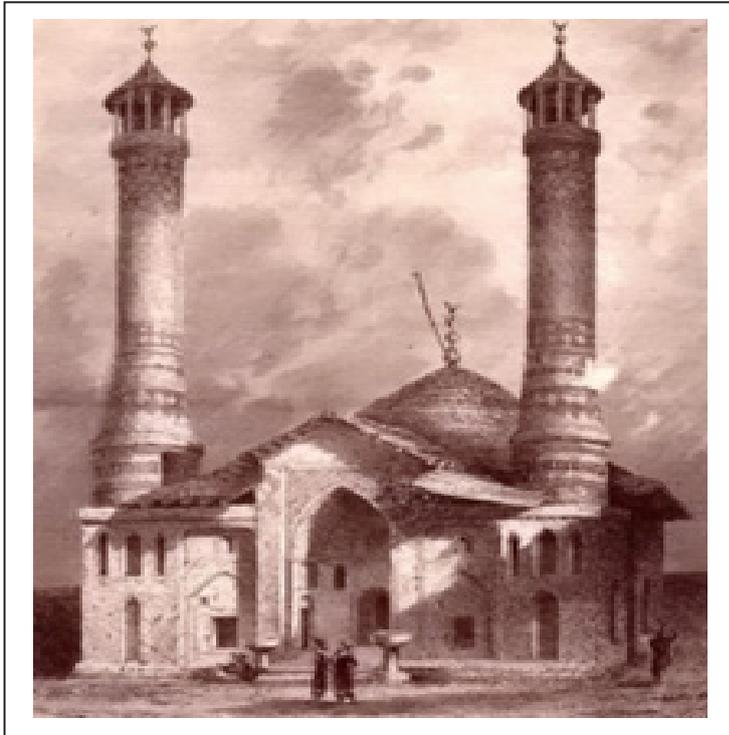
*Restoration of the Ganja gate of the city of Shusha after the liberation from the occupation<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>8</sup> <https://report.az/ru/karabakh/ilham-aliev-vozhrozhdenie-shushi-idet-bystrymi-tempami/>

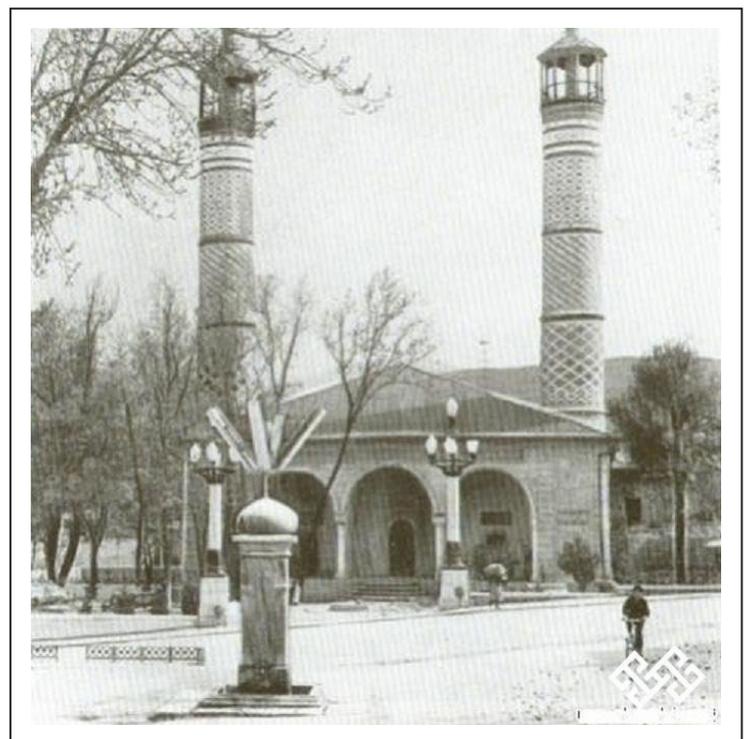




## 2.3 Mosques



*Govhar Agha Mosque in 1865  
(drawing by V. Vereshchagin<sup>9</sup>),*



*Yukhary Govhar Agha Mosque  
before the occupation<sup>10</sup>.*

<sup>9</sup> Fatullayev, S. S. (1986). *Gradostroitel'stvo i arhitektura Azerbajdzhana XIX-nachala XX veka [Urban planning and architecture of Azerbaijan in the 19th-early 20th century]*, p. 456

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.heritage.gov.az/az/monuments/yuxari-govher-aga-mescidi?map=shusha>



*Yukhary Govhar Agha Mosque after the occupation<sup>11 12</sup>.*



In the 19th century, every quarter of the city of Shusha hosted a mosque. The most remarkable among them was the **Yukhary Govhar Agha mosque**, built by the famous architect Karbalayi Safikhan Garabaghi. Its construction was financed by Govharagha, Ibrahim Khan's daughter. The Yukhari Govhar Agha mosque is an Azerbaijani cultural monument that was built in the 18th-19th centuries. It is also one of the remarkable monuments of Shusha. Initially, the mosque had been built here during the reign of Panah Ali Khan in the 1750s, then rebuilt in 1768-1769 when the ruler of the Garabagh Khanate was Ibrahim Khalil Khan<sup>13</sup>. In the first half of the 19th century, the mosque, which had fallen into disrepair, was rebuilt again with the funds of Govharaga. It acquired two minarets. In 1883, through her efforts, the mosque was rebuilt for the fourth time, finally gaining its current appearance.

It was also called the Juma mosque, that is the Friday mosque- the main mosque of the city. The new mosque was built on the foundation of an old one. However, it differs seriously from the previous one. Its protruding portal, similar to the portal of the Aghdam mosque, was replaced by

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.heritage.gov.az/az/monuments/yuxari-govher-aga-mescidi?map=shusha>

<sup>12</sup> Here and below, "after the occupation" refers to the state of the object during the years of military occupation, which lasted from 1992 to 2020.

<sup>13</sup> The list of the immovable historical and cultural monuments approved by the Decision N 132 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated August 2, 2001 <https://e-qanun.az/framework/2847>



an *eyvan* - a covered gallery, extending almost over the entire facade, similar to the Khanbulag mosque. There are two-story galleries separated by high stone columns, as well as traditional domed ceilings. The biggest prayer hall of the mosque has a rectangular shape with three arches on the north side. The building of the mosque itself was constructed of stone, while its minarets were made of brick. Like most of the mosques in Shusha, the prayer hall of the mosque is three-naves. The lancet vaults of the hall rest on six octagonal stone columns. The minarets were covered with tents mounted on thin spines. There were crescents on top of the tents. Quran inscriptions and patterns were inscribed on the surface of the minarets. All these works, including the painting of the room which was situated on the second floor of the mosque, were carried out by Mir Mohsun Navvab, a Shusha-based painter, poet, musicologist and scholar. A madrasah was built next to the mosque.



*Sketch of the Yukhary Govhar Agha mosque*

In May 1992, in the course of the military attack and following the military occupation, the mosque was severely damaged. In 2019, Armenia, with the involvement of aliens, carried out “restoration” of the mosque, presenting it as a monument of Persian architecture. It should be noted that Armenia has also systematically destroyed or appropriated Azerbaijani cultural heritage in other occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The “restoration” of a mosque in the occupied territory of Azerbaijan, as an illegal act under international law, was aimed to change the identity of the monument and was intended to erase the Azerbaijani origin of Shusha.

After the liberation of Shusha from the military occupation, the works have been launched to remove the falsifications introduced to the mosque.

**The Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque**, similar to the Yukhary Govhar Agha mosque, was built at the behest of Govharagha in 1874-1875. This mosque is situated below the first mosque and is smaller than the first one. In the general plan of 1855<sup>14</sup> of the city of Shusha the mosque has been for the first time marked together with a madrasah. In 1874-1875 reconstruction works were carried out here.



*Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque after the occupation*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Avalov, E.V. (1978). *Arhitektura goroda Shusha i problemy sohraneniya ego istoricheskogo oblika* [The architecture of the city of Shusha and the problems of preserving its historical appearance], Baku, Elm, p.112

<sup>15</sup> <https://karabakh.center/az/cd-264/susa/asagi-govher-aga-mescidi#gallery1-7>





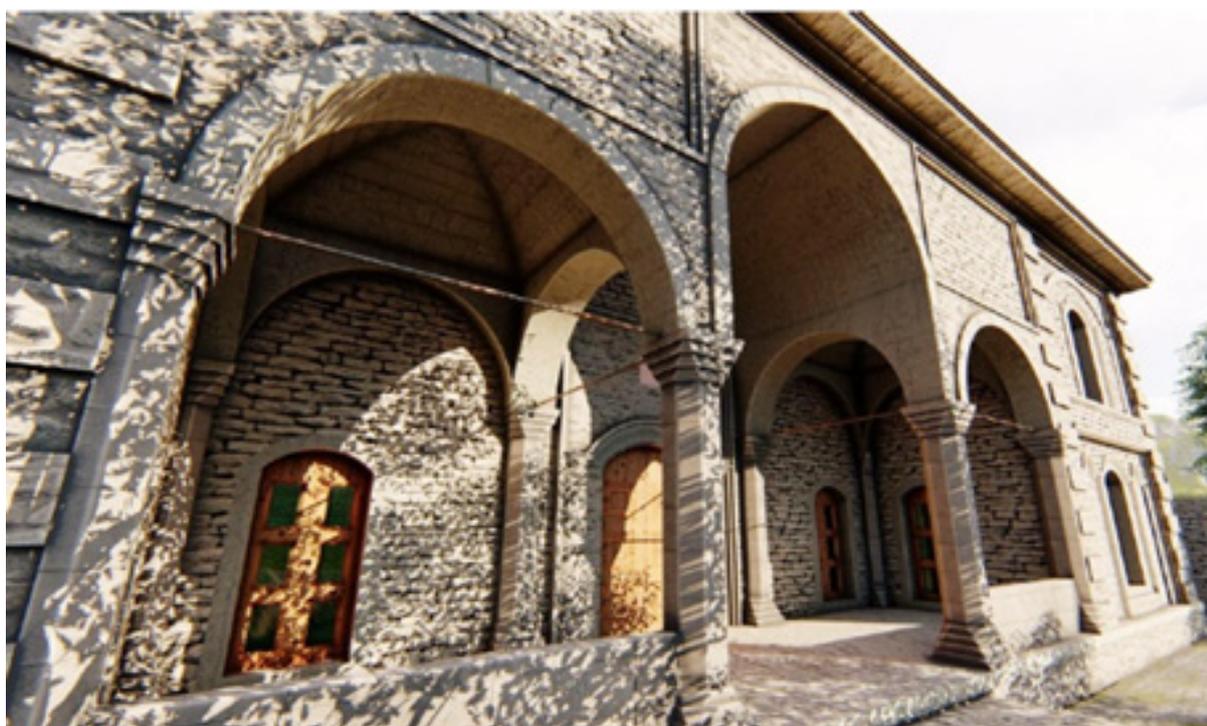
Despite the fact that both mosques were projected by the same architect, they have a lot of architectural differences. The position of minarets and the distinction among portals are the main differences. Although the main entrance of the mosque is directed towards south, its minarets were shifted to north as it looks out on the square. The well-shaped cylindrical minarets of the Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque differed from the minarets of the Yukhary Govhar Agha mosque in their ornament, which was made up of colored bricks. The ornament was composed of the word “Allah” in the Arabic script, numerous embedded on the surface of the minaret. It should be particularly mentioned the spiral dome of the Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque.



*Remains of the interior of the Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque after the occupation<sup>16</sup>*

As a result of the military occupation, one of the minarets of the mosque lost its crowning part. Its roof and all window openings were destroyed. Due to the military occupation, the wall-paintings by Mir Mohsun Navvab as in the case of numerous frescoes made by him in other mosques and houses in Shusha were lost.

<sup>16</sup> <https://karabakh.center/az/cd-264/susa/asagi-govher-aga-mescidi#gallery1-10>

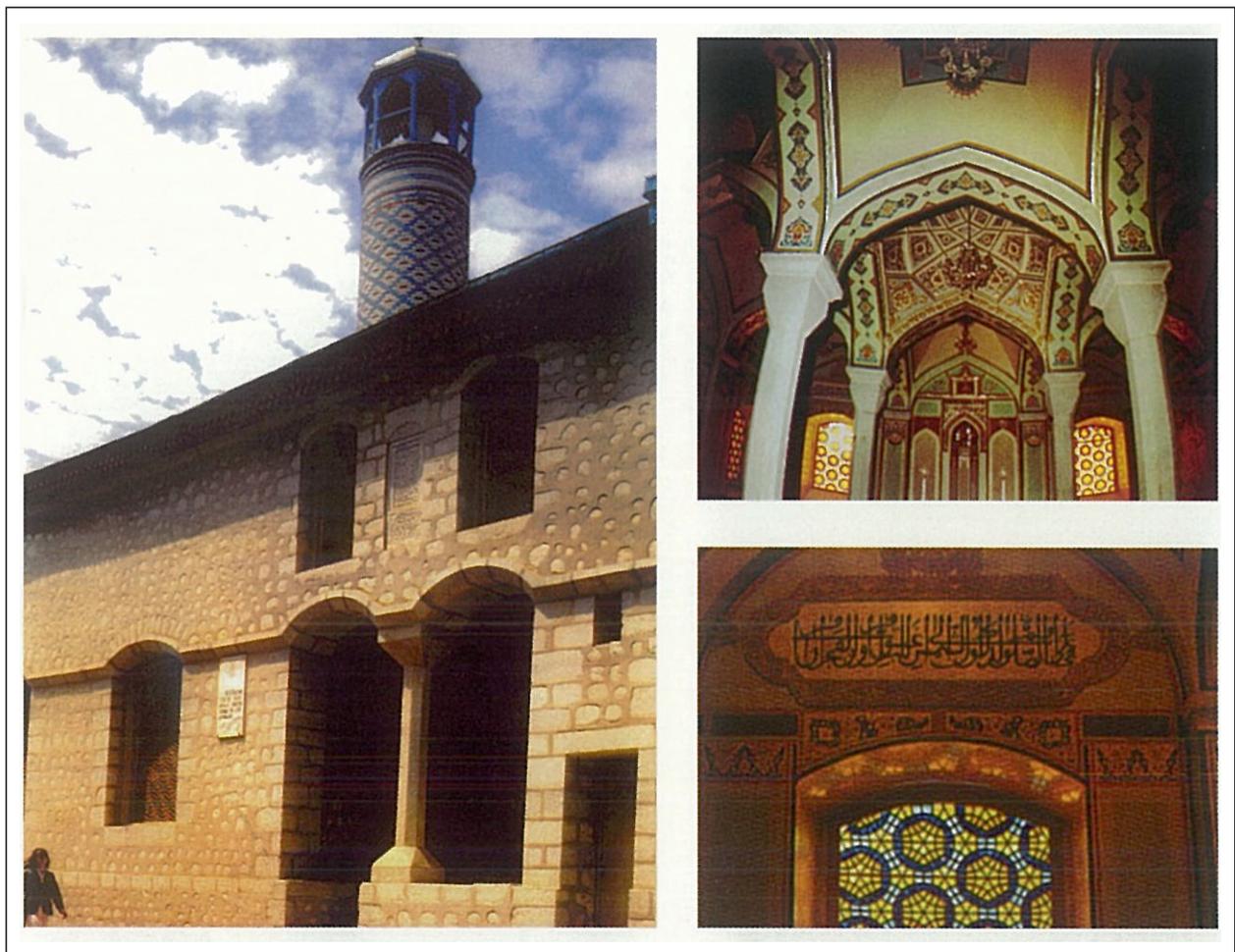


*Sketches of the Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque*





**The Saatly mosque** was also built in 1883 by the Azerbaijani architect Karbalayi Safikhan Garabaghi on the site of an old mosque. A madrasah was built here as well, in which Molla Panah Vagif, an Azerbaijani poet and vizier of the Garabagh Khanate, was lecturing. The complex of the mosque includes a decorated high minaret with an isolated entrance. At the time of construction, the new mosque excelled all the quarter mosques with its beautiful interior decoration, moulding, stained glass windows, wood carvings and magnificently decorated high minaret that was mentioned above. In May 1992, as a result of artillery shelling of the city of Shusha by the armed forces of Armenia the minaret of the mosque was destroyed.



*Saatly mosque before the occupation<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>17</sup> War against Azerbaijan Targeting Cultural Heritage” p. 39



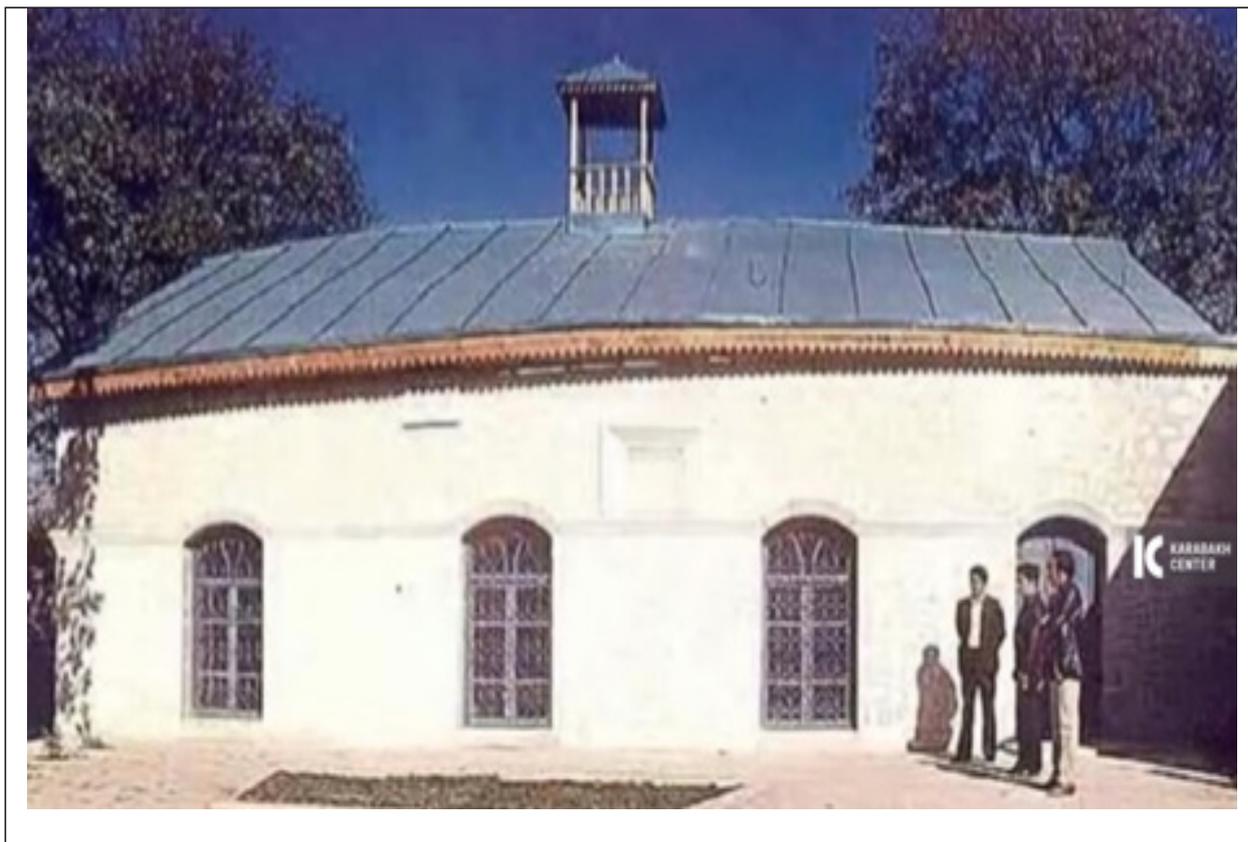
*Saatly mosque after the occupation* <sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> <https://karabakh.center/az/cd-267/susa/saatli-mescidi#gallery1-4>





**The Mamayi mosque**, also projected by Karbalayi Safikhan Garabagi in the 19th century in the quarter of the same name. The Mamayi mosque, rectangular in design, differed by its simplicity and it looked more like a residential house than a place of worship. The only difference from the house is “Guldasta”, a small structure for muezzins (a person who calls to prayer), installed on the roof of the mosque and crowned with a crescent. The Mamayi mosque had a three-aisled hall where the ceiling rested on arches thrown over octagonal columns. During the military occupation, the Armenian side changed the appearance of the mosque and turned it into a church<sup>19</sup>.



*Mamayi mosque before the occupation*

<sup>19</sup> <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/HESABAT%20AZ.pdf>



*Mamayi mosque after the occupation<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> <https://karabakh.center/az/cd-266/susa/mamay-mescidi#gallery1>  
<https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/HESABAT%20AZ.pdf>



## 2.4. Civilian buildings: *Imarats, Palaces, Caravanserais*

Among the civilian buildings in Shusha, the most numerous ones are caravanserais, baths and, without a doubt, *imarats*, residential buildings that are the most striking architectural monuments of the city. The residential houses of Shusha were built in the Garabagh style- mostly two-story, facing the courtyard, with deep verandas on wooden or stone pillars. The combination of rubble laying with wooden structures of verandas and *shebekes* (colored stained-glass windows), as well as multi-colored interior decor created a unique colorful appearance of *imarat* residences of Shusha. Many of them such as the House of the poetess Khurshidbanu Natavan, the House of Hajy Gulu, the Houses of Mehmandarovs, Ughurlu bay, Asad bay, the houses in which the outstanding composer Uzeyir Hajibayov, singer Bulbul and others were born and raised, are historical and architectural monuments.

**The residence of Khurshidbanu Natavan** belongs to the buildings of palace type, with a distinctive architecture of Shusha. It is a part of the complex of palaces of the Garabagh khans, while marking a new stage since it was built at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries. The residence was built along the roadway, while, as it is typical for eastern cities, the external facade was quite simple and the most interesting part of the house was in the courtyard. Here, a shaded veranda combined with colorful *shebeke* windows created an intricate play of light and shadow, while a small indoor pool and an abundance of greenery created a peaceful environment.



*Palace of Khurshidbanu Natavan before the occupation*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.heritage.gov.az/az/monuments/xursidbanu-natevanin-evi?map=shusha>



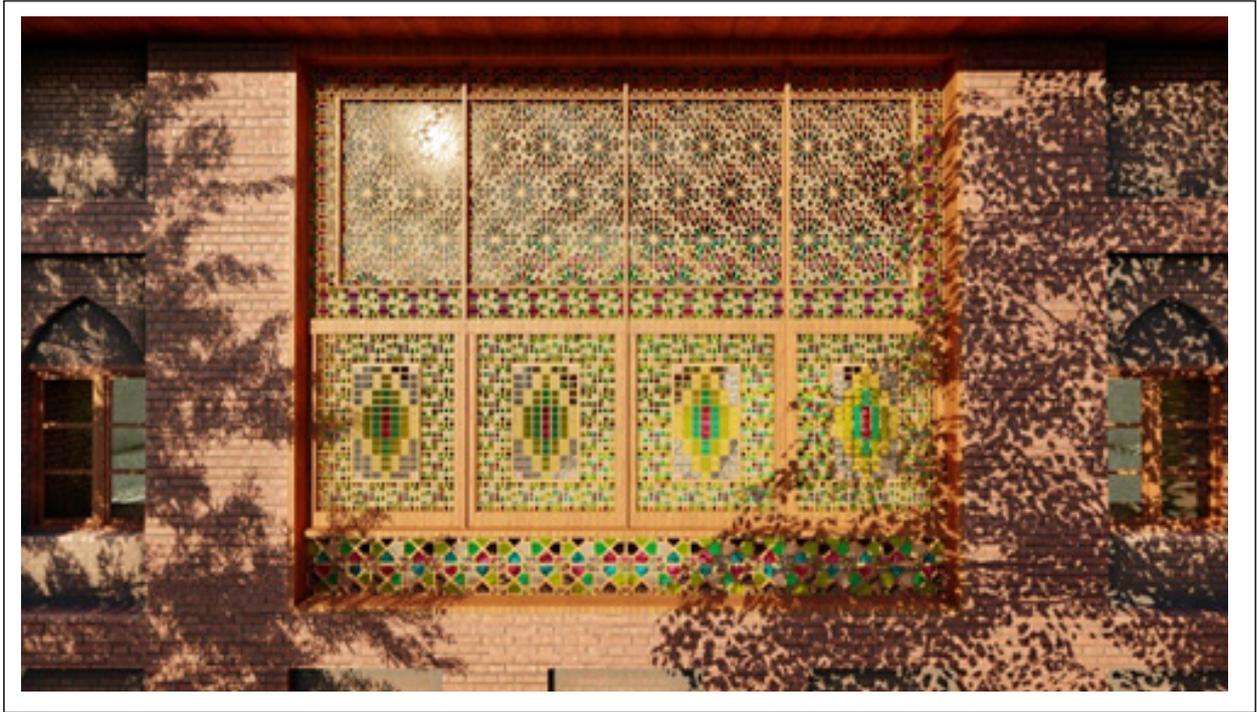
*Palace of Khurshidbanu Natavan after the occupation<sup>22</sup>*

This was a two-story house, the lower floor of which was allocated for non-residential rooms. Living rooms were placed around a spacious central hall on the second floor with an external staircase. The hall was about 5 meters high. Wall-paintings and carving on alabaster were used in its interior decoration. The hall, throughout the entire width of the house, was lit up by large multi-colored *shebeke* windows of 5 × 3.5 meters size, installed from two opposite sides *shebeke*<sup>23</sup>. These were sliding windows. Window sashes and bars were assembled from standard wood components on wooden tenons without nails or glue. A square meter of a *shebeke* window consisted of from 3000 up to 5000 components. Colored glasses in *shebeke* form a pattern of 10-12 ray stars with radial rays. The selected pattern was symmetrically repeated many times.

<sup>22</sup> <https://karabakh.center/en/cd-250/Shusha/Khurshudbanu-Natavan%E2%80%99s-House#gallery2-1>

<sup>23</sup> Qajar C. (2007). *Staraja Shusha [Old Shusha]*, Baku, Sharg-Garb, p.344 ISBN, 978-9952-34-096-9.





Sketch of the shebeke of the Palace of Khurshidbanu Natavan



In 1932, the first-ever children music school in Azerbaijan was opened in the House of Khurshidbanu Natavan. Tar and kamancha, the Azerbaijani folk musical instruments, piano, violin and vocal classes were taught in this educational institution. Soon the music school has become the center of culture and art in Shusha. As seen from the picture, the house was also deliberately destroyed during the occupation.

**The house of the Zohrabbayovs family** is one of the most beautiful, astonishingly harmonious and proportional *imarat* houses in the city of Shusha. The deep arcade of the first floor and the *eyvans* with wooden railings on the second and third floors created a intricate play of light and shadow, highlighting the beauty of the residence. The house has been badly damaged during the military aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan. All decorative elements have been also destroyed. Both structures and elements of decorative finery require a complete restoration, of which the *shebeke* carries particularly high value.



*House of the Zohrabbayovs before the occupation<sup>24</sup>*



*House of the Zohrabbayovs after the occupation<sup>25</sup>*

<sup>24</sup> Qajar C. (2007). *Staraja Shusha [Old Shusha]*, Baku, Sharg-Garb, p.344. ISBN, 978-9952-34-096-9

<sup>25</sup> <https://karabakh.center/ru/cd-244/susa/dom-zoxrabbekovyx>





Sketch of the Zohrabbayovs house

The owners of **the residential complex of the Mehmandarovs family** were also two well-known residents of Shusha from the Mehmandarovs family: Abdul Karim Mustafa bay oghlu and Samad bay Sadykh bay oghlu, a doctor and a military serviceman respectively. The complex consisted of large and small residential buildings and a mosque. The mosque also functioned as the mosque of the quarter. Wall paintings in residential buildings caught the attention of N. Miklashevskaya, who studied the wall paintings of Mehmandarovs' house in the middle of the 20th century. She mentions that the *shebeke* on the entire front wall of the hall was similar to the *shebeke* of Sheki palace: “*Shebeke* with its tracery weaving combined with small colored glass makes up intricate patterns of stars and circles and complete the peculiar decor of the room”<sup>26</sup>. During Soviet times, the large residential building was used as a hospital while the small residential building hosted the Museum of the History of Shusha. The large residential building has been severely destroyed during the years of the Armenian occupation. The mosque on the territory of the complex has been illegally appropriated and turned into a “Museum of Geology”.

<sup>26</sup> Qajar C. (2007). *Staraja Shusha [Old Shusha]*, Baku, Sharg-Garb, p.344 ISBN, 978-9952-34-096-9.



*Buildings of the Mehmandarovs' complex after the occupation<sup>27</sup>*



*Sketch of a small house in the Mehmandarovs' complex*



*Ongoing reconstruction work of the small house in the Mehmandarovs' complex after the liberation of Shusha*



<sup>27</sup> [https://karabakh.center/az/cd-273/susa/mehmandarovlarin-malikane-kompleksi#after\\_gallery0-5](https://karabakh.center/az/cd-273/susa/mehmandarovlarin-malikane-kompleksi#after_gallery0-5)



Since 1959, with the support of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, the Museum of the History of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Culture and the Music Fund a museum dedicated to **Uzeyir Hajibayov**, the great composer of Azerbaijan, was established in his own **house**. Before the occupation, the museum had 1,700 exhibits. During the military aggression, the staff of the museum has managed to evacuate only some of its exhibits to the House Museum in Baku. However, about 1600 exhibits have been destroyed by the armed forces of Armenia. The house has been almost completely destroyed.



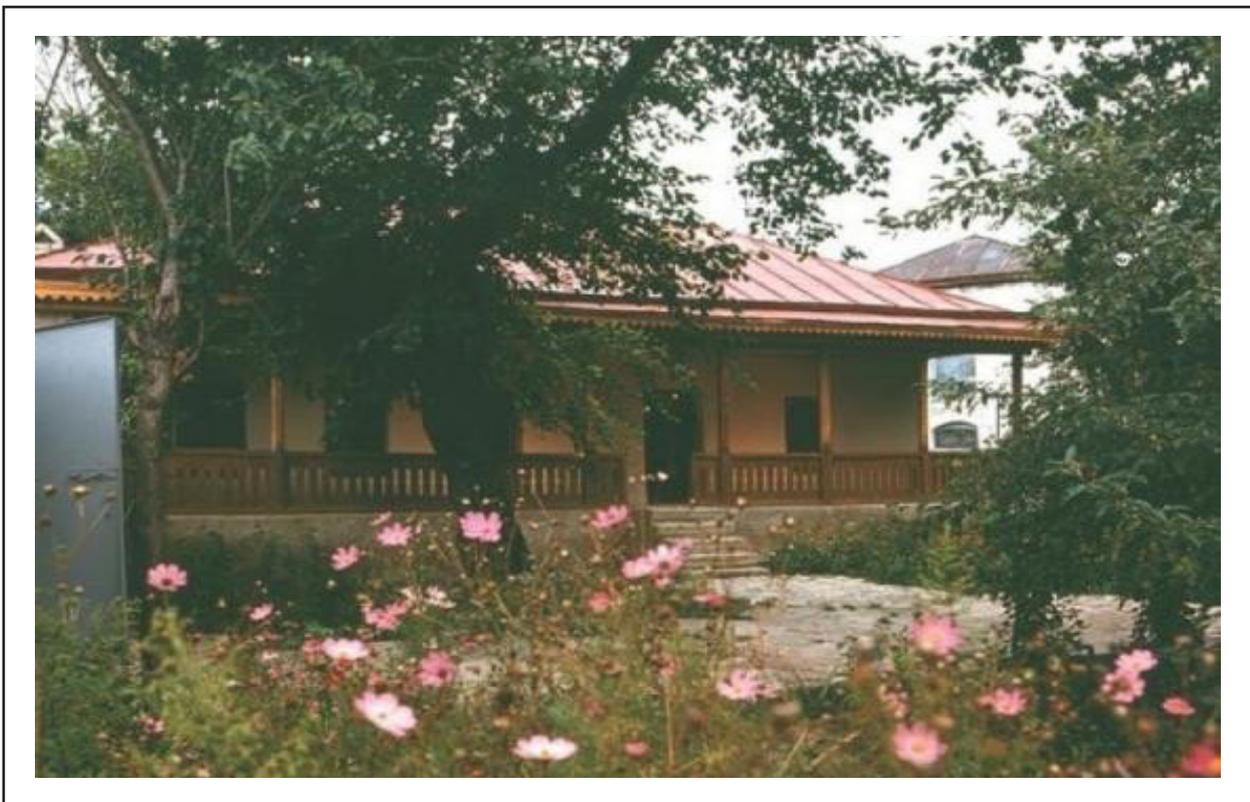
*House of Uzeyir Hajibayov before the occupation* <sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> <https://karabakh.center/ru/cd-246/susa/uzeyir-qadjibeyli-dom-muzey>



*Ruins of the House of Uzeyir Hajibayov after the occupation<sup>29</sup>*

There was also a museum in **the House of Bulbul**. In general, about 9 thousand exhibits were presented in the museum's exposition, about 6 thousand of which were destroyed or removed in the years of the occupation in order to be presented to the world community as examples of Armenian culture. At present, the house has been restored and it hosts again the museum of the famous Azerbaijani singer.



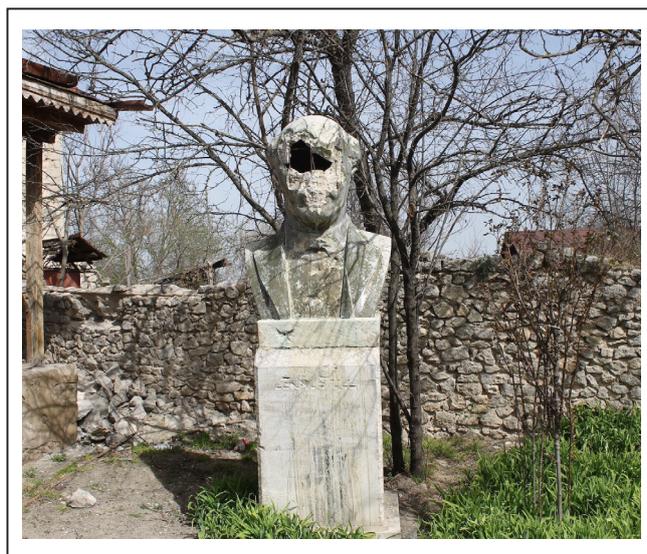
*House of Bulbul before the occupation*

<sup>29</sup> <https://karabakh.center/ru/cd-246/susa/uzeyir-qadjibeyli-dom-muzey#gallery1-4>





*House of Bulbul after the occupation<sup>30</sup>*



*House of Bulbul, restored after the liberation*

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.heritage.gov.az/az/monuments/bulbulun-evi?map=shusha>

**The House of Hajy Gulu** in the Khoja Marjanly quarter was built in 1851. The three-story palace, built in accordance with the best national traditions had 46 rooms and two large guest rooms. In May 1992, during the occupation of the city of Shusha by Armenia, the walls of the House of Hajy Gulu were destroyed by its armed forces. Nowadays, the ruins of the building as separate fragments remind us of its former greatness.



*House of Hajy Gulu before the occupation* <sup>31</sup>



*House of Hajy Gulu after the occupation* <sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Qajar C. (2007). *Staraja Shusha [Old Shusha]*, Baku, Sharg-Garb, p.344 ISBN, 978-9952-34-096-9.

<sup>32</sup> <https://karabakh.center/ru/cd-272/susa/qadjiquulu-aleskerov-pomeste>





Caravanserais, baths, and other civilian buildings hold a special place in the architecture of the city of Shusha. Immediately after the construction of the fortress walls, first caravanserais appeared in the city of Shusha. They were located near city squares, merchant shops and bazaars. By the end of the 19th century, there were 10 caravanserais in Shusha<sup>33</sup>. The convenient location of the caravanserais was the reason for using them even after the need for them disappeared. In Soviet times, many of them were used as bazaars and all-weather markets. During the occupation, many of them have completely lost their historical appearance and have been turned into ruins. The current state of the Shusha caravanserais necessitates conducting urgent restoration or conservation works.



*Caravanserai of Shusha after the occupation* <sup>34</sup>

**Shusha Realni School** was opened on September 20, 1881, in Shusha. It was considered as an exemplary educational center of that epoch. Well-known Azerbaijani writers and artists were graduates of this school. In May 1992, after the occupation of the city of Shusha, the Armenian side set fire to the school and turned it into ruins.

<sup>33</sup> Qajar C. (2007). *Staraja Shusha [Old Shusha]*, Baku, Sharg-Garb, p.344 ISBN, 978-9952-34-096-9.

<sup>34</sup> Photo by the author



*Realni School before the occupation*<sup>35</sup>



*Realni School after the occupation*<sup>36</sup>

In the late 1970s, a **museum and mausoleum complex** were raised on the grave of **Molla Panah Vagif**, an Azerbaijani poet and statesman, vizier of the Garabagh Khanate, who lived in 18th century. The complex was built near a well-known place in the city of Shusha, the Jidir duzu plain. The mausoleum has a quadrangular shape and is decorated with carved marble. About eighty items were exhibited here reflecting the life of Molla Panah Vagif in Shusha. As a result of the occupation of the city of Shusha by the armed forces of Armenia, the building of the complex and exhibits here have been destroyed or removed. After the liberation of Shusha, the mausoleum has been restored.

<sup>35</sup> "War against Azerbaijan Targeting Cultural Heritage" p. 58

<sup>36</sup> [https://azertag.az/xeber/Tehsil\\_Nazirliyi\\_Susa\\_Real\\_Mektebinin\\_berpadan\\_sonraki\\_gornusu\\_ile\\_bagli\\_video\\_paylasib-2146166](https://azertag.az/xeber/Tehsil_Nazirliyi_Susa_Real_Mektebinin_berpadan_sonraki_gornusu_ile_bagli_video_paylasib-2146166)

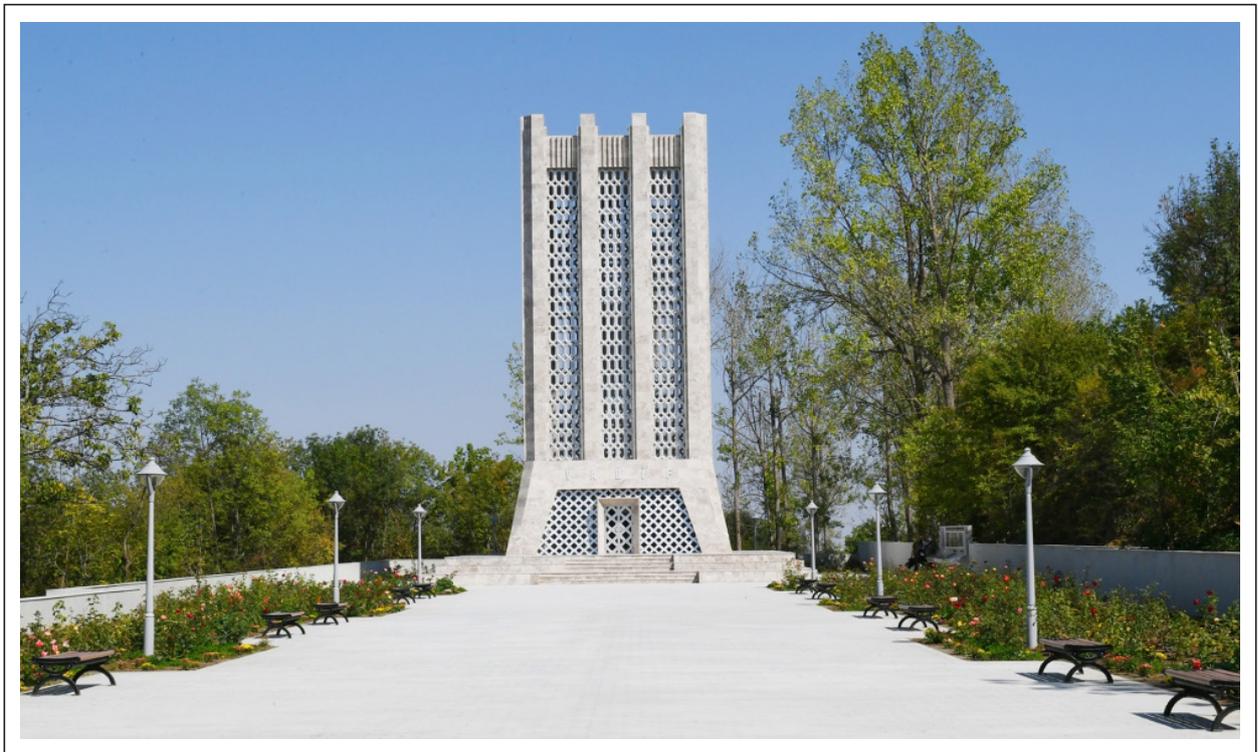




*Mausoleum of Vagif before the occupation<sup>37</sup>*



*Mausoleum of Vagif after the occupation<sup>38</sup>*



*Restoration of the mausoleum of Vagif after the liberation of Shusha<sup>39</sup>*

<sup>37</sup> [https://karabakh.center/az/cd-262/susa/m.p.baqifin-turbesi#before\\_gallery0-4](https://karabakh.center/az/cd-262/susa/m.p.baqifin-turbesi#before_gallery0-4)

<sup>38</sup> [https://karabakh.center/az/cd-262/susa/m.p.baqifin-turbesi#after\\_gallery0-3](https://karabakh.center/az/cd-262/susa/m.p.baqifin-turbesi#after_gallery0-3)

<sup>39</sup> [https://azertag.az/xeber/Susada\\_dahi\\_Azərbaycan\\_sairi\\_Molla\\_Penah\\_Vaqifin\\_muzey\\_meqbere\\_kompleksinin\\_berpandan\\_sonra\\_achilisi\\_olub\\_YENILANIB\\_VIDEO-1863593](https://azertag.az/xeber/Susada_dahi_Azərbaycan_sairi_Molla_Penah_Vaqifin_muzey_meqbere_kompleksinin_berpandan_sonra_achilisi_olub_YENILANIB_VIDEO-1863593)

## Conclusion

Although before the war the old quarters and numerous historical and architectural monuments were in excellent condition, as a result of almost 30 years of occupation, the medieval city of Shusha with its peculiar urban infrastructure has been subjected to serious destruction.

For almost three decades, Baku raised the alarm about the destruction of the rich historical and cultural heritage in the territories of Azerbaijan, including in the city of Shusha occupied by Armenia. The facts of the deliberate erasure of cultural objects have been presented to UNESCO, the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international organizations. However, no effective actions have been taken to stop these crimes and bring the perpetrators to accountability. 738 historical monuments, 28 museums with more than 83,5 thousand exhibits, 4 art galleries, 14 memorial complexes, and 1891 material and cultural resources, including 1107 cultural institutions were destroyed in the territories occupied by Armenia<sup>40</sup>. For instance, the 17th century mosque in the Jabrayil district and the 19th century mosque in the Aghdam district were turned into animal stables. The property of Albanian Christian churches located in Kalbajar, Khojavand and other occupied territories of Azerbaijan have been appropriated. The architectural features of these churches have been changed. They are presented as Armenian monuments. Since 2003, illegal archaeological excavations have been carried out in the Azikh cave and around the Aghdam district. Such acts were committed in violation of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict, adopted on May 14, 1954, and the obligations undertaken by Armenia in accordance with the Second Protocol of this Convention, adopted in 1999.

The damage assessment and restoration works have already started. There is no doubt that the beautiful historical city of Shusha, the pearl of Azerbaijani architecture and urban planning will be fully restored and regain its former glory.

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<sup>40</sup> <https://vestikavkaza.ru/analytics/Armeniya-unichtozhaet-kulturno-istoricheskoe-nasledie-Azerbaydzhana-na-okkupirovannykh-territoriyakh.html>



# Shusha. Cultural Cradle of Azerbaijan

*Daniel Pommier Vincelli\**

## Why a book on Shusha?

When my Azerbaijani colleague Elchin Ahmadov and I decided to publish the first book on Shusha ever written in a western language, we faced the initial challenge to familiarize the Italian public with a place almost unknown and exotic to the average Western reader.<sup>1</sup> Where is Shusha? Why is it important? Why was it a forbidden city and ghost town for almost thirty years? Why a war was fought over its mountains and what is the symbolic value of its stonewalls? When I teach to my Italian students about Azerbaijani history I use a comparative method by picking topics from the most familiar Western and Italian past. Italy and Azerbaijan have many things in common dating back to modern age (XVI-XVIII centuries) and to the nation building era (XIX-XX century). Both countries were subject to foreign and imperial powers and were unable to unify in a singular Nation state, despite the rise of national conscience among Azerbaijanis and Italians in XVIII and XIX centuries. Both countries were divided and fractured in smaller regional states without a force able to overcome local divisions. Both countries had a region that was the cornerstone of culture, language and identity. When introducing Karabakh and Shusha I often remind my students of what Florence and Tuscany represented for the Italian history.

The end of XX century was extremely difficult for Azerbaijan. Even though its borders were internationally recognized, Azerbaijan was mutilated of around 20% of its territory as a consequence of a bloodshed war with Armenia. Shusha, the cultural center of the Azerbaijani nation, was then ripped off the motherland.

## From fortress to capital

The city of Shusha was the capital of the Karabakh Khanate for over half a century. The khanates were the ancient pre-unitary states of Azerbaijan, which arose in the 18th century and were inhabited and led by Azerbaijani dynasties. The territory of the khanates extended over the present-day Azerbaijan and parts of other present-day Southern Caucasian states. The Karabakh Khanate was incorporated into the Tsarist Empire in 1805 by the Treaty of Kurakcay, signed by the Karabakh Khan

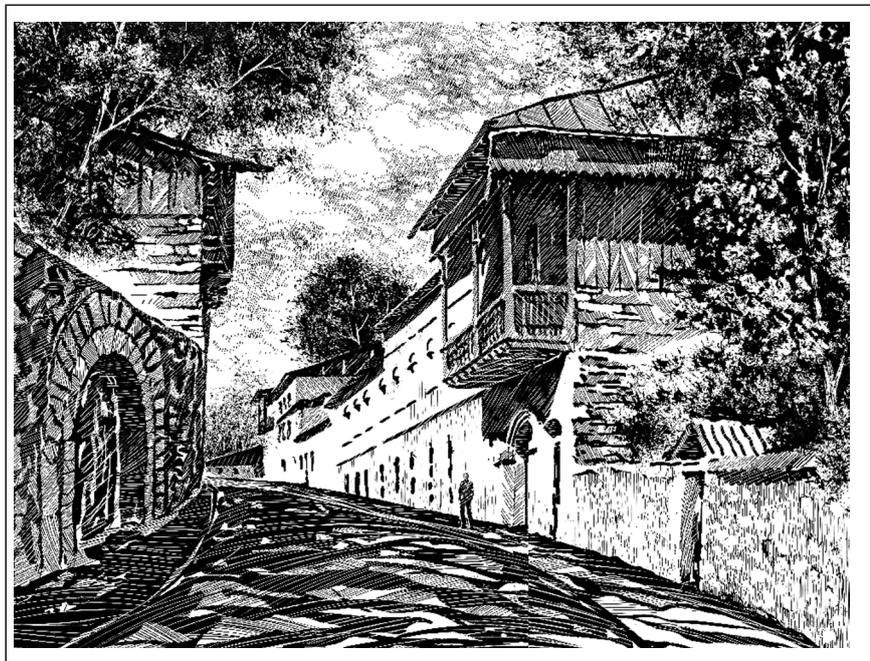
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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Pommier, Elchin Ahmadov, Shusha. Capitale culturale dell'Azerbaijani, (Roma: Sandro Teti Editore, 2021).



Ibrahim Khalil Khan and the general commander of the Russian army Pavel Dmitrievič Cicianov. Karabakh thus retained its state independence until 1805. The foundation of the Karabakh Khanate and the transformation of Shusha from a fortress to capital were related to the biography of Panah Ali Khan (1747-1763), the founder of the state. Panah Ali Khan, was not only instrumental in the foundation, but ruled as first sovereign of the independent Khanate of Karabakh. He descended from the Sarijali branch, which in turn was part of the Javanshir tribe. This Azerbaijani tribe was originally from Karabakh and for a long time played an important role in the socio-political life of the region. The foundation of the city of Shusha was completed in 1752. Panah Ali Khan, declared Shusha the capital of the new state, strengthened it and turned it into a fortress city. The city was named “Panahabad” in honor of its founder and later was renamed “Shusha”.

Since the second half of the 18th century, the population of the city grew rapidly and Shusha became one of the most important and strategically relevant cities in the present-day Azerbaijan. During the reign of Panah Ali Khan, massive works of enlargement of the urban fabric were carried out, and later, by the work of his successor Ibrahim Khalil Khan (1763-1806,) the Karabakh Khanate strengthened its geopolitical position in the Caucasus, disentangling itself from the colliding influences of three empires: Russian, Persian and Ottoman. In the territory of the khanate were edified other important fortresses of strategic importance, such as those of Askaran, Aghoghlan, in addition to the rebuilding of the walls of the same fortress of Shusha. The city grew in a short time and became known for its natural beauty, the tall stoned buildings and the magnificent and imposing walls placed for its protection. The city consisted of 17 wards or districts, each with a mosque, a fountain and a hamam, the traditional Middle Eastern and thermal bath. During the reign of Panah Ali Khan in the initial phase of the city’s construction, the oldest wards were collectively called “Aşağı məhəllə” (Lower Quarter) according to their urban layout in relation to the fortress. The second phase of Shusha’s urban development dates back to the reign of Ibrahim Khalil Khan (1763-1806). In this phase, a second district called “Yuxarı məhəllə” (“Upper Quarter”) was formed.



*Graphic work “Mamayi quarter” by Elturan Avalov, 2008, paper, ink. Photo source: [www.azgallery.az](http://www.azgallery.az)*



## A city between past and modernity

Shusha is an ancient city. It belongs to another time, which digs into our imagination. Its geographical position is unique. The mountain on which it lies at 1600 meters is impassable from three sides, a steep road reaches it on the west side as the only access; the fabric of the city is made of stone walls and the remains of an imposing fortress, squares and paved avenues, palaces, mosques, fountains, patrician houses where eastern and western elements are mixed. Everything in Shusha is reminiscent of the “Middle Ages”, albeit in an original version of “East” and with some Russian and European influence. Yet it is not an “ancient” city, at least in a chronological sense. It belongs to the era we know as late modernity. It was founded in 1752, when New York and Boston were already colonial metropolises, and just a few decades before Australia was discovered and the French Revolution changed the world forever. Its history witnessed the continuous irruption of modernity: empires, nationalisms, revolutions, but also economic development, cultural growth and enlightenment.

At the half of the eighteenth century, while the novel *Tom Jones* was being published in London and the myth of *Balilla* – the hero boy against the invaders – circulated in Italy, Southern Caucasus was also experiencing a season of upheaval. It is often written that the Caucasus- this region between two seas and separated from Russia by a large mountain range from which it takes its name- was at the crossroads of the great Eurasian empires. Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Mongols, Timurids and in more recent times Ottomans and Russians competed for hegemony over a place in between Asia and Europe, an important commercial hub and a territory of great natural wealth. When Shusha was founded by its first ruler Panah Ali Khan, it was at that time “when the old world is dying and the new one is slow to appear”. By the late 1740s following the decline of the Nadir Shah (Afshar) Empire (1736-1747), which had exercised its hegemony over the Caucasus, the political power was in crisis. Before that, the Azerbaijani Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), in power since the sixteenth century, had been extinct and confused power struggles disrupted the empire, leading to its retreat from Caucasus. The Russian and Ottoman Empires - the other two major competitors in the region - were also too weak or too busy with other crises to take advantage of the political situation in the region. This was the time, for the local ruling class to express a political autonomy. At the end of 1840s, in the territory of present-day Azerbaijan and beyond (even in present-day Armenia), the Azerbaijani Khanates were formally established and prospered for the following decades. The khanates were autonomous polities led by Azerbaijani dynasties. In a comparison easily understood by the contemporary reader, the Azerbaijani khanates were similar to the ancient pre-unitary states of Italy, which divided the peninsula until 1861. Just as the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, or the Kingdom of Naples were “Italian” in language, culture, and institutions, so too the Karabakh, Baku, or Ganja Khanates represented a form of Azerbaijani statehood in language, social structure, religion, and urban organization. One of the most important khanates was Karabakh, a region much larger than the one that was the object of the recent conflict and inhabited by a mixture of Muslim and Christian populations. Shusha was born, following the foundation of a new independent state riding of the heavy protection of empires. Its foundation responded to a military need. Whoever built fortresses controlled the



territory, thus retaining political power. The mountain of Shusha allowed to dominate a large part of the region. Panah Ali Khan, the first ruler of the Karabakh Khanate, was a skilled personality. His successor, the second khan, Ibrahim Khalil Khan, was the true architect of Shusha's development. The city grew in spite of the many conflicts it was involved in. The poet Vagif, one of the leading figures of Azerbaijani poetry and one of the greatest representatives of the history of literature of Islamic countries, occupied the role of vizier of Ibrahim Khalil Khan in Shusha for many years. But with the advent of the nineteenth century, the empires returned to the struggle to subjugate the Caucasus.

Tsarist Russia after the end of the Napoleonic wars was committed to conquer its tricontinental colonial empire by occupying over the decades Caucasus, Central Asia, Siberia, Far East and Alaska. In 1805, Ibrahim Khalil Khan signed a fundamental agreement for the history of Karabakh: the khanate while retaining its merely formal independence accepted the Russian protectorate entering, de facto in the orbit of Tsardom. In the twenties of the nineteenth century Karabakh lost its formal independence to become a Russian colonial province. The Karabakhi Muslims became subjects of the Tsarist Empire. In his Journey to Arzrum, Aleksandr S. Pushkin recounts the Russian-Turkish war of 1829 and how the "Karabakh regiment" composed of Azerbaijanis on horseback defeated their Ottoman adversaries. And again, how "first in pursuit were our Tatar regiments, whose horses are distinguished by speed and vigor," speaking of the Karabakh horse, the native horse breed that is a true symbol of the territory. As Thomas De Waal wrote in his memorable Black Garden "In the nineteenth century Shusha was one of the great cities of the Caucasus, larger and more prosperous than either Baku or Yerevan. Standing in the middle of a net of caravan routes it had ten caravanserais. It was well known for its silk trade, drawing on the famous Karabakh mulberry trees, for its paved streets and large stone houses, for its brightly colored carpets, and for its fine-bred horses." <sup>2</sup>

Until the early nineteenth century, the absolute majority of the population living in Karabakh, including Shusha, were Azerbaijanis. The change in the composition of the city's demography was due to Tsarist Russia policy, which with occupation of the South Caucasus, decided to use Armenians to strengthen its position here. According to the terms of the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828) and the Treaty of Edirne (1829), Tsarist Russia began the resettlement of Armenians from Iran and Ottoman Turkey in the South Caucasus, mainly in the lands of historical Azerbaijan, including in the mountainous part of Karabakh. According to official data, Russia allowed the relocation of 40,000 Iranian and 84,000 Turkish Armenians to the South Caucasus in 1828-1830 alone. The service of Armenians didn't go unrewarded by Russia. In 1836, the Russian Tsar adopted an act abolishing independent (Caucasian) Albanian Catholicosate<sup>3</sup> with its center in Karabakh, in its mountainous part, and subordinating it to the Armenian Echmiadzin Catholicosate. Property of the Albanian Church was transferred to the Armenian Church and its archives were destroyed. Loss of state

<sup>2</sup> Thomas De Waal, Black Garden. Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War, New York University Press, 2013, p. 200.

<sup>3</sup> Azerbaijan has ancient traditions of statehood. Caucasian Albania (IV BC-VIII) was the first state in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Karabakh was its part, as it was part of other Azerbaijani states like Sajjids, Salarids, Shaddadids, Atabays and others emerged later. Caucasian Albania was home to different religious traditions, including Zoroastrianism and Christianity. The conquest of Albania by Arabs put an end to its existence in the early 8th century and resulted in adoption of Islam by most of the Albanian population, while some in the mountainous places continued to adhere to Christianity.





and church independence in this situation led to the process of armenization of the local Christian population of (Caucasian) Albanian origin in the mountainous part of Karabakh. In 1905 and 1918 there were clashes and conflicts between the Azerbaijanis and the Armenians, which were followed by moments of true and sincere reconciliation.

In 1917, the Tsarist empire collapsed and once again the Russians abandoned Caucasus. It was the moment when the three republics were established in Transcaucasia: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Karabakh was a part of the newly formed Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and in 1919 the great victorious Powers of World War I- the United Kingdom, France and Italy- recognized this sovereignty of Azerbaijan. There were conflicts between the three republics (mainly because of Armenia's claims to the other two) but also some mutual understandings. In 1919, the Armenians of the mountainous part of Karabakh, where they lived in, officially recognized the authority of Azerbaijan. In 1920 the Russians returned to the Caucasus under the guise of Soviet power and the new state, founded on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the leading role of the Communist Party. Like tiles of a domino, Azerbaijan, Armenia and finally, in 1921, Georgia fell into Soviet hands. The three republics continued to exist formally and then became associated in the new Union of Soviet Republics (1922). The Caucasian bureau of the Russian Communist Party in July 1921, considering the economic ties between upper and lower Karabakh, decided that "Nagorno-Karabakh" is to be retained within the boundaries of Azerbaijan and conferred broad autonomy, with Shusha as its administrative centre.

Thus was born "the autonomous region of Nagorno Karabakh". The wording of the decision, i.e., to leave "Nagorno-Karabakh" within the Azerbaijan SSR, as well as the events in 1919 mentioned above, one more time refute the allegation that in 1921 the mountainous part of Karabakh, was "transferred to Azerbaijan". This territory has always constituted a part of Azerbaijan.

Shusha continued to be an Azerbaijani city with a small Armenian minority: in 1989, 98% of the city population was Azerbaijani. The seventy-year Soviet period passed basically quietly in Karabakh and relations between the two communities were peaceful and relaxed, even with numerous inter-ethnic marriages. Between the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, during the first leadership of Heydar Aliyev (1969-1982) as the First Secretary of the



*National Leader of the Azerbaijani people Heydar Aliyev at the inauguration of the Mausoleum of Molla Panah Vagif, 1982.*

*Photo source: [www.azertag.az](http://www.azertag.az)*

Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, the city began to discover its cultural identity again, also through the building of new monuments that recalled a past that the Soviet era tended to erase, such as the inauguration of the mausoleum of Vagif in 1982, and the establishment of the Historical and Architectural Reserve of Shusha in 1977. The crisis of the Soviet Union in the eighties and the emergence of an aggressive nationalism, on the Armenian side, led to an unrepentant movement that, in 1987-88, demanded the separation of the region from Azerbaijan and its annexation to Armenia. Soon that movement became hegemonic in Armenia and represented the only form of relationship with neighboring Azerbaijan. At the end of eighties tensions between the two Soviet republics began. The Karabakh issue had a turning point with the collapse of the USSR. At the time of the dissolution of the Union in the summer of 1991, the fifteen successor states of the Soviet Union (including Armenia and Azerbaijan) agreed on a simple principle. The borders of the new fifteen countries- internationally recognized- that would have succeeded the dying USSR would have been the same as those of the fifteen Soviet republics that formed the Union. This was the basis, both political and international-legal, of the recognition of the “Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh” as an integral part of the newborn Republic of Azerbaijan; this administrative-territorial entity was abolished by the law of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Azerbaijan on November 26, 1991. Armenia did not maintain its word on the borders of the new States. I do not want to reconstruct the military clashes in 1992-1994 during the conflict in this article. Both the Karabakh region and other surrounding districts of Azerbaijan were occupied. Many westerners, who have a superficial knowledge of the events, do not know that Karabakh is very far from Armenia and completely surrounded by territories with a totally Azerbaijani ethnic presence. The war of occupation produced a humanitarian disaster. One million Azerbaijanis were uprooted from their homes and Azerbaijan became in a few weeks the country with the highest number of internal refugees, in relation to the population, in the world. 1992 was the *annus horribilis* of Shusha. In the



spring of 1992 the city experienced a siege. In the afternoon of May 8, 1992 the armed forces of Armenia launched their final assault and in less than twenty-four hours the city was invaded, while the entire Azerbaijani population fled, losing the chance to return for over a quarter of a century. For more than twenty-eight years Shusha has been isolated from the world, emptied of its inhabitants with its cultural heritage erased, dilapidated and impoverished.

State of the Karabakh khan's Palace after the occupation.

Photo source: [www.culture.gov.az](http://www.culture.gov.az)

## Time for reconstruction

A generation passed, while the mediators in the face of the so-called Minsk Group failed to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. It was not until September 2020 that history returned to accelerate its course in Karabakh. The Forty-Four Day War, which broke out on September 27, was signed by a rapid Azerbaijani victory, with the gradual liberation of all territories from Armenia's occupation. Shusha was liberated on November 8, 2020 and signing of the Trilateral Statement by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russian Federation on November 10, 2020 put an end to the conflict, reversing the outcome of 28 years and 6 months earlier.



*President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva at the opening of the Uzeyir Hajibeyli monument in Shusha, 29 August 2021.*

*Photo source: [www.president.az](http://www.president.az)*

Azerbaijan is accelerating the material, economic and social reconstruction of the liberated territories. Actions of Azerbaijan demonstrate to the world that its sovereignty is not only legitimate in itself, but brings progress and modernization to an area that has been isolated from the world for almost 30 years, destroyed, impoverished and emptied of its vital forces. Baku immediately took large-scale measures to restore the liberated territories, ensure their future development, create the necessary infrastructure and return the displaced population

to their homelands. In this regard, President Ilham Aliyev made two important decisions. In order to restore the historical appearance of the city of Shusha, its former glory and revive its traditionally rich cultural life, as well as to promote it in the international arena as a bright pearl of Azerbaijan's centuries-old culture and architecture, on May 7, 2021, the President declared Shusha the cultural capital of Azerbaijan. At the same time, in order to ensure a unique program of equal development of the liberated territories through the effective use of the rich economic potential, natural resources and extensive tourist opportunities of these areas, the division of the liberated territories into economic districts was reconsidered. Therefore, by a decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 7, 2021, two economic districts were established in the liberated territories: Karabakh Economic Region, which includes the city of Khankandi, the districts of Aghjabadi, Aghdam, Barda, Fuzuli, Khojaly, Khojavand, Shusha and Tartar, and East Zangazur Economic Region, which includes the districts of Jabrayil, Kalbajar, Gubadli, Lachin and Zangilan. Azerbaijan wants to project the image of a strong reconstruction, focusing on the connectivity and interdependence of the entire South Caucasus region.



During more than 28 years of Armenian occupation Shusha suffered systematic destruction. As Australian journalist Francis Farrell wrote in New Eastern Europe soon after the end of the conflict, “most of Shusha’s Azeri cultural sites remain in ruins, such as the mausoleum of 18th-century poet Molla Panah Vagif, which now stands as a great ambiguous cage-like structure on the town’s edge”. But the restoration and reconstruction works, both completed and in progress, as well as the cultural events promoted in the year



*President Ilham Aliyev at the opening of the bust of Molla Panah Vagif, 29 August 2021.*

*Photo source: [www.president.az](http://www.president.az)*

following the liberation, show the will to make it a sort of symbolic capital of Azerbaijan. The attention given to Shusha is evidenced by the numerous visits of President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva. The visits have seen a long series of inaugurations of hotels, cultural centers, monuments, house-museums, multimedia centers, poetry and music festivals, also linked to the great Azerbaijani personalities who have lived in the city since the eighteenth century, such as Vagif, Khurshidbanu Natavan, Uzeyir Hajibayli, Bulbul. Reconstruction activities- after a conflict of almost thirty years – are not only material. Reconstruction projects can be divided into two major categories: those that concern the intangible heritage- poetry, music, theater- and those that aim to remedy the material devastation of the last thirty years.

## Conclusion

The challenge of the reconstruction is to restore, with the most advanced technologies and through cooperation with foreign companies (including many Italian ones), these places to their former vitality. All cultural sites that have been destroyed or depleted during the years of occupation, as if to complete a cultural ethnic cleansing after the one on the population.

Alongside the monuments, impressive infrastructural works are being completed such as the Victory Road along the Ahmadbayli-Fuzuli-Shusha route, and the construction of Fuzuli International Airport, which is the gateway to the Karabakh area, including Shusha.

Among the intangible works, we cannot fail to mention the “Xaribülbul” (Kharibulbul) Music Festival, held on May 12-13, 2021 and on May 12-14, 2022 on the Jidir Duzu Plain, dedicated to ethnic and





*Xarıbülbül Music Festival, Shusha, 12 May 2021.  
Photo source: [www.president.az](http://www.president.az)*

liberation. President Ilham Aliyev has repeatedly said that even though Armenia destroyed all these territories during the military occupation, Azerbaijan will soon turn the liberated territories, including Shusha, into a paradise by restoring it to its former glory. The works completed in a short period of time, the ongoing works and the designed plans show that in a very short time these areas, which have unique natural beauties and rich history, will become the most attractive and developed region not only of Azerbaijan but also of the whole South Caucasus. The impressive restoration and reconstruction works underway in Shusha will soon restore the city to its former glory. All this raises hopes that the historical center of Shusha, declared a historical and architectural reserve in August 1977 on the initiative of National Leader Heydar Aliyev and included in the preliminary list of UNESCO World Heritage in 2001, will soon be included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

folk music, and the Vagif Poetry Days, held on August 30-31, 2021 and July 15, 2022, in front of the Vagif Mausoleum. Both events resumed their course after the 30-year occupation and were organized by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, and inaugurated by President Ilham Aliyev. In addition, the Uzeyir Hajibayli International Music Festival, which is celebrated every year on September 18, on the birthday of the well-known musician, was held for the first time in 2021 in the park where his statue was erected in Shusha after the



*President Ilham Aliyev views the works carried out at the Fuzuli International Airport, 18 October 2021.  
Photo source: [www.president.az](http://www.president.az)*

# Why Shusha?

PD Dr. Michael Reinhard Hess, M.A.\*

On May 7, 2021, President Ilham Aliyev decreed the elevation of the city of Shusha to the rank of Azerbaijan's cultural capital (*Azərbaycanın mədəniyyət paytaxtı*).<sup>1</sup> In another decree that followed on January 5, 2022, President Ilham Aliyev declared 2022 as the Year of Shusha (*Şuşa İli*). Both acts lucidly highlight the unique place that Shusha occupies in the history and cultural memory of Azerbaijan.

## Shusha's foundation: facts

There can be no doubt that the main reason for the emergence of Shusha as one of historical Azerbaijan's major cultural centers was its being chosen as the capital of the Khanate of Karabakh.<sup>2</sup>

Shusha was not the first capital of the Karabakh Khanate. The founder of the Khanate, Panah Ali (Pənahəli, ca. 1693-1763), chose as his first main town Bayat, which is situated approximately 50 kilometers to the west of Shusha. It was close to the homeland of the Cavanşir Oghuz Turkic tribe, whose leader Panah Ali was. Several years after the foundation of the Khanate, probably in 1751 or 1752, Panah Ali transferred his residence from Bayat to a fortified place called Shahbulag (Şahbulaq), which is in the vicinity of Aghdam (Ağdam) and whose name translates as "King's Spring". Only after Bayat and Shahbulag had served as the first two residences of the Khan of Karabakh the city we know as Shusha today became the Khanate's third capital.

The somewhat cumbersome expression "the city we know as Shusha today" may be an adequate form of reference because the name "Shusha" was not yet used for it at that time. Instead, Panah Ali named it Panahabad (Pənahabad). This name can be understood "city of Panah", as Panah is the first part of the name Panah Ali and may serve as an abbreviation of it. Alternatively, Panahabad can also be translated as "the city of asylum", as *panah* as a generic term signifies "asylum". It was only later that the name "Panahabad" was replaced by "Shusha" on orders of Panahali's son and successor Ibrahimkhalil, who ruled the Khanate from 1763 to his death in 1806.

Publications on the history of Shusha do not provide a precise date when the renaming happened. Possible *termini ante quos* are 1797 or even 1795. In these two years, the city was attacked by the Qajars (Qacarlar). During one of the sieges, the attackers and the beleaguered residents of Shusha exchanged provocations in which a pun turning on the name of the city and the phonetically similar word for "glass" (*şüşə in Azerbaijani*) was used<sup>3</sup>. From this, one may infer that "Shusha" must have been used as the name of the city at least during one of these attacks. However, it is possible that the city got its new name already considerably earlier.

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<sup>1</sup> The original Azerbaijani text of the decree can be found, together with a Russian translation, in: Xeyrana Abbasova, Şuşa. Azərbaycanın mədəniyyət paytaxtı. Bibliografiya (Baku: Azərbaycan Milli Kitabxanası, Azərbaycan Respublikası Mədəniyyət Nazirliyi, 2021), p. 5-8.

<sup>2</sup> Brief summaries of the history of the Karabakh Khanate can be found in Michael Reinhard Hess, Karabakh from the 13th century to 1920. Unfolding Azerbaijan's history, 3rd, rev. ed. (Berlin: Gulandot, 2022), p. 64-77; and in Idem, Panzer im Paradies. Der Berg-Karabach-Konflikt zwischen Armenien und Aserbaidschan (Berlin: Dr. Köster, 2016), p. 32-43.

<sup>3</sup> On the sieges and the pun, see В. Н. Левиатов, "Предисловие", in: Мирзэ Адыгөзэл бэй, Qarabağnamə/ Karabag-name, ed. A. Алескерзаде (Baku: Издательство Академия наук Азербайджанской ССР, 1950), p. 30f.; Чингиз Каджар, Staraja Shusha (Baku: Şərq-Qərb, 2007), p. 52 Каджар, op. cit., p. 53.





## Politics blends with culture: the age of Vagif

Within the four decades after its foundation, the Khanate of Karabakh and its capital became not only one of the political power centers in the South Caucasus but also an important economic node and a place of considerable cultural charisma.

A key role in this development was played by Molla Panah Vagif (Molla Pənah Vaqif, 1717-1797). On one hand, he occupied top positions in the political organization of the khanate. For many years, he held the office of vizier, which was the second most important political function after that of the khan. On the other hand, he was an accomplished teacher, scholar, and poet. Together with Vidadi (1709-1809), he is considered to have been the most important Azerbaijani poet of his time. In many instances, Vagif's intellectual and artistic talent went hand in hand with his political skills. For instance, he is credited with having been the mastermind of the khanate's chancellery. The quality of the official documents produced by this chancellery was so impressive that the Russian empress Catherine the Great (ruled in 1762-1796) appreciated them more than those of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, Vagif can be credited with having made a large contribution both to the political and the cultural burgeoning of the Karabakh Khanate, and therefore simultaneously of Shusha as well. Tragically, most of Vagif's literary works are said to have been destroyed after his tragic death. Therefore, it is not possible to say if the simultaneous thriving of Karabakh and Shusha in the political, economic, and cultural sphere were the results of a conscious design. However, this combination doubtlessly became one of the reasons why Karabakh and Shusha continued to be amongst the most important economic and cultural centers of Azerbaijan even after the khanate was *de facto* subjugated by Russia in 1805 and formally abolished in 1822.

## Culture in the post-independence period

After Russia had completed its military conquest of the South Caucasian Muslim khanates and other territories, it step by step set about replacing the former political and administrative structures by new organizational forms. The long-time goal of Russian politics was to melt away the traces of the original culture in order to make the newly taken lands indistinguishable from any part of the Russian Empire and thereby lastingly inseparable from it. This process began at the moment each of the formerly independent Muslim territory was invaded (which was the year 1805 in the case of the Khanate of Karabakh and the city of Shusha) and continued into the second half of the 19th century. Among other things, this process of gradual assimilation can be seen in a number of administrative reforms (in 1840, 1846, 1859, and 1867).<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Russians applied other

<sup>4</sup> Каджар, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> On these reforms, cf. Mahmudov, Yaqub M. (ed.), *Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti Ensiklopediyası*, vol. 2 (Baku: Lider Nəşriyyat, 2004-2005), p. 123.

far reaching measures that reshaped not only the administrative and political but also the cultural, social, and economic landscape in a radical way.

In the first phase after the completion of the military conquest, the Russians did not fully replace the old Muslim Azerbaijani élites but allowed them to preserve a part of their former possessions, titles, and influence. Some of them were integrated into the Russian military and civilian establishment. This also concerned a number of members of the former ruling dynasty of Karabakh. For instance, Mahammad Hasan agha (Məhəmməd Həsən ağa, 1766-1805), who had been Ibrahimkhalil's son and legitimate successor before his untimely death, and Mahammad Hasan agha's son Jafargulu khan (Cəfərqulu xan, 1787-1866) both received ranks in the Russian army.<sup>6</sup>

The fate of Jafargulu khan is particularly illustrative of the changing role that certain members of the old Muslim Azerbaijani élites were able to play in the first decades after the Russian conquest. Although he deserted from the Russian army in 1812 and went over to the Russian's enemies, the Qajars, he was pardoned by Russia shortly afterward. In 1822, he unsuccessfully tried to reclaim his hereditary rights to the throne of the Karabakh Khanate, which the Russians had just liquidated. Following this, Jafargulu khan spent a period of banishment in the Russian cities of Simbirsk and St. Petersburg. He was eventually allowed to return to his native town of Shusha in 1829.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, Jafargulu khan then invested a good portion of his fortune into the cultural life of Shusha. Among other things, his *majlises* (party-like gatherings with literary and other cultural presentations) became an important part of the city's cultural landscape.

Generally speaking, much of the money and influence that was still in the hands of the former ruling family of Shusha and Karabakh, as well as other parts of the Muslim Azerbaijani upper class, poured into similar cultural activities. This means that although the old élites had lost political control, they were still able to uphold their influence in the cultural sphere. In sum, this situation enabled them not only to preserve much of the traditional Azerbaijani Muslim culture in the period of Russian rule but also to contribute to its veritable development.

As far as Shusha and Karabakh are concerned, the most emblematic figure to mention in this context is probably Khurshidbanu Natavan (Xurşidbanu Natəvan, 1837-1897).<sup>8</sup> She was not only a daughter of the last (although only nominally ruling) khan of Karabakh, Mehdiqulu (Mehdiqulu, 1763-1845), but also one of the leading female Azerbaijani poetesses of her age. The *majlis* she established in Shusha was one of the most important events in Azerbaijani literary and musical history, as it brought together leading poets, writers, musicians, and composers of the time over a stretch of many years. Also, Khurshidbanu Natavan was a modernizer and reformer of her hometown, bestowing on it a system of water conduits remains of which are still seen today. Other important names that illustrate the dimension of Shusha's cultural blossoming are the poetess Ashug Pari

<sup>6</sup> Каджар, *op. cit.*, p. 235f., 254.

<sup>7</sup> On the life of Cəfərqulu xan, Каджар, *op. cit.*, p. 236, 254.

<sup>8</sup> A short sketch of Xurşidbanu Natəvan's life can be found in Parvana Bayram, "NĀTAVĀN, Hūrşid Bānū Nātavān", <http://teis.yesevi.edu.tr/madde-detay/natavan-hursid-banu-natavan> [accessed on April 4, 2022]. Cf. also Əzizə Cəfərzadə. *Natəvan haqqında hekayələr* (Baku: Azərbaycan Dövlət Nəşriyyatı, 1963); Bəylər Məmmədov, "Ön Söz", in: Xurşidbanu Natəvan: Əsərləri (Baku: Lider Nəşriyyat, 2004), p. 4-16; Əliabbas Müznib, *Natəvan Xurşidbanu* (Baku: Elm və Təhsil, 2012).





(Aşıq Pəri, ca. 1802-after 1842),<sup>9</sup> the poet and polymath Mir Mohsun Navvab (Mir Möhsün Nəvvab, 1833-1913 or 1918), whose literary *məclis* could rival that of Khurshidbanu Natavan,<sup>10</sup> and the poetess Fatma khanum Kamina (Fatma xanım Kəminə, 1841-1898).<sup>11</sup>

## Shusha's heritage: from tradition to modernity

Towards the end of the 19th century, Shusha's importance as an economic and cultural center suffered a marked decline. There were a number of reasons for this.

Some of them had to do with the administrative restructuring measures mentioned above imposed by the Russia rule. The "Province of Karabakh" (in Russian, *Karabagskaja provincija* or *Karabakhskaja provincija*), whose center Shusha had been, was dissolved in 1840. Subsequently, the territory of the former Khanate of Karabakh became integrated into administrative units which names and delimitations tended to obliterate the historical importance of the Karabakh Khanate and its capital Shusha. In 1840, the area became part of the "Caspian Province" with its main place Shemakha (Şamaxı), and in 1846 of the *gubernija* (governorate) of Shemakha. After Shemakha had been destroyed by a devastating earthquake in 1859, the *gubernija* was renamed Governorate of Baku, with the city of Baku as its main place. Finally, in 1867, Shusha became part of the *gubernija* of Elizavetpol, which was the name the Russians used for Ganja (Gəncə), which is today Azerbaijan's second largest city.<sup>12</sup>

Another reason was the rise of Baku as an economic and cultural metropole. As a consequence of Shemakha's destruction and, more importantly, the beginning of the oil boom (around 1872), Baku gradually became Azerbaijan's most important political, economic, and cultural center.<sup>13</sup>

However, even in the post-1867 period, Shusha made a crucial contribution to Azerbaijan's cultural history. At this stage of cultural history, the city's main achievement can be described as the transformation of traditional Islamic Azerbaijani culture, be it music, poetry, literature in general or other branches of culture. This transformation was to a large degree a transposition of traditional Muslim Azerbaijani forms of cultural expression onto Western cultural currents, and *vice versa*.

<sup>9</sup> On her, cf. Əzizə Cəfərzadə (ed.), *Azərbaycan qadın şairləri antologiyası* (Baku: Avrasiya Press, 2005), p. 96; Əlisahib Əroğul, Aşıq Pəri. Həyatı, mühiti və sənəti (Baku: Şərq-Qərb, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> On Nəvvab, cf. Əkrəm Bağirov, "Ön söz", in: Mir Möhsün Nəvvab, *Təzkireyi-Nəvvab* (Baku: Elm, 2018), p. 5-7.

<sup>11</sup> On her, cf. Eva-Maria Auch/ Rasim Mirzayev, *Muslimisch-aserbaidshanische Eliten der Region Karabach zwischen Modernisierung und politischen Umbrüchen (1850-1940). Ein bibliographisches Lexikon* (Baku: Stiftung für Wissenschaftsentwicklung, 2017), [http://www.sdf.gov.az/development/uploads/qrantlar\\_uzre\\_neshrler/eif\\_kitabrlar/muslimisch-azerb\\_eliten\\_yeva\\_maria.pdf](http://www.sdf.gov.az/development/uploads/qrantlar_uzre_neshrler/eif_kitabrlar/muslimisch-azerb_eliten_yeva_maria.pdf) [accessed on April 10, 2022], p. 155f.

<sup>12</sup> The preceding summary of administrative dates is based on В. Н. Левиатов, [No title], in: Мирзэ Адыгəзəл бəй, *Qarabağnamə/ Karabag-name*, ed. A. Алескерзəде (Баку: Издательство Академия наук Азербайджанской ССР, 1950), p. 5-23; Mahmudov, op. cit., vol.1, p. 224f.; vol. 2, p. 116-126; Heydarov 2008, op. cit., p. 39; Aser Babajew, *Weder Krieg noch Frieden im Südkaukasus. Hintergründe, Akteure, Entwicklungen zum Bergkarabach-Konflikt* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014), p. 26; and (2014) *غاب هرق. قيرط مم الس ل ي ف زاقوق ل (هرهاق ل: االب ن ل اء اء ل ي ف ق ث ل ل)*, p. 100.

<sup>13</sup> On the history of the oil boom in and around Baku, cf. Deutsch-Aserbaidshanisches Forum (ed.), *Aserbaidshan. 33 Fakten, die man kennen muß* (Berlin: Deutsch-Aserbaidshanes Forum e.V., [2012]), p. 33; Mathieu Auzanneau, *Or noir. La grande histoire du pétrole* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), p. 54f.

The result was a cultural amalgam which can be called traditional because it preserved many forms and motifs of classical Azerbaijani culture (such as *muğam* music, classical *əruz* poetry or forms of traditional religious drama such as the *şəbih*) but which at the same time was innovative in creating new forms of expression in dialogue with Western influences.

Shusha's contribution to the overall process of bringing traditional Azerbaijani and Western culture into a productive dialogue can be highlighted by using the examples of Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev (Əbdürrəhim bəy Haqverdiyev, 1870-1933) and the Hajibayov brothers, amongst whom by far the most influential was Uzeyir Hajibeyov (Üzeyir Hacıbəyov, 1885-1948), followed by Jeyhun bey Hajibeyov (Ceyhun bəy Hacıbəyov, 1891-1962) and Zulfugar Hajibeyov (Zülfüqar Hacıbəyov, 1884-1950). However, many other representatives of Azerbaijani culture could be named here as well. Both Hagverdiyev and the Hajibeyov brothers came from Shusha or the area surrounding it. Their intellectual and artistic careers were shaped by the above-mentioned unique cultural climate that had been created in the city. Their personal life and intellectual and artistic careers intersected in numerous ways, enabling them to benefit from each other's motivation and inspiration.

One of the most beautiful concrete examples of how this cooperation and mutual inspiration worked is the history of the creation of the first opera of the Islamic world by Uzeyir Hajibeyov. Probably in 1897 or 1898, a scenic representation with musical accompaniment bearing the title "Majnun on the grave of Leyli" (*Məcnun Leylinin məzarı üstündə*) was staged in Shusha. The story was based on Füzuli's (ca. 1485-1556) famous adaptation of Nizami Ganjavi's (1141-1209) equally illustrious poem. The performance itself was organized by Hagverdiyev, who might also have been responsible for the dramaturgy as he was one of the most influential Azerbaijani playwrights and writers of his time. This small dramatic performance with music then became one of the main inspirational sources for Uzeyir Hajibeyov in writing the Islamic world's first ever opera, "Leyli and Majnun" (*Leyli və Məcnun*) in 1907. It was staged in Baku in the following year (on January 25 according to the Gregorian calendar). Interestingly, the conductor of this truly historical première was Hagverdiyev.<sup>14</sup> Here one sees how the circle was closed, with the whole project finding its way back to one of the persons who had originally inspired it. This kind of cooperation is typical of the way in which the cultural life practically worked in Shusha and amongst people originating from Shusha around the beginning of the 20th century. It shows that the unprecedented achievements that Uzeyir Hajibeyov made in the realm of composing and musical theory, as well as the accomplishments of other heirs of Shusha's cultural richness were not only individual exploits but at the same time also the products of a general atmosphere of openness and cooperation.

In sum, the example of "*Leyli and Majnun*" shows how the unique cultural development that Shusha had seen during the 19th century became one of the pillars of Azerbaijan's modern culture of the 20th and 21st centuries, which is unique in the Islamic world for its fertile amalgamation of traditional and modern, Oriental and Western elements.

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<sup>14</sup> On the history of the first opera of the Islamic world, cf. Elmira Abasova et al. (eds.), *Üzeyir Hacıbəyov Ensiklopediyası* (Baku: Şərq-Qərb, 2007), p. 81-96, 135-140, 144; Anar, "Dahi bəstəkarımız", in: Abasova, op. cit., p. 10-16. On Füzuli's poem, cf. Bedriye Atsız "Mehmed Füzüli: Leylā ve Meğnün", in: Walter Jens (ed.), *Kindlers Neues Literatur Lexikon*, vol. 5 (Frechen: Komet, 1998), p. 932f.



## **Conclusion: three periods of Shusha's history influenced Azerbaijan's modern culture**

The political and cultural flowering that Shusha had witnessed in the era of the Karabakh Khanate can be described as the first phase that constituted its importance to the cultural history of Azerbaijan. This first period was followed by a second one which comprised the first decades of the Russian rule. In this second phase, political independence was lost but the fervor of the cultural unfolding continued mostly unabatedly. Finally, a third phase can be identified from the late 19th century onward. In this era, the unique cultural richness that Shusha and Karabakh had been able to preserve entered in intense contact with Western culture, as can be seen from the examples of Uzeyir Hajibeyov and Abdurrahim bey Hagverdiyev.

In conclusion, Shusha's past does not only seem to be interesting from a purely archival point of view. It also reveals some features of Azerbaijani culture that continue to shape its present and may be used to carry it into the future. These include the Azerbaijanis' ability to keep their culture alive even against political adversity, their flexibility and capability to adapt and transform various layers of culture, and, last but not least, of course their immense cultural creativity and productivity.



# Shusha Carpets and Embroideries in the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum Collection

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Shirin Melikova\*

The liberation of the city of Shusha, the cradle of the Azerbaijani culture, from almost three-decade long occupation has become a symbol of freedom for every citizen of Azerbaijan.

Given the unprecedented vandalism committed by Armenia in Shusha in the course of the military occupation, the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, after its liberation, began to rebuild the city in record time. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation also takes an active part in these restoration and reconstruction activities.

To erase the historical evidence of the Azerbaijani origins of Shusha, the Armenian side destroyed or changed the architectural feature of numerous historical and architectural monuments, including Panah Ali Khan's Palace, the Yukhary Govhar Agha mosque, the Ashaghy Govhar Agha mosque, the Palace of Khurshidbanu Natavan and Molla Panah Vagif Mausoleum. And yet, as H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, proudly emphasized at the time, Shusha retained the spirit of Azerbaijan.

The reconstruction and recovery of the city of Shusha enclose both infrastructure and cultural heritage. These include the raising a monument to Uzeyir Hajibeyli, the restoration of the Molla Panah Vagif Mausoleum and the restoration of the House-Museum of Bulbul. Along with architectural monuments, the city revives its cultural life. Last year the Carpet Weaving Gallery, restored in Shusha by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, hosted the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum's (ANCM) exhibition "*Homecoming. Art Treasures of Karabakh*". The exposition featured more than thirty-five museum exhibits: carpets, embroideries, artistic metalwork, and samples of folk costumes.

At present, the new building of the ANCM's Shusha Branch, established back in 1987, is under construction. Initially, the branch operated in the 19th-century mansion of the Mehmandarov noble family. In 1992, before the occupation of Shusha, the museum's management could evacuate a part of the branch's exhibits to Baku. In the following years, the rescued Karabakh treasures were on display in the capital awaiting their homecoming.

The Karabakh region hugely contributed to the treasury of Azerbaijani carpet weaving. In the 15th–16th centuries, people massively exported Karabakh carpets to Europe. One can admire them in the paintings of European artists. For example, the 15th-century "*The Virgin and Child with an Angel*" by Hans Memling illustrates the Karabakh carpet *Mughan*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> «Азербайджанский ковер» Ляtif Керимов (V. II, p.30, Гянджлик, Баку, 1983)





According to the Arab historians (Al-Muqaddasi, Al-Masudi, and others) of the early Middle Ages, Barda, the Azerbaijani city located on the plain, was the center of Karabakh carpet weaving. In the 18th century, Shusha became the new center of local carpet weaving. Folk still produced carpets in the Karabakh lowlands, however, Shusha carpets were considered the best in this area. In this regard, Jakov Zedgenidze, a famous researcher and teacher at the Shusha City School, wrote in 1891 that “Shusha holds the first place in the Caucasus for the number and quality of the carpets and *palas*”.<sup>2</sup>

Zedgenidze’s works are very interesting because he explicitly says that the carpet weaving art in Azerbaijan and particularly in Shusha was the prerogative of the Tatar population (Azerbaijanis were called Caucasian Tatars at that time).<sup>3</sup>



*Carpet Balig.*  
*Karabakh, Azerbaijan.*  
*Early 20th century.*  
*Wool. Pile, handmade.*  
*ANCM collection,*  
*Inv. No. 8928*

The works of Jūlijs Straume, a Latvian artist, ethnographer and teacher, also provide valuable information about Karabakh carpet weaving. These works are preserved in the Art Palace of Georgia as the Caucasian Handicraft Committee was established in Tbilisi in 1899 and many workshops operated under its auspices, including those on the territory of Azerbaijan. In 1907, Jūlijs Straume joined the staff of this organization as a senior artist. He undertook ethnographic expeditions in the Caucasus, including Karabakh. The artist collected sketches and photographs of handicrafts from here, especially carpet ornaments.

People weaved both pile and flat-woven carpets in Karabakh. The cattlemen and villagers mainly used flat-woven carpets and produced them from wool and silk. These include *palas*, *kilim*, *jejim*, *shadda*, *varni*, *zili*, and *ladi*.

The Karabakh type of carpet weaving comprises thirty-three compositions: *Bakhchada Gullar*, *Balig*, *Buynuz*, *Bahmanli*, *Karabakh*, *Goja*, *Gasimushagy*, *Lambaran*, *Mughan*, *Talish*, *Lampa*, *Malibeyli*, *Khanlig*, *Khantirma*, *Chelebi*, *Shabalid-Buta*, *Nakhchivan*, and many others. According to the classification of Latif Karimov, the world-famous carpet expert, Karabakh carpets fall into three groups: Shusha, Karabakh, and Jabrayil.

Karabakh’s pile carpets were famous for their large size, up to 30 square meters, much larger than in any other region of Azerbaijan. Spacious dwellings and interiors in Karabakh, especially in Shusha, required carpets of appropriate sizes. This inspired the production of *Dast Hali Gaba* sets, a highlight of local carpet weaving. They consist of one large central and several side carpets, together creating a single ensemble. Not everyone could afford this carpet set, which only increased its prestige.

<sup>2</sup> «Город Шуша» (Я. Зедгенидзе; Салах-бек Захар-беков; Амбарцум Тер-Егиазаров) — Сборник материалов для описания местностей и племен Кавказа. Вып. 11-й, Тифлис, (1891), р. 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., р. 3



*Carpet Ajdahali – Khatai. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Late 18th century. Wool. Pile, handmade. ANCM collection, Inv. No. 9486*

the common features of Karabakh carpets. In general, their color range is very bright due to the diverse flora of Karabakh, which includes many plants providing rich shades of dyes. Along with the vegetable dyes, the local population actively used cochineal as well.

The *Bandi-Rumi* classical design forms the *Khatai* composition. *Ajdahali* (Dragon) carpets are one of the varieties of this composition. Dragon motifs are characteristic of the Turkic peoples. And *Khatai* denotes the name of one of the Azerbaijani tribes<sup>4</sup>. The key elements of its design consist of wide bottom-up arms or branches superimposed on each other, the main intersections of which are decorated with palmette or rosette forms. The palmette motif symbolizes life, guarded on both sides by dragons – defenders from evil forces. The Shusha group's *Lampa* and *Malibeyli* compositions are of particular interest. They reflect the tastes of the two layers of the Azerbaijani population of Karabakh at that time: the urban settled population and the semi-nomadic rural population.

The late 19th-century *Balig* carpet (Inv. No. 8928) became the first exhibit of the ANCM back in 1967. This carpet, a part of such a set, represents a wide central *hali*. The Karabakh carpet composition *Balig* (means 'fish') got its name from one of the fragments of its ornament, resembling a fish. However, it is an element of a vegetative ornament. *Balig* is one of the most widespread Karabakh carpet compositions. More than a third of the carpets produced in the second half of the 19th century in Shusha were *Balig* carpets.

Unlike the rest of Karabakh, in Shusha at that time people actively performed the ornaments of Tabriz type, another geographical type of Azerbaijani carpet weaving. They transformed the whimsical floral decor of Tabriz carpets in line with the geometric ornaments, characteristic of Karabakh, and replaced the color, built on halftones, with contrasting saturated colors in local traditions. Among these compositions are *Balig*, *Khatai*, and *Afshan*. The red-colored background is one of the



*Carpet Lampa. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Late 19th –early 20th century. Wool. Pile, handmade. ANCM collection, Inv. No. 7523*



<sup>4</sup> «Азербайджанский ковер» Ляtif Керимов (V. II, p.81, Гянджлик, Баку, 1983)



The *Lechek-Turunj* composition designs *Lampa* carpets using a vertical system. These carpets were woven in Shusha from the first half of the 19th century. Later, they spread to all the carpet weaving centers of Karabakh. These carpets appeared owing to the need for decorating the walls and ceilings of spacious wealthy houses in Shusha. Weavers wove them as a carpet set *Dast Hali Gaba*: one central and two narrow side carpets. The ceiling in the room mirrored the carpet's ornaments. *Lampa* carpets illustrate a large octagonal medallion in the center.



*Carpet Malibeyli.*  
Karabakh, Azerbaijan.  
Early 20th century.  
Wool. Pile, handmade.  
ANCM collection,  
Inv. No. 3341

The ornaments *Malibeyli* carpet have other origins. They echo the Silk Road caravans. Notably, the ANCM collection preserves the world's earliest carpet with the *Malibeyli* composition. The museum acquired the carpet of 1813 in 1976 from the Karabakh resident Ali Ahmad oghlu Farrukhi. *Malibeyli* represents one of the most archaic types of Dragon carpets. Its middle field's composition illustrates *göl* (medallions) arranged vertically in a row. A square-shaped element with the solar symbol *charkhi-felek* adorns the inside of each medallion. Eight serpentine elements surround these squares. They symbolize the dragons guarding the *charkhi-felek* (wheel of fortune).

Serpentine ribbons symbolizing dragons are sometimes mistakenly interpreted as images of clouds. In the West, they are called Cloudband. These carpets received their Azerbaijani name, recorded in the documents of the early 20th century, from the Malibeyli village, situated 14 km from the city of Shusha. Starting from the mid-19th century, the official sources have been conveying information about this village that produced these carpets since the mid-18th century. The village of Malibeyli was destroyed by the armed forces of Armenia during its military occupation in early 1990s. Following the occupation, the Armenian side, as in the case of other occupied territories of Azerbaijan, distorted the name of this village as well. Today Armenia falsifies the Azerbaijani carpets *Malibeyli*, presenting them as its own, and named them "Khndzoresk".



*Carpet Baghchadaguller. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. 1971.  
Wool. Pile, handmade. ANCM collection,  
Inv. No. 9476*



*Carpet Bulud. Karabakh,  
Azerbaijan.  
Early 20th century. Wool.  
Pile, handmade. ANCM  
collection, Inv. No. 384*

*Bulud, Baghchada Guller, and Sakhsida Guller* carpet compositions are inherent in Shusha. The compositions' basis represents ornaments typical of Russian folk art of the XIX century (in particular, Pavlovo-Posad shawls). These carpets' modified designs were borrowed during the active trade relations at that time between the Caucasian and Central Russian provinces of the Russian Empire. *Bakhchada Gullar* carpet (Inv. No. 9476), one of such exhibits of the 1970s preserved in the ANCM collection has a unique story: during the occupation of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, the Armenian side stole the carpet and put it up for auction in the United States under the guise of an Armenian carpet. The Azerbaijani philanthropist bought the carpet and sent it back to Azerbaijan. The philanthropist together with the ANCM hoped to find its owner, whose name and date of birth the weaver wove on the carpet: "It was a mother's birthday present to her son". A long-last search was unsuccessful, and the carpet, which returned to its homeland, became a part of the museum's collection.



Narrative carpets, relatively rare for most other groups of Azerbaijani carpet weaving, are an amazing part of the carpet heritage of the city of Shusha, and Karabakh as a whole. Among them is the Shusha carpet of 1912 (Inv. No. 1548) *Ayan Majlisi* (The Meeting of the Nobles).



*Narrative carpet. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. AH 1333/1915.  
Wool Pile, handmade. ANCM collection Inv.No.1548*

The carpet is considered to be a portrait since it contains the names Amirkhan, Shakhrikhan, and Timurkhan, who most likely belonged to the representatives of the privileged strata of society.

The narrative carpet of 1915 (Inv. No. 2630), dedicated to the Gulistan of Saadi Shirazi is exceptional. Two quotes from the poem adorn the carpet. One of them says:

“A sweet-smelling piece of clay, one day in the bath,  
Came from the hand of a beloved one to my hand.  
I asked: ‘Art thou musk or ambergris?  
Because thy delicious odour intoxicates me.’  
It replied: ‘I was a despicable lump of clay;  
But for a while in the society of a rose.  
The perfection of my companion took effect on me  
And, if not, I am the same earth which I am.’”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The Gulistan of Saadi. Translated by Edward Rehatsek, ©GlobalGrey 2018, p. 4





*Narrative carpet. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. AH 1336 / 1917.  
Wool. Pile, handmade. ANCM collection, Inv. No. 2630*

Another quote, from another chapter, continues the theme of the soul’s dominance over the body,

“Rely not upon possessions and this world  
Because it has cherished many like thee and slain them.  
When the pure soul is about to depart,  
What boots it if one dies on a throne or on the ground?”<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, the originality of this exhibit lies not so much in the combination of a genre scene with quotes from the poem but in additional inscriptions that have found a place on the carpet. Along with the name of the owner – Iskender – the carpet comprises a popular political slogan of that time “Long live freedom, prosperity, justice”. Furthermore, quite unexpectedly, there are also the prices for bread and eggs of the time.

It must be said that the Karabakh Khanate was both the cradle of Azerbaijani music, poetry, and carpet weaving and the trendsetter of national fashion in clothing and accessories. The products of Karabakh masters, remarkable in their craftsmanship and rare in the ornament’s sophistication, had a great influence on the development of many types of crafts in neighboring khanates and in far abroad.



*Arkhalig (women’s outerwear).  
Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Late 19th century.  
Velvet, cotton. Chain stitch embroidery.  
ANCM collection, DDK-8610*



<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 17



*Arkhalig (women's outerwear) and Tuman (a skirt). Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Cotton, silk. Gold embroidery. ANCM collection, DDK-315/1 and DDK-315/2*

women and men), skirts, *kurdu* and *bahari* (upper garments), *arakhchins* (headwear), and men's nightcaps belonging to this region. Two Karabakh sets of a skirt and an arkhalig regard the pearls of the ANCM collection: The early 20th-century set (Inv. No. DDK-315/2) in gold embroidery with a buta ornament embellished on bright pile-on-pile velvet and the late 19th-century set (Inv. No. DDK-8610) in *takalduz* (chain stitch) embroidery with a floral pattern decorated on burgundy velvet. The designs of both *arkhaligs* are performed in the *nilufar* (lotus) sleeve style characteristic of Karabakh: this long sleeve fits around the upper arm and flares out from the elbow, like a bell. According to legend, the famous poet Natavan, the daughter of the Karabakh Khan introduced this style. People esteemed her as a trendsetter, a skilled artist, and a needlewoman. The National Museum of the History of Azerbaijan exhibits her works: embroidered slippers and *khurjun* and *heyba* (bags), a pouch, and a case for the Quran.

Embroidery was one of the most developed types of crafts in Karabakh. Customarily as in the entire Muslim East, they bore a purely functional and practical value and rarely function as panels. Various types of women's clothing took a significant place among such items. While the men's clothing of Azerbaijanis of any class differed with strictness and restraint. Here only the material (partly the style) could serve as an indicator of quality, therefore there was no embroidery in its design. Wealthy women quite widely used embroidery in the decoration of their garments. They embroidered the hem, the edges of the sleeves, and the collar, sometimes the entire clothing. The ANCM collection preserves excellent samples of Karabakh women's clothing. The women's traditional costumes of the Karabakh region varied with their special sophistication, and incredible refinement of decoration. The museum possesses several *arkhaligs* (kind of jackets for



*Tuman (a skirt). Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Late 19th century. Velvet, cotton. Chain stitch embroidery. ANCM collection, DDK-8609*



*Embroidery. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. Late 19th century.  
Velvet, sequin. Satin stitch embroidery.  
ANCM collection, DDK-932*

Folk embroidered all kinds of accessories. These included clothes (shoes, headwear, fans), personal accessories (mustache guards, fans, pouches), objects to store or carry various items like coins, a comb, a pocket watch, a compass, a prayer stone, and the Quran. The ANCM preserves such exhibits, including those from Karabakh.

Interior objects like pillow covers and curtains for niches in various embroidery techniques gave the space a unique personal design style. Chingiz Qajar in his book “Old Shusha” (2019)<sup>7</sup> writes about the numerous niches of various sizes, from the smallest for storing religious ritual items to the largest for keeping bedding and carpets, set in the vast halls of wealthy Shusha houses. The dwellers covered the large niches with curtains embroidered with colored threads and beads, while the curtains for small niches were embellished even more richly with gold embroidery. They put the same goldwork embroideries under the decorative boxes for keeping the Quran. The ANCM collection contains similar objects,



*Embroidery. Karabakh, Azerbaijan  
Late 19th century  
Velvet, cotton  
Chain stitch embroidery  
ANCM collection, DDK-1471*

<sup>7</sup> Çingiz Qacar. “Köhnə Şuşa”. Bakı, Şərq-Qərb, 2019, p. 88



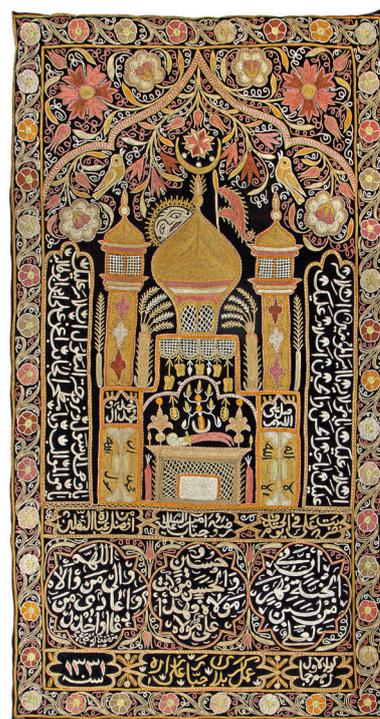


Embroidery. Karabakh, Azerbaijan.  
19th century.  
Velvet. Chain stitch embroidery.  
ANCM collection, DDK-2368

including those from Karabakh, made in various embroidery techniques on broadcloth or velvet. Among them is the embroidery with the image of peacocks, performed in satin stitch and sequins on brown velvet (Inv. No.DDK-932).

*Namazlig* embroidery, an embroidered panel of religious content for decorating mosques represents a special group. This embroidery indeed resembles a *namazlig* (a prayer rug) in its compositional structure. It contains a characteristic mihrab in the upper part and illustrates religious symbols or corresponding inscriptions in the central field. The ANCM preserves three Karabakh exhibits of the 19th century, typical samples of this group, performed in *takalduz* (chain stitch) embroidery. The first panel shows a laconic composition against black velvet, illustrating three flower bouquets and an inscription in its central field (Inv. No. DDK-1471). Another two pieces (Inv. No. DDK-2367, DDK-2368), decorated with pure Karabakh luxury, function as paired panels. The image of a mosque with two minarets and religious inscriptions praising the Prophet Muhammad and his family adorn the central field. The panels comprise both the date of their creation and the name of the master – Karbalai Jabbar Alizada.

In conclusion, it is important to note that many museums around the world house the Karabakh carpets and embroideries of Azerbaijan in their collections. Among them are such large museums as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul, the State Hermitage Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum possesses the world's largest collection of Karabakh carpets, which contains most of their compositions.



Embroidery. Karabakh, Azerbaijan. 19th century.  
Velvet. Chain stitch embroidery.  
ANCM collection, DDK-2367

# From Age to Age: Musical Generations of Shusha

Giula Shamilli\*

Shusha, a unique city of Azerbaijan that has received epithets like “little Paris”, “Conservatory of the Caucasus”, “homeland of talents”, “city of longevity”, etc.,<sup>1</sup> has a multivolume history of its musical heritage.

It is not possible to encompass this history within one article and therefore I will make only a few notes about it. In doing so, I will take as a basis an important idea that Shusha is a cultural centre that over the past century has overcome millennium-long path of the development of the world musical culture- from examples of traditional music up to symphonic pieces that have enriched the musical art with new musical forms and genres.

It is a well-established fact that voices of Shusha are the musical reality of the world scenes that have conquered the hearts of listeners. It is also a metaphor associated with the unique hearing code of a musicking person for whom there are no barriers in mastering the sound.

Over the past century, Shusha and its residents have gone all way from a lullaby and a multi-part genre composition of *mugham-dastgah* to the first opera and ballet, from the rhythmic tunes to the most complex jazz improvisations, from romantic lyrical melody to the large-scale symphonic pieces. The rapid mastering of the world’s musical heritage by Shusha residents, both in terms of performing and composing art, might be comprehended through the lens of the mutual enrichment of traditions that have been connected from the earliest times by trade and cultural routes.

In the treatise on music by Shusha resident Mir Mohsun Navvab Agamirzade Karabakhi (1833-1918), we read the titles of compositions passed on from one generation to another, from teachers to students through the method of repeated memorizing: “Rast”, “Mahur”, “Shahnaz”, “Chahargah” and “Nava”<sup>2</sup>.

The portraits of the Shusha musicians born in the 19th century are described in the books authored by music historian Firidun Shushinsky<sup>3</sup>. They tell about the musicians who preserved the *mugham-dastgah*, an ancient vocal-instrumental type of professional music-making. Dozens or even hundreds of musicians from the old Shusha presented one of the prestigious performing schools. They, through their descendants, passed on the most valuable asset that belongs to this city- devotion to the music and everything related to the music.

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The present article has been submitted in the Russian language and was translated into English.

<sup>1</sup> See Shushinski, Firidun. (1968). *Shusha* [Shusha]. Baku: Azerbaijan State Publishing House, p. 164

<sup>2</sup> Safarova, Zemfira. (2020). *Shusha — Citadel' azerbajdzhanskoj muzyki* [Shusha is the citadel of Azerbaijani music] Baku: Elm. p.110-111

<sup>3</sup> Shushinski, Firidun (1979). *Narodnye pevcy i muzykanty Azerbajdzhana* [Folk singers and musicians of Azerbaijan]. Moscow: Sovetskij kompozitor, 198 p.; Shushinski, Firidun. (1985) *Azerbajdzhan xalg musigichileri* [Azerbaijani folk musicians]. Baku. Yazichi, p.478





Mirza Sadykh Asad oglu, or Sadykhjan (1846-1902), a reformer of the modern Azerbaijani tar, adapted the structure of the instrument to the classical tradition of Azerbaijani music and became the first author of the musical scene “Majnun at Leyli’s grave”. It had been staged in Shusha by Abdurrahimbey Hagverdiyev with the participation of Jabbar Garyaghdioglu, a great singer, in 1897, long before *mugham* opera under the same name was composed by Uzeyir Hajibeyov. Sadykhjan left his mark in history as an outstanding virtuoso (his teacher was Mirza Alasgar Garabaghi). His reconstruction of the tar enhanced the sound of the instrument, adapted it to a large acoustic space and fitted its bridges to the hearing sensation experience of the native musical tradition. Sadykhjan’s experiments improved the style of playing the tar and received the recognition from students and contemporaries<sup>4</sup> on the scale of the professional musical tradition of the West and Central Asian performing schools. The leading role of this musical instrument in the performance of *mugham-dastgah* compositions and other genres of *makam art* (*nuba*, *makam*, etc.) is undeniable, as a singer tunes in to the main tone of the melody according to the tar sound and further follows the tar player transiting from one tonality to another.

Today, few people know that Vagif Sadykhov (born in 1946), the bright and charismatic Moscow-based musician, who during his tours in Europe, USA, and Australia<sup>5</sup> conquered the world of jazz with his skill and virtuosity, is a descendant of the legendary Sadykhjan. However, the surname of the Sadykhovs (Sadiqovs in the old-printed transliteration), who were from Shusha, also extends on the other branches of generations of musicians, among whom is Durdana Sadykhova (1913-1989), one of the first woman singers who mastered the European vocal school. She was a founder of the Music Notes Department of the Azerbaijan National Library named after M.F. Akhundov. Her nephew is pianist Chingiz Sadykhov (1929-2018), who turned the piano into an “Azerbaijani folk instrument”<sup>6</sup>, exquisitely harmonizing folk melodies and extracting the touch of a sounding voice from equal-tempered scale of the musical instrument. His children - Nargiz (b.1957) and Lala Sadykhova (b. 1959) are teachers of violin and piano art in San Jose (USA, California). Her great-granddaughter is Rena Fakhradova (b.1997), a musicologist, who became the youngest ever winner of the All-Russian Competition of the Junior Scientists in the Field of Art and Culture (in the nomination “Musical Art”) for her research on 20th century spectral music.

Dynasty starting with Majid Behbuddaly oglu Behbudov (1873-1945), a well-known representative of Karabakh mugham school and a native of Shusha, who recorded several Azerbaijani *mughams*, *tesnifs*, and folk songs with the participation of the tar player Mashadi Jamil Amirov in Riga in 1910 by the invitation of the Gramophone company, continued by his son Rashid Behbudov (1915-1989). He was a pop and opera singer and had a velvety voice with a special soft timbre, an incredible stage charm and a special talent of performing Azerbaijani classic songs. Performing the lead role of Asker in the film “Arshin Mal Alan” (1945), based on the musical comedy by Uzeyir Hajibeyov, he contributed to the popularization of this character and U.Hajibeyov’s work on the world stages. His sister - Najiba Behbudova (1914-1999), an actress of the Azerbaijan Musical Comedy Theater,

<sup>4</sup> Shushinski, Firidun (1979). *Narodnye pevtsy i muzykanty Azerbajdzhana* [Folk singers and musicians of Azerbaijan]. Moscow: Sovetskij kompozitor, p.41-48

<sup>5</sup> *Anthology of Azerbaijani Jazz*, (2014). Baku, p.107—109

<sup>6</sup> Sadykhov, Chingiz / <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMP6Lx5vdjs> (Accessed 04/28/2022)

brother- Anvar Behbudov (1912-1993), a theater director, and daughter- Rashida Rashid (b.1966), a singer, deservedly continued the creative legacy of their father and grandfather.

Mashadi Jamil Amiraslan oglu Amirov (1875-1929), a prominent cultural figure who was a student of Mir Mohsun Navvab Garabaghi and a teacher of unique *khanendeh* –singers Seyyid Shushinsky and Zulfi Adigozalov, gained fame as a tar player and performer of traditional music. He was the first to convert Azerbaijani *mugham* “Heyrati”, which has a metric basis, into European musical notation. His son Fikret Mashadi Jamil oglu Amirov (1902-1949), an outstanding composer, abundantly inherited the composing talent of his father. F.Amirov created a new genre of symphonic *mugham* (“Shur”, 1948, “Kurd-Ovshary”, 1948, “Gulistan Bayaty Shiraz”, 1968), and authored well-known stage works- the opera “Seville”, the ballets “A Thousand and One Nights” and “The Tale about Nasimi”, as well as symphonic and chamber-instrumental pieces. His grandson Jamil Amirov (b.1957) is a talented jazz musician and a director of the musical ensemble “Savab”. His granddaughter Aida is a singer. The composer’s daughter- Sevil Amirova (b.1954 graduated from the Azerbaijan National Conservatory (piano class), and his granddaughter - Nazrin Efendiyeva (b.1979) graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of Brussels (piano) and the Royal Conservatory in Mons (composition), became a laureate of international piano competitions, a founder and president of the “Fikret Amirov International Association” and teaches at the Academy of Music in Braine-l’Alleud (Belgium).

Afrasiyab Badalbeyli and Shamsi Badalbeyli, who are the descendants of prominent public and cultural figure Badalbey Bashir bey oglu Badalbeyli (1875-1932), Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s cousin, continued the important work of musical and theatrical-stage modernization, spreading intensely from Shusha throughout Azerbaijan, which experienced the collapse of the empire in the early 20th century, then the short-lived fate of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (1918-1920), the construction of a new communist world and the long-awaited independence at the end of the 20th century. The first national ballet “Maiden Tower” by Afrasiyab Badalbeyli became the basis for a rapid development of this genre. His “Explanatory-Monographic Music Dictionary” remains a unique experience in the study of terminology, which has gone through several editions in Cyrillic and Latin Azerbaijani scripts. Shamsi Badalbeyli’s son- Farhad Shamsi oglu Badalbeyli (1947) has become the first Azerbaijani prize winner at the B. Smetana International Piano Competition in Hradec-Kralove (Czechoslovakia, 1967) and Viana da Motta International Music Competition in Lisbon (Portugal, 1968). As the Head of Baku Academy of Music, he continues his performing activities and giving concerts in Azerbaijan and abroad as a pianist and composer.

The music legacy of the Aliverdibeyovs family that started with Aghalar Kerbalayi Alekper oglu Aliverdibeyov (1880-1953) and continued by his sons- composer Nazim Aghalar oglu, conductor Kazim Aghalar oglu, and his grandson- Samir Nazim oglu Aliverdibeyov belongs to those musicians of Shusha origin who received European education. Agalarbey, had been a graduate of a Realny School in Shusha and continued his studies as a civil engineer at the Imperial Institute of Technology and Warsaw University. However, he never stayed away from music and towards end of his life he taught *mugham* at Baku College of Music named after A. Zeynally. Agalar-bey left a mark in





the history of Azerbaijani musical culture as a public figure, a collector of folklore and the author of the first illustrated history of music<sup>7</sup>, written in the form of the similarly titled work by Emil Naumann (1827-1888)<sup>8</sup>, a German musicologist. The chapter “Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani Music” was organically inscribed by him in the world history of music from ancient times till the beginning of the 20th century, while the names of 66 Azerbaijani musicians were provided with the background information that still requires to be extensively researched.

The long process of intercultural and regional interaction in Shusha, located at the crossroads of civilizations, was naturally embodied in the work of Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1886-1948), an outstanding composer, publicist and public figure as well as his brothers, cousins, and nephews. The creative heritage of the Hajibeyov family is widely known through and deeply studied in numerous monographs, dissertations and articles<sup>9</sup>. Uzeyir Hajibeyov laid a solid theoretical and practical foundation of an Azerbaijani composer school of European type. He wrote the theoretical work “Fundamentals of Azerbaijani Folk Music” that allowed future composers to adapt the national mode system to the structures of the European musical language and mindset. Hajibeyov created a new musical genres, such as “*mugham opera*”, wrote musical comedies and the first heroic opera “*Koroglu*”. In this context, Vladimirovna Abezgauz Isabella, a musicologist, wrote: “If the researches of previous years answered mainly to the question of what did Hajibeyov take from the Azerbaijani folklore and from the European tradition, the present study aims to find out what have Hajibeyov given to the art of the European tradition and how he has enriched it... Dialectic interaction of a purely national type of mindset and the people’s understanding of a form as a completed melodic reality with a new understanding of it by a composer was marked by Hajibeyov’s creation of completely new, syntactic and compositional norms that stands up the European tradition, as well as a decisive and peculiar rethinking of the old, well-known ones”<sup>10</sup>.

Enrichment of the European tradition rapidly continued by representatives of the Hajibeyovs family. His cousin- Soltan Hajibeyov (1919-1974) was awarded the State Prize of the Azerbaijan SSR for the genre of concerto for a symphony orchestra, while his son- Ismail Hajibeyov (1949-2006) authored striking pieces written in the style of neoclassicism at the end of 1970s.

Conductorial, composing and public activities of Niyazi Zulfugar oglu Tagizade-Hajibeyov (1912-1984), U. Hajibeyov’s nephew, left a deep trace on the musical culture of Azerbaijan. Important milestone in his professional career was the years of work at the Leningrad Opera and Ballet Theater named after S. M. Kirov (1960-61, now the Mariinsky Theater) and at the Bolshoi Theater (1963). For many years, he was closely connected with the symphony orchestra of the Azerbaijan State Opera and Ballet Theatre named after M.F. Akhundov and the State Orchestra named after U. Hajibeyov. A bright individuality, pronounced artistry and charisma were the hallmarks of his performing style. The ballet “Chitra” and the symphonic mugham “Shur” stand out among the works of Niyazi-composer.

<sup>7</sup> Aliverdibeyov, Agalar bey.(2001) *Rasimli musigi tarixi / Transliterasiyasi, tadgigi, va lugheti Aynur Khalilovanindir* [Illustrated History of Music / Transliteration, study and glossary by Aynur Khalilova]. Baku, p.232

<sup>8</sup> Nauman, Emil. (1896). *Illjustrirovannaja vseobshhaja istorija muzyki* [Illustrated General History of Music]. Issue 1, St. Petersburg.

<sup>9</sup> See: One of the latest studies on Gadzhibekov’s work in the system of genre coordinates of traditional music- Dadashzade, Kamila. (2014) *Vos-hozhdenie (Uzeir Gadzhibejli i ashygskoe iskusstvo: intertekstual’nyj dialog)* [Ascent. (Uzeyir Hajibeyli and Ashig Art: Intertextual Dialogue)]. Baku: Sharg-Gharb, p. 232

<sup>10</sup> Abezgauz, Isabella. (1987). “Opera «Kerogly» Uzeira Gadzhibekova [ Koroglu Opera of Uzeyir Hajibeyov] Moscow: Sovetskij kompozitor, p. 4, 7

Isfandiyar Aslan oğlu Javanshirov, also known as Khan Shushinsky (1901-1979), one of the most prominent figures of the Karabakh Mugham School, had a unique voice in terms of timbre and power that brought him First Prize of the Art Olympiad of the Peoples of the Transcaucasia in Tbilisi in 1934. Famous singers Jabbar Garyagdioglu and Seyid Shushinsky took part in his professional development. “Şuşanın dağları” (“Mountains of Shusha”), one of the songs, composed by Khan Shushinsky, is a popular Azerbaijani folk music. Ancient roots of the family of Khan Shushinsky goes back to Panah Ali-Khan, founder of the Karabakh Javanshir dynasty. The singer’s brother, tar player Allahyar Javanshirov, was a soloist in the Azerbaijani Philharmonia named after M. Magomaev. His daughter Beyimkhanim Javanshir-Verdiyeva founded and led the Khan Shushinsky Foundation. Another daughter Zumryud Pashayeva graduated from the Azerbaijan National Conservatory named after U. Hajibeyov (vocal class). She works at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. Another daughter Saadat Javanshirova also works as instructor at the faculty of musical comedy of the Institute of Arts. Khan Shishinsky’s granddaughter Maryamkhanim Verdiyeva-Huseyinova is a graduate of piano and vocal class of Baku Musical Academy and his great-grandchildren Farid Huseynov and Elmira Huseynova (children of Maryamkhanim) master music professions.

The plenitude of the creativity of the prominent singer, musician and public figure Murtuza Mashadi Rza oğlu Mammadov (1897-1961), who was named “Bulbul” or “Nightingale” for his unique voice, fell on the Soviet era that managed to appreciate his rare talent. Bulbul remains to be the only musician who equally mastered the techniques of a *khanendeh* singer and Italian *bel canto* singing. This allowed to bring to a new level the Oriental and Western professional branches of singing and to become the founder of a unique vocal school of singing in Azerbaijan. Upon graduation from Azerbaijan State Conservatory (class of N. Speransky, 1927), he had courses (1927-1931) of J. Anselmi and R. Grani at the La Scala Theatre of Milan. In 1933 Bulbul became the first Azerbaijani laureate of the First All-Union Competition of Musicians-Performers in Moscow. Although, for many years Bulbul taught classical singing at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory his devotion to theatre, where he performed dozens of performances a year, was incomparable. In this context, suffice it to mention that only the role of “Koroglu” in the eponymous opera of U. Hajibeyov was performed by him for more than 400 times. One can find the following amazing reading about the events amidst the World War II in the monograph of A. Mammadova: “All-Union conference was convened in Baku to train singers in March 1941. In order to establish the general principles for training of Azerbaijani singers an extensive research work was launched that included the study of the creativity of *ashugs*, *khanendeh*, defining their techniques and methods of performing folk songs ... The practical pedagogic work of Professor Bulbul ... showed the possibility of synthesizing the basics of a pan-European school of singing with a number of national features that were borrowed from folk art ...”<sup>11</sup>. This unique synthesis was manifested with all its brightness and in its entirety in the voice of the maestro’s son, Polad Bulbul oğlu (b.1945), a famous singer, composer, and actor, who has led the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan for 18 years and has been the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Russian Federation since 2006. Polad Bulbul oğlu’s works are presented in different genres - ballet, symphony, chamber-instrumental compositions, music composed for more than 25 films, numerous songs, many of which became very popular hits and are sung nowadays. His sons, Teymur Polad oğlu Bulbul

<sup>11</sup> Mammadova, A. (1964), *Bul-Bul*. Baku: Azerbaijan State Publishing House, p.68





(b.1975) and Murtuza Polad oğlu Bulbul (b.2001) continued the musical path of their grandfather. For many years Teymur has performed as a member of a group of bassoon performers as well as a singer of the P. I. Tchaikovsky Symphony Orchestra, while Murtuza studies conducting at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory.

Another vivid example of musical dynasty from Shusha is the family of the prominent Azerbaijani singer Zulfugar (Zulfi) Samed oğlu Adigozalov (1898-1963), a father of the violinist Rauf Adigozalov and the composer Vasif Adigozalov (1935-2006), who wrote symphonies, operas and musical comedies, instrumental concerts, music pieces of the cantata-oratorio genre. Among the latter, it should be particularly noted the oratorio *Karabakh shikestesı*. Conductor Yalchin Vasif oğlu Adigozalov (b.1959), a grandson of the famous grandfather, made a ground-breaking revision of the symphonic *mugham* Rast by Maestro Niyazi. While maintaining the chronometration and structure of the composition, the conductor entrusted the parts of the solo instruments of the symphony orchestra, which according to the composer contained the *khanendeh* singers melodies, to the traditional *mugham* trio. As a result, the sound of the symphony orchestra, folk instruments and voice harmoniously converged in a single sound stream. Sony Music became interested in this new experiment and released for the first time an album of Azerbaijani classical music as part of Yalchin Adigozalov's unique project "Azerbaijani symphonic mughams" (2021). It should be also mentioned that the fourth generation of this family is represented by Tamerlan Adigozalov, who despite his young age, has experience in performing with a symphony orchestra and is preparing for admission to the piano class of the music conservatory.

A native of Shusha, Zakir Javad oğlu Baghirov (1916-1996), created his first composition while studying at the workers' faculty at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. He participated in the World War II as a commander of an automobile platoon, and was sent to Manchuria before the 1946 capitulation. In 1949, after graduating from the Moscow State Conservatory Zakir Baghirov returned to Baku. Along with composing, he was teaching musical subjects and was the Dean of the Department of Music Theory of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. His son Elshad Baghirov (b.1948) studied at the same music conservatory. He continued his education at the Leningrad Conservatory at the Faculty of Opera and Symphony Conducting in Arvid Janson's class. After working as a chief conductor of the Istanbul Opera and Ballet Theatre, Elshad Baghirov was awarded the "Uğur və Şöhrət" ("Success and Glory") award by the Semiha Berksoy Opera Foundation (Turkiye). Over the years, he has worked at the Bolshoi Theatre, with orchestras of the All-Union Radio and Television, with the Azerbaijan State Orchestra, and with other famous musical ensembles. The grandson of the composer Zulfugar Baghirov (b.1973), the descendant of the Baghirovs and the Garayevs, the two famous musical families, a clarinet class graduate of the Istanbul University State Conservatory, after completing his studies at the jazz school, started his studies at and graduated with honours from the Berklee College of Music (Boston), then from the New York University (master's degree), released several CDs, including the well-known album "QaraBağ: ZulfiqaRenatuS".

Ashraf Jalal oğlu Abbasov, the famous composer and teacher from Shusha, was drafted into the Red



Army in December 1939 as a private of the military brass band of the 345th rifle regiment stationed in Belarus and was gravely wounded near the city of Yelnya. After being treated and discharged from the army, he returned to Shusha. In Shusha he worked as the head of the educational department and later as the director of the Shusha Music School, where he had previously studied. After graduating from the Azerbaijan National Conservatory in professor B. Zeidman's composition class and completing postgraduate studies at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory (composition class of M. Chulaki), Ashraf Abbasov became the director of the Baku College of Music, and at the age of thirty-three he became the rector of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory and for fifteen years he headed the department of composition, where such outstanding composers as Gara Garayev and others worked. The composer's son Jalal Ashraf oglu Abbasov (b.1957), a graduate of the conservatory in the composition class of Gara Garayev, currently teaches composition at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory and is the author of the "Karabakh Trilogy", nominated in 2022 for the Azerbaijan national award. The descendants of his younger brother, conductor and teacher Kamal Jalal oglu Abbasov (1929-1978), namely, daughter Irada Kamal gizi Abbasova (b.1974), professor of the Department of Music Pedagogy at Adnan Menderes University in Aydin (Turkey) and nephews Tamara Abbas gizi Abbasova and Agil Muzafar oglu Gafulov also devoted themselves to music.

In conclusion, I would like also to mention the remarkable Azerbaijani composer, conductor, and teacher Suleyman Eyyub oglu Alasgarov (1924-2000), the author of numerous operas, operettas, symphonic and chamber works, romances and songs, who was a Head of the Department of Folk Instruments at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. His hospitable house in Shusha brought together numerous intellectuals and visitors of the city for several decades until the military occupation of the city on May 8, 1992. The composer's two sons and daughter received their musical education in the Azerbaijan National Conservatory, where they later gave piano lessons. Arzu Alasgarov and Eyyub Alasgarov are laureates of the Transcaucasian Competition of Musicians, and their grandchildren, Tahir and Jabir Imanov devoted their careers to the performance art.

People always talk about Shusha in the present tense, despite the challenging history of the city, which has experienced many tragic developments, including military campaigns, devastating fires, looting and ominous silence that was unbearable for every resident of Shusha. Shusha, formerly Panahabad, a city founded by Panah Ali Khan in the mid-18th century at the foothills of the Karabakh mountain range, has always been abound in singing, continues to sound outside its own fortress and its unique voices are heard throughout the world.

"The beauty of nature surrounding the city, its miraculous climate and healing air, undoubtedly had a beneficial effect on the residents, thanks to which this city is the birthplace of famous writers and poets, outstanding composers and mellifluous singers. The people say: 'Shusha is the city of health, the birthplace of talents.' And it is true. We can safely say that no city in Azerbaijan has given as many gifted people as Shusha has given"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Shushinski, Firidun. (1968). *Shusha* [Shusha]. Baku: Azerbaijan State Publishing House, p. 86

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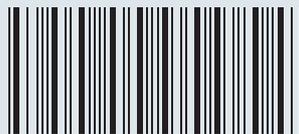
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