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**SHUSHA
- THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF
AZERBAIJAN**

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Shusha - the cultural capital of Azerbaijan.
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SHUSHA - THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF AZERBAIJAN

Shusha is the crown of Karabakh, the cultural capital of Azerbaijan, a historical city that combines antiquity and modernity.

The city of Shusha for centuries throughout its ancient and glorious history has witnessed not a few complex events and fought heroically against foreign invaders.

The establishment of the Karabakh khanate and the proclamation of Shusha as its capital city are linked with the name of Panahali khan (1748-1763). Panahali khan of the Sarijali family of Javanshir clan, one of the ancient clans of Karabakh, founded the Karabakh khanate in 1748. The newly

established Karabakh khanate did not have a fortified capital in the early days, what made Panahali khan decide to build a fortress with a high defensive ability to serve as a capital city.

The Bayat fortress was the first fortress built in the territory of the Karabakh khanate during the reign of Panahali khan [9,126]. This fortress was the capital of the Karabakh khanate for five years [9,128]. However, the location of Bayat fortress was not strategically successful. So, Panahali khan issued a directive to build a new capital-fortress with a more favorable position. Thus, the construction of the Shahbulag fortress (near the Shahbulag spring near Aghdam) began and it was completed in 1751-1752. The old fortress was destroyed by the khan's order while in the new castle stone houses, buildings, mosques, baths, markets were built [3,81]. Nevertheless, the Shahbulag fortress also managed to remain as the capital of the independent Karabakh khanate for just a few years. In order to prevent relentless attacks on the Karabakh khanate, Panahali khan had to build a new strategically stronger and more resistant to enemy attacks fortress city. He convened an advisory council and addressing the nobles said: "We must build such an eternal and unshakable fortress in the mountains, in a stable and impassable place, that even a

strong enemy cannot besiege it. One side of the fortress should always be open to the people of the mountains, and our connection, communication with the districts should never be cut off even for a moment". Located on the inaccessible mountain plateau on 1300-1600 m above the sea level of Azerbaijan the ancient settlement of Shusha fully met all these requirements.



Thus, in the ancient dwelling of Azerbaijanis in Shusha construction of a new residence of the Karabakh khans began. In the first years of its existence, the new city-fortress was named “Panahabad” [4, 11] after its founder, but later the place was being called by its ancient name “Shusha” and became the permanent capital of the Karabakh khanate.

There is no doubt that the word “Shusha” has Azerbaijani-Turkic origin. This name corresponds to the landscape of the area where the city was built, and in the ancient Turkic language means “plateau”, “peaky rock”. It is not coincidental that this city was called among people by its old name “Shishe” and was referred to in this way in a number of literary works [7, 22].

The relief of the area where the city was built had a strong influence on its architecture and construction as a stronghold. The area intended for the construction of the city of Shusha had a great military-strategic importance. Surrounded by high steep cliffs on three sides, the fortress could only be reached from the northeastern part of the area by an extremely uncomfortable narrow path. The historian Mirza Yusif Karabakhi writes: “Panah khan laid the foundation of the city of Shusha in a merry day. The city was surrounded by inaccessible to pedestrians or any others

strong walls and natural steep cliffs from the south-west, north-east, as well as from the west and south. To build the wall, they measured the southern lands of the city and some parts of the eastern side. The villagers along with the heads of clans worked together to build a wall five arsheens high and two arsheens wide. As it was fortified with stone and lime, neither cannon balls nor anything else could break it down. They also made four gateways through this wall. The gate on the north-east was called “Shusha village gate”. The two gates were between the north and the west. One of them was called “Irevan Gate” and the other was called “Ganja Gate” or “Chilabord Gate”. The fourth gate was demolished and now a wall has been built in its place. Now the city has three gates” [8, 23]. French writer Jean Gevrin’s historical novel “Eunuch Shah” on the life and works by Agha Mohammad Shah Qajar, provides very interesting information about the defense facilities of Shusha. The author writes: “In times of Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar, Shusha was a small, beautiful city. The height of its strong walls is equal in all sides of the city. There were places on the wall where stones, hot water or molten lead could be poured on the heads of those who attacked the fortress” [4,130].



However, the walls built during the reign of Panahali khan were not strong enough. The constant threat of attack forced the khan to build the fortress walls in a short time. Later, when his successor Ibrahimkhalil khan came to power, he restarted the construction of the walls of the Shusha fortress [9,162].

Ibrahimkhalil khan took a special care of the quality and strength of the khanate's defense facilities and attracted high-level specialists to the construction works. He brought craftsmen from Tabriz, Ardabil and other cities to build Shusha in the ancient Azerbaijani architectural traditions.

When the Shusha fortress was built, there was no typical for khanates inner fortress. Fearing an impending enemy attack, Panahali khan had no other choice than to replace the inner fortress with smaller castles in the better parts of the city. The historian of Karabakh Mir Mehdi Khazani writes about a castle built by Panahali khan's son Ibrahim: "Ibrahim khan built another castle on a hill equal to his mansion, so that when the enemy approaches the fortress, he could protect the endangered places" [10, 231]. In terms of appearance and structure, these constructions copy each other, all surrounded by castle walls with towers in the corners.

The construction of the Inner Fortress in Shusha dates back to the reign of Ibrahimkhalil khan. During his reign, the Inner Fortress was built on a high hill near the Ganja gates of the city, meeting all the necessary architectural requirements. The historian M.Baharli writes that after Ibrahimkhalil khan came to power, he built a castle of seven or eight rooms, between two rocks in a place called "Treasure Fortress", which served him and his family as a shelter during the enemy attack. There were a court ("*divankhana*"), two large mansions and ancillary buildings inside the castle walls. Built on the only narrow road to the Shusha fortress, this

castle was surrounded by semicircular towers and walls. Unlike the constructions built during the reign of Panahali khan, the ones built by Ibrahimkhalil khan were not directly surrounded by defensive structures. The presence of defensive walls of the inner fortress eliminated the need to surround each building with separate fortress walls [7,33-34].

At that time, it was widely spread to build additional defense facilities, such as small fortresses and watchtowers, even around large settlements with strong defenses, and especially on strategically important roads leading to these settlements. The security forces stationed in these buildings were used to prevent the initial attacks of the enemy, and at the same time to warn the population about the danger of the attack. For this purpose, the Askeran fortresses were built on both banks of the Gargarchay river in the Karabakh khanate. These fortresses were built, primarily, to prevent the enemy's attacks on Shusha from the plains. The fortifications on the right bank of the river consisted of a double wall 250 meters long. The wall of the fortress, built of pebble, was 2 meters wide and 9 meters high in some places. The Askeran fortresses had a very favorable position. Thus, since the banks of the Gargarchay river were very high and steep, the

enemy could not advance to Shusha without capturing these fortresses. The enemy, who had to move along the river basin, was meant to come across these two towers built on the way [7,40].

The historian of Karabakh Mirza Jamal wrote: “Both fortresses of Askeran were built in 1203 (1788-1789) of the Muslim calendar on the land of three woods of Shusha between the two mountains, where the Gargarchay river flows. If there is a small infantry force in these fortresses during the war, it makes it enough to make the pass of the enemy through it towards the Shusha fortress impossible”[9, 162].

Karabakh khans held the construction of palaces and maisons in Shusha with great care. It is clear from the information provided by Karabakh historians that both Panahali khan and Ibrahimkhalil khan built six palaces and mansions for themselves and their children in Shusha. Two of these palaces - Panahali khan's and Garaboyuk khanum's palaces have survived to the present day. It is seen from the inscription on the entrance door of the last palace that it was built in 1768, during the reign of Ibrahimkhalil khan. Khan's palaces built in Shusha attracted attention due to their size, shape and originality of architectural style. They mainly had

glass windows, were built of carved stones, and were completed with wooden doors decorated with carved patterns. 14 carpenters, joiners and wood-carving masters working in the city were engaged in the manufacture of doors and windows of the palaces, plastering the ceilings and planks. Palaces were usually surrounded by high walls with double doors [7,113-114].

The history of the formation of the neighborhoods (*"mahalle"*) in Shusha in the second half of the 18th century - the beginning of the 19th century, in fact, fully reflects the history of the establishment and development of the city. Ashagi mahalle, the oldest quarter of the city, was established during the reign of Panahali khan. In the first period of its existence it was called "Tabrizli", but later, in accordance with the relief of the city, this neighborhood was renamed to "Ashagi mahalle" - "Lower neighborhood" and was known by this name until the abolition of the Karabakh khanate.

The second quarter of Shusha, later called "Yukhari mahalle" - "Upper neighborhood", was built during the reign of Ibrahimkhalil khan. Unlike the location of the first quarter, which was suitable for urban development, the area of the second quarter was not so appropriate. Located on a hillside, the area was densely forested, what made it necessary to

clean the territory in order to provide space for future houses. In other words, when needed, the trees were cut down and on that space the quarters were established. In the period of time between 1763 and 1806 about eight new small quarters were built in Shusha. Those neighborhoods were as follows: Khanlig, Saatli, Kocharli, Mamayi, Khoja Marjanli, Demirchi, Hamamgabaghi, Teze. The construction of the third largest quarter of the city, called "Gazanchali" in the mountainous area, began in 1806 after the occupation of the Karabakh khanate by Russia and continued throughout the XIX century. This area, consisting of twelve small quarters, was the most populated neighborhood of Shusha. There were Chilabord, Dere, Baghlar and other small quarters in this part of the city [7,113-114].

English travelers and scientists G. Maurier and R. Burter left some significant comments on the antiquity of Shusha. According to G. Maurier, Shusha was a dwelling even long before our era. R. Burter writes that "in Shusha there were stone buildings as ones in European cities and which are not found in any other places of the Caucasus, wide streets with pebble roads, beautiful bath remnants reminding us of ancient Roman baths" [2,36].



The buildings and mansions of Shusha follow the traditions of oriental architecture. The balconies of all the buildings face the qibla. Garaboyuk khanum's mansion, Haji Dadash's mansion, Haji Gulu's mansion, M.M.Navvab's estate, Najafgulu Aga's estate, J. Garyagdioglu's estate, the Zohrabbeyovs' estate and hundreds of beys, aghas, clergy and merchants adorn the streets of Shusha. The mansions belonged to Panahali khan, Ibrahimkhalil khan, Mehrali bey, Mehdigulu khan, Khurshidbanu Natavan, as well as the divankhana (court) complex are indelible and unforgettable historical memory of Karabakh khanate [1,277; 5.21].

Like in other cities of Azerbaijan, special care in Shusha was also shown to the construction of mosques. According to Karabakh historians Mirza Jamal and M. Baharli, the first mosque built during the reign of Panahali khan was made of reeds, but later, in 1182 AH (1768/69 AD) Ibrahimkhalil khan replaced it with a new Juma mosque made of stone and lime [3,113]. Three more Juma mosques were built in Shusha in early 19th century. The last fourth Juma mosque in Shusha was built in 1883 by Karbalayi Safikhan Karabaghi with Govhar agha's financial assistance. As written in some sources, this mosque was built on the foundation of another mosque, most likely a mosque built by Ibrahimkhalil khan. This mosque, better known as Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque, remained in good condition until the 1992 Armenian occupation. Two large prayer halls, minarets and several rooms on the second floor were decorated by the prominent artist Mir Mohsun Navvab. During the Armenian occupation in 1992, like other architectural monuments in Shusha, this mosque was also destroyed and left in a state of disrepair [7,118].

Ashaghi Govhar Agha Mosque also has a special place among Shusha mosques. It was rebuilt in 1874-1875 by the architect Karbalayi Safikhan Karabaghi, served as a Juma

(Friday) mosque and had its own madrasa. By the second half of the 19th century, the total number of mosques in Shusha reached 16. Three of them served as Juma (Friday) mosques, and the rest as neighborhood mosques.

The neighborhood mosques were built in proportion to the population of each quarter. Located usually in the best parts of the neighborhood squares, these mosques were very simple in appearance and reminded the residential houses. However, the internal structure of these mosques met all the requirements for religious ceremonies. One of them, the Chukhur neighborhood mosque had its unique architectural style, differs by its construction and size. In its sacred hearth in front of the mosque (Shusha people call it "Saqqakhana"), during the month of Muharram or other religious ceremonies the population was treated to tea, rose water and sweet syrup. The Hazrat Abbas Mosque, built in the upper part of Shusha, was also a popular place of pilgrimage for locals and visitors [5,23].

Saatli Mosque, built in 1882 by the architect Karbalayi Safikhan, stood out among the neighborhood mosques of Shusha. The interior of this mosque, which has the most magnificent minaret, was decorated with verses from the Qur'an [11,79].

The water problem of Shusha found its solution due to great efforts by khan's daughter Khurshidbanu Natavan. In 1871, at her expense, water was pumped into the city through pottery pipes from Mount Khalfali, seven kilometers from Shusha, and two large springs were built. One of these springs, called "Khan gizi spring", consisted of 12 pipes, an octagonal pool and was built in front of the house of Khurshidbanu Natavan. The second spring, called "Shor Bulag", was built near the Ganja Gate of the city and was decorated with national patterns of the original composition. In 1896, a second water pipeline was laid to Shusha. This pipeline not only fulfilled the needs of the city's residents for drinking water, but also allowed to build stone ponds, springs and new baths on more than twenty streets, as well as helped the further greening of the city [7,114-115].

Among the architectural monuments of Shusha caravanserais occupy a special place. Baharli says that the construction of the first caravanserais here coincided with the formation of the first settlement - Tabrizli quarter. During this period, wealthy people of Shusha, such as Ughurlu bey, Haji Amiraslan bey, Haji Huseyn bey and others, built caravanserais in the places called Ashagi Bazar and Meydan. These caravanserais were considered to be one of the main

buildings of the market complex in Shusha. From now on the construction of a caravanserai in Shusha continued. By the end of the 19th century, there were already ten caravanserais here.

Being the administrative center of Karabakh, Shusha was also an important economic center. Since the city's natural and geographical conditions were not useful for agriculture, trade and handicrafts were the main occupations of the people living here. The main trade and handicraft facilities were concentrated in the places considered the center of the city - so-called "Ashaghi (Lower) Bazaar" and "Meydan (Square)". Baharli writes that in addition to many shops and artisans' workshops, several caravanserais and baths were built and functioning in the Lower Bazaar. In Shusha, the covered market and the main street of the city, which stretched from the place called "Bazarbashi" to Sheytanbazar, was called "Rastabazar". The unique appearance of Shusha market place was completed by a large market square adjacent to its route. The city's main square, called Meydan, was consisted of temples and shops along Rastabazar Street, one-story shops, a two-story caravanserai, and a beautiful Juma Mosque with two minarets. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were 1,464 shops registered in the city, which,

altogether with the markets, had an annual turnover of 6 million rubles [12].

So, from the second half of the 19th century, Shusha became the main center of crafts and trade in Azerbaijan. Shusha was considered one of the most luxurious cities in the Caucasus. The fame of Karabakh merchants and artisans came not only from the Caucasus and the Middle East, but also from other countries. This magnificent city stood at the same row with many other developed cities for its nature, craftsmanship, and trade relations.

Shusha was one of the largest crafts centers of Azerbaijan. The development of trade relations in the city, the improvement in various fields of art spread its fame far and wide. In the second half of the 18th century, Shusha, a city of historical, cultural and strategic importance of Azerbaijan, reached the scale of world markets with its carpets, silk, cloth and porcelain, and thus gained great fame. Shusha artisans produced various types of handicrafts both to meet domestic demand and to be exported to other Azerbaijani khanates and foreign countries. At the beginning of the 19th century, there were craftsmen working in more than 50 fields of crafts in Shusha.



During this period, along with various other crafts, weaving and carpet weaving were one of the most widespread activities in Shusha. The high level of development of cotton growing in the Karabakh khanate created more favorable conditions for the production of various types of cotton fabrics. At the end of the 18th century, there were about a thousand looms producing cotton cloth in Shusha and surrounding settlements. The produced cotton fabrics not only met the needs of the local population, but were also exported to Russia and Iran.

At the same time, Shusha was also one of the important centers of carpet production in Azerbaijan. The category of

Shusha carpets of the Karabakh school of carpet weaving occupies an important place in the Azerbaijan visual arts. Carpets woven in the villages located in and around Shusha, such as Malibeyli, Tug, Dashbulag and others, are now kept in many museums around the world as unique works of art. Shusha carpets differed from carpets woven in other parts of Karabakh due to their colorfulness, variety of ornaments and weaving techniques. Members of the Caucasian Artisan Committee, sent to Shusha, the main carpet-weaving center of Karabakh, in 1908, studied 600 carpets belonging to local beys and merchants and identified 20 patterns belonging only to Shusha carpets. At the end of the 19th century, the growing demand for Azerbaijani carpets in world markets led to the further development of carpet weaving in Shusha. In this time, the city annually was producing carpet products worth a total of 50,000 rubles. Shusha carpets were also famous for their high quality. Shusha carpet-weaving school had a strong influence on the development of carpet weaving not only in Azerbaijan, but also in neighboring regions. The city of Shusha played an invaluable role in the formation of artistic tastes in the field of carpet weaving throughout the South Caucasus. The most skilled female carpet weavers, who were defining the direction of future carpet production,

worked here. Over time, the further development of weaving, especially carpet weaving, gave a strong impetus to the development of dyeing. By the end of the 19th century, the number of dye houses operating in Shusha had reached eight. At the beginning of the 20th century, the annual production capacity of Shusha dye houses increased and reached 69,500 rubles [7, 86].

Shusha was also one of the main centers for the production of jewelry made of precious metals in Azerbaijan. The great number of nobles here created the main demand for jewelry. At the beginning of the 19th century, ten jewelers were engaged in meeting the demand in this field in Shusha, but by the end of the century, their number had increased to 78.

In general, various types of jewelry were produced in Karabakh using copper, gold, silver and tin. Decorative items such as rings, bracelets, earrings, buttons, etc. made of precious metals were found during archeological excavations and were distinguished by elegance and beauty.

It is not accidental that Panahali khan built a mint in Shusha and ordered to produce a silver coin called “panahabadi”. The words “Panahabad” were inscribed on one side of the coin and “La ilaha illallah, Muhammadan

rasulullah” (“there is no God but Allah, Muhammad is his messenger”) on the other side [8, 23]. Coins of the Karabakh khanate were minted as panahabadi, half of panahabadi and small copper coins. These coins were used along with the other coins in all Azerbaijani khanates and Iran. Panahabadi has been repeatedly discovered in treasures far beyond the borders of the khanate. The reliability and stability of the coin proves the active work of Karabakh merchants. Coinage continued even after Karabakh became part of Russia and was stopped only in 1822, after the abolition of the khanate.



SHUSHA - THE IRREPLACEBLE CULTURAL CENTER OF AZERBAIJAN

Since its establishment, the city of Shusha has gained fame as “National Cultural Treasury of Azerbaijan”, “Cradle of Azerbaijani Music”, “Conservatory of the Caucasus”. Speaking of the role of Shusha in the history of the Azerbaijan music culture, prominent musician B.S.Vinogradov wrote: “Shusha musicians created the music history of Azerbaijan and represented it not only in their homeland, but also in other countries of the East”. The great Azerbaijani poet Samad Vurgun also noted that Shusha played an important role in

the history of Azerbaijani culture. He wrote: "Almost all famous Azerbaijani musicians and singers are from Shusha. It is no coincidence that Shusha is called "the cradle of music and poetry"". The most prominent representatives of the Azerbaijan School of Khanende Harrat Gulu, Abdul Baghi Zulalov, Haji Husu, Mashadi Mammad Farzaliyev, Jabbar Garyagdioglu, Kechachi oglu Mahammad, Seyid Shushinsky, Zulfu Adigozalov, Khan Shushinsky and others were born and raised in Shusha. Haji Husu, one of the most prominent representatives of the Shusha music school of the 19th century, marked the beginning of a new stage in the performing arts. Mirza Sadig Asad oglu (Sadigjan), Mashadi Jamil Amiraslan oglu Amirov (father of the famous composer Fikret Amirov), Gurban Pirimov played an important role in the raising of development of Shusha music performance to a higher level. Tar melodies developed by Sadigjan were widely used throughout the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Dagestan [7,101].

An eminent opera singer and a talented performer of folk songs Bulbul (1897-1961) is also a graduate of the Shusha Music School. The great Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli (1885-1948) was also born in Shusha and began his musical career in this city. The musical life in Shusha played a

decisive role in the creation of the first opera in the whole East by Uzeyir Hajibeyli “Leyli and Majnun”.



Marvel everyone with its amazing beauty, Shusha has given Azerbaijani literature many outstanding poets, writers and playwrights. One of the founders of Azerbaijani realist literature Molla Panah Vagif (1717-1797) lived and worked in Shusha. His immortal poetry played an important role in the formation of the modern Azerbaijani literary language. His ghazals and goshmas were widely known. Vagif was also a prominent statesman, a vizier of Ibrahimkhalil khan of Karabakh. Another prominent Azerbaijani poet Gasim bey Zakir (1784-1854) was born in Shusha, received his first

education here, returned to Shusha at the end of his life and died on his motherland. Gasim bey Zakir is considered one of the founders of critical realism and satirical genre in Azerbaijani poetry.

Shusha was also famous for its literary soirees. In 1864, Haji Abbas Agahi organized “Majlisi-uns”. Since 1872 this assembly, which united up to thirty poets, was held in the house of Khurshidbanu Natavan. The second assembly organized in Shusha in 1870 was called “Majlisi-Faramushan”. Mir Mohsun Navvab, a scholar and tezkire writer, was the head of this assembly, which functioned until the beginning of the 20th century. At these gatherings, poets recite their poems, mughams were sung and discussions were held on philosophy, history, logic and astronomy. The life and works by Suleyman Sani Akhundov and Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli, prominent representatives of Azerbaijani literature, were also connected with Shusha. Among Shusha writers Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli is known as one who described Shusha the most. His novels “Twenty years of my life” and “Notebook of a young man” give a detailed description of the unique nature, public life, customs and traditions of Shusha. The author’s last novel “In the Blood” reflects the events that took place in the Karabakh khanate in

the second half of the 18th century - early 19th century [7,103].

Shusha was the birthplace of many artists and masters of applied arts. The life and works by the prominent Azerbaijani poet, artist and embroiderer Khurshidbanu Natavan (1830-1897) are indestructibly linked with Shusha. Her paintings, miniatures and works of applied art now adorn the expositions of the Azerbaijan State Museum of Art. Mir Mohsun Navvab (1833-1918), one of the prominent personalities of Shusha, became famous as a calligrapher, artist, poet and musicologist of his time. There is a deep vitality in his paintings, such as "Portrait of Timur", "Flowers" and "Birds", which are now kept in the Azerbaijan State Museum of Art. His paintings and patterns on the walls of various buildings in Shusha have not lost their freshness even to these days. Navvab also created unique patterns in the Azerbaijani art of book design.

Shusha was also famous as a city of museums. Some of the pearls of art created by Shusha artists and masters of applied arts were displayed in various museums of the city. The Shusha Art Gallery, which consisted of ten halls, housed about 200 unique works of fine art. The gallery's golden fund included illustrations by Mir Mohsun Navvab which he drew

for his own books. More than 300 rare carpets were displayed in the Carpet Museum located in the Mehmandarovs' residential complex. Moreover there were the Museum of History, the Museum of Stone Arts, the Museum of Medicinal Plants, the house-museums of Uzeyir Hajibeyov, Khurshidbanu Natavan and Mir Mohsun Navvab functioned in Shusha. All these museums were destroyed by Armenian vandals occupying Shusha in May 1992, and their exhibits were looted [7,108].



THE OCCUPATION OF SHUSHA

Shusha fortress has historically been the capital of the Karabakh khanate of Azerbaijan. At the beginning of the 19th century, on May 14, 1805, the Karabakh khan Ibrahimkhalil khan and the commander-in-chief of Russia's Caucasian troops, General Sisianov, signed the Kurakchay Treaty ("Oath of Allegiance") [14]. Thus, the Karabakh khanate became part of Russia. To strengthen its position in Karabakh tsarism immediately began to resettle Armenians here. This fact shows that the resettlement of Armenians to Karabakh by the Russian government was done for a special purpose:

ensuring the living of the Armenian newcomers in a compact way had a special strategic intention. By this, Tsarist Russia created ample opportunities for Armenians both in Azerbaijan as a whole, and in the Karabakh region in particular. The Armenians soon started an open confrontation for the realization of the idea of a “Greater Armenia”. One of the steps was the occupation of Karabakh, Yerevan, Nakhchivan and other territories of Azerbaijan [13].

So, the number of Armenians was artificially increased by resettlement. At the same time their economic strengthening was provided. Thus, as a result of the all-round support of the tsarism, the Armenians managed to secure their positions in the economic life of Karabakh. On July 7, 1923, Armenians resettled in the mountainous part of the Karabakh region achieved under the auspices and with the direct participation of Soviet Russia to be granted the status of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) within Azerbaijan, what grossly violated Azerbaijan’s administrative-territorial division. By the resolution adopted in 1923, the territories of Shusha, Javanshir and Gubadli districts were parted and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was established.



This event was not only a violation of the administrative-territorial division of Azerbaijan, but also a tool for future territorial claims of Armenians against our country, and since then the term “Nagorno-Karabakh” has appeared. Although the decree on the establishment of the autonomy defines Khankendi as the regional center, shortly afterwards, on September 18, 1923, by the decision of the Nagorno-Karabakh regional party committee, Khankendi was renamed to “Stepanakert” after S.Shaumyan, who disguised under the

mask of a Bolshevik and lead the genocide of Azerbaijanis on March 1918. Thus, the foundation for the further renaming of historical places, districts, regions and villages of Azerbaijan in Karabakh was laid [12].

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, due to the patronage of the USSR leadership over the Armenians, the situation became more complicated and the Republic of Armenia started an open aggression by sending troops to the territories of Azerbaijan. Beginning in early 1992, the Armenian armed forces one by one started to occupy the last Azerbaijani settlements in Karabakh. On May 8, 1992, by capturing the city of Shusha, the ancient cultural center of Azerbaijan, the process of the occupation of the whole Karabakh by the Armenian army was completed. As a result, the city of Shusha, which covers an area of 289 km², had the population of 24,000 people, 1 city and 30 villages, was occupied by the Armenian armed forces. In the battles for Shusha, 195 people were killed, 165 were wounded and 58 were missing. Moreover, the aggression of the Armenian armed forces caused destruction of 25 schools, 31 libraries, 17 clubs, 8 culture houses, 4 technical colleges, 2 institute branches, 7 kindergartens, 4 cinemas, 5 culture and recreation parks, 2 sanatoriums, tourist base, 2 hotels, etc.

The branch of the State Museum of Azerbaijan Carpet in Shusha, Shusha State Drama Theater, Shusha TV-station, the Factory of Oriental Musical Instruments, State Art Gallery, Children's Health Center were looted, burned and destroyed [2, 38].



In addition, before the occupation, there were more than 170 residential buildings in Shusha, 160 cultural and historical monuments, which are considered very important architectural monuments. Among them are the tombs of Shusha and Shushakend which are considered to be the Last Bronze and Early Iron Age monuments, the monument of the Stone Age Shusha cave camp, the walls of Shusha fortress of

the 18th century, Ganja Gates, Panahali Khan's palace and library, Ibrahimkhalil Khan's tower and castle, Khan's palace and caravanserai, M.P.Vagif's madrasa and tomb, Yukhari mosque madrasa, the Hajiguls' mansion, Two-storey caravanserai, the Mehmandarovs' mansion complex, the Govhar aga, the Khoja Marjanli, the Haji Abbas, the Mardinli, the Saatli, the Kocharli mosques, Khurshidbanu Natavan's mansion and fountain, A.B.Hagverdiyev's, G.B.Zakir's, M.M.Navvab's, S.S.Akhundov's, N.B.Vazirov's, Y.V.Chamanzaminli's mansions, Mamay-bey's mansion, mosque and fountain, the Behbudovs', the Faramazovs', Zohrabbeyov's, Bahman Mirza's mansions, Uzeyir bey Hajibeyov's, Bulbul's house-museums, Khan Shushinsky's, tar virtuoso Sadigjan's mansions, Realni school building, Girl's school, Sweet water hamam, Square spring, Isa spring, etc. All these historical monuments were looted, destroyed or demolished by the Armenian occupiers.



THE LIBERATION OF SHUSHA

On September 27, 2020 under the leadership of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Ilham Aliyev the Azerbaijani Army set a start to large-scale counter-offensive operations in response to the Armenian military aggression in order to liberate our occupied territories. Our people united around the glorious Supreme Commander-in-Chief as one. The battles for every inch of Azerbaijan lands, the crushing blows of our mighty army on the enemy as pages of new glorious history, as well as the liberation of a number of important cities, settlements, strategic heights in various

directions, created great confidence and enthusiasm among people.

As a result of large-scale and successful counter-offensive launched by the Azerbaijani Army in Karabakh on September 27 under the leadership of the President of Azerbaijan, Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces Ilham Aliyev, by November 9, 5 districts, 4 settlements and 286 villages were liberated from the occupation. Within 44 days, Jabrayil district and its 90 villages, Fuzuli district and its 53 villages, Zangilan district and its Minjivan, Aghband, Bartaz settlements and 52 villages, Hadrut settlement and 35 villages of Khojavend district, 3 villages of Tartar district, Gubadli district and its 41 villages, 9 villages of Khojaly district, Shusha city, 3 villages of Lachin district, as well as several strategic heights in the direction of Aghdara and Murovdagh, Zangilan's Bartaz, Sighirt, Shukurataz heights and 5 more unnamed heights were liberated.

November 8, 2020 was marked as a glorious day in our history. Under the leadership of Supreme Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev, our army liberated the city of Shusha, the crown of Karabakh, which is of a significant historical, cultural and strategic importance to Azerbaijan. This was the most important historical event and a major military victory

among the successful counter-offensive operations carried out in 44 days.

The liberation of Shusha, an impregnable fortress with a hard relief, still amazes military experts around the world.

The French newspaper Le Monde reported that Armenian forces were destroyed in the battles for Shusha. Russian media wrote: “Has anyone seen such a war, love of state and homeland? It’s hard to say! The Azerbaijani Army was climbing those cliffs, with the martyrs on their shoulders, fighting, covered in blood and sweat. Neither the wounded nor the martyrs were left behind. They went to Shusha on one breath...”. Ukrainian military expert Alexei Arestovich emphasized that “Azerbaijan liberated Shusha. With infantry battles, carrying ammunition, in the fog, in bad weather conditions, was breaking through the mountains. They took the city without UAV, tanks or artillery” [15].



RECONSTRUCTION OF SHUSHA

Straight after the liberation of the city, an inventory of the damaged units of the historical and cultural heritage and nature was carried out and reconstruction works began. The liberation of Shusha, its reconstruction and taking back its place in the culture of Azerbaijan were among the greatest dreams of the Great Leader.

Visiting Shusha on January 14, 2021, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev noted that the last trip of the national leader Heydar Aliyev to the city was 39 years ago during his historic and unforgettable visit, and today the

heroic Azerbaijani army via well-thought-out military operation, demonstrating courage, bravery, heroism, strength and national spirit, liberated Shusha from the occupation, and after a long break, on November 8 the Azerbaijani flag was hoisted in Shusha: “We came here as winners, we also raised our flag, now the Azerbaijani flag is waving in all liberated lands. We reached here fighting. Nobody gave us these lands. The negotiations did not help. We saw that we had to liberate our lands by our own efforts and we did it” [17].

During his visit to Shusha, President Ilham Aliyev said that after the liberation of Shusha, the process of reconstruction of the city and restoration of all historic buildings was launched. As a result of the occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia, including Shusha, many historical and cultural monuments were destroyed, houses and museums were looted. Among them are busts of Khurshidbanu Natavan, Uzeyir Hajibeyli, Bulbul. These shot busts are witnesses of Armenian vandalism. He noted that after the restoration of our territorial integrity, busts of Bulbul, Natavan and Uzeyir Hajibeyli will be erected in Shusha again. These words of the President have already become a reality. The busts of these geniuses have been put on their initial place.

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev noted that despite all the efforts of the Armenians, they could not present Shusha to the world as an Armenian city. They tried for 28 years, but failed. Even if Shusha was destroyed by the Armenians, it did not bend, it was taken captive, but never lost its dignity, and despite the attempts of Armenianization, was able to preserve the spirit of Azerbaijan [18].

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan stated that Shusha as the cultural capital of the Azerbaijan state will become one of the most beautiful cities in the world: “In fact, it has always been so. The antipathetic enemy has simply destroyed all our historical monuments. But we will restore them. We will return them their real faces. And from now on the people of Azerbaijan will live in Shusha forever!” [16].

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