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## **ON THE PRESERVATION OF PERSIAN MONUMENTS IN THE REPUBLICS OF ARMENIA AND ARTSAKH**

**Key words:** Persian Monuments, The Republics of Armenia and Artsakh, cultural heritage, cultural policies, Azerbaijan's falsifications, The Blue Mosque of Yerevan, The Mosque of Shushi.

### ***Introduction***

Within the frames of the present article certain theses are introduced in regard to the question of preserving the Persian monuments in the territories of Armenia and Artsakh. Despite the fact that presently Persian cultural monuments are scarce in number; the ones that have been preserved symbolize the good neighborhood relations and peaceful co-existence between Persians and Armenians in different epochs.

In the article parallels are drawn between the cultural policies pursued in the Republics of Armenia, Artsakh, Islamic Republic of Iran and Azerbaijan and the specifics of this policy are underscored. The given article does not intend to delve into the cultural and architectural value and significance of various monuments.

### ***The Azerbaijani claims to expropriate cultural heritage***

The Persian cultural trace in the republics of Transcaucasia is conditioned by the Persian political influence in the region for quite a long, historical period. It is evident that after becoming part of the Russian Empire, the Russian cultural influence became more prevalent in Eastern Armenia and in the region as a whole, thus, Persian social norms in all their forms were of secondary

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significance. However, Persian cultural traces have been preserved in the region and in its constituent part, i.e. in Eastern Armenia.

Nonetheless, it should be taken into account that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan taking advantage of the situation, on state level tried and is still making all efforts to expropriate the authentic rich cultural heritage of Armenians and Iranians.

Over decades apart from expropriating Armenian historical-cultural heritage, apace with it, Azerbaijani propaganda, in fact, lays a claim to expropriate not only the cultural heritage of neighboring Iran, but also the exceptional, historical civilizational values of whose creation Azerbaijan doesn't have even any remote relation. It is apparent that in this case it can be complicated for official Baku "to digest" this claim due to political, military standing that Iran has in the region. Nevertheless, it is this factor that can become a straightjacket for hampering the Azerbaijani claims.

To be fair, it should be ascertained that Azerbaijan's falsifications of Iranian cultural objects and non-material values do not receive appropriate feedback from Iranians. Moreover, Iranian reactions are not consistent with current challenges.

The inclusion of "Zorkhane" sport in UNESCO's Intangible Heritage List testifies to this which according to the daily Etealat is "weird and shocking"<sup>1</sup>. This item of news is so astounding, that even after learning about it the Iranian public hopes that it is fake and will be refuted soon. Whereas in order to fight such falsifications it is imperative that counteractions on a higher level be carried out.

After the 44-day war of 2020 due to the military occupation of the greater part of Artsakh Republic, the Persian Mosque in the city of Shushi appeared under the Azerbaijani control. Today the occupants claim the mosque to be of Azerbaijani origin, despite the irrefutable fact the preserved inscriptions of the cultural monument are in Persian<sup>2</sup> (see picture 1).

Under new circumstances the aggressor made another claim to expropriate the Persian Mosque in Yerevan when on February 22, 2022 two Members of the

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<sup>1</sup> Մկրտչյան Ազգ, 09.XII.2022, 45(5733):

<sup>2</sup> Հայաստանի Հանրապետության վարչապետի, Ադրբեջանի Հանրապետության նախագահի և Ռուսաստանի Դաշնության նախագահի հայտարարությունը [https://www.primeminister.am/u\\_files/file/Haytararutyunner/Haytararutyun-.pdf](https://www.primeminister.am/u_files/file/Haytararutyunner/Haytararutyun-.pdf) retrieved<sup>1</sup> 07.12.2022:

Azerbaijani Parliament visited Yerevan for participating in the sessions held by the committees of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly<sup>3</sup>.

Similar to military assistance Azerbaijan basically gets certain aid and guidance from Turkey for shaping and adopting such a pretentious policy in regard to this issue.

On April 21, 2022 the Turkish attempt aimed at converting another Persian monument into Azerbaijani is a telling fact. During a program broadcast by Turkish national Radio and Television Corporation a monument-building on Hanrapetutyun Street 32, in the center of Yerevan was introduced as a part of an old fictitious "regal" palace. While the monument-building designed by Michael von der Nonne was built in 1876 as an official residence for the first consul of Persia, functioning as such up until 1920<sup>4</sup>. In the 1850s the building was owned by a Persian wealthy Haji Abbas Kyalbarai Abdu Hussein Ogli. The Persian consul's room was entirely covered with murals that are still preserved<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, irrespective of the uses of this building, undeniable is the fact that the construction abounds in Persian cultural elements. In this case the Azerbaijani claims to "expropriate" the building are groundless. It should also be mentioned that despite the fact still in June 1997 the reformist President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Sayyid Mohammad Khatami launched an initiative<sup>6</sup> to open a dialogue "between different religions and civilizations". In fact 5 years prior to this initiative when the Armenian army liberated the Armenian city fortress of Shushi the local Persian mosque suffered no damage and was preserved as a cultural monument<sup>7</sup>. Otherwise stated, the cultural dialogue or, to be more precise, Armenians secured the policy of tolerance even during the military action.

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<sup>3</sup> Ադրբեջանցի 2 պատգամավորներ Երևանում կմասնակցեն «Եվրանեսթ» ԽՎ բյուրոյի և հանձնաժողովների նիստերին <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31714230.html> retrieved' 07.12.2022:

<sup>4</sup> Later the headquarters staff of the Armenian division were housed in the building. Then the Relief Committee for Armenia headed by Hovhannes Tumanyan was located there. Since 1963 the Organization of Preserving Historical Monuments founded by great Armenian painter Martiros Saryan, who headed the organization, has been situated in this building.

<sup>5</sup> Երևանի պարսկական հուշարձանը ադրբեջանականացնելու թուրքական փորձ <https://www.aliqmedia.am/2021/04/21/11714/> retrieved' 07.12.2022.

<sup>6</sup> See **Բայբուրդյան** 2005, 742:

<sup>7</sup> Սերգեյ Շահվերդյան. Շուշիի Վերին Մզկիթի վերականգնման աշխատանքները համապատասխանում են միջազգային կոնվենցիայի դրույթներին <https://www.panorama.am>

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Moreover, in 2007 the authorities of Artsakh announced that a project was to be launched aimed at the restoration of the mosque. In fact, we can state that a policy of cultural tolerance has been outlined in the Republic of Artsakh that has never been part of independent Azerbaijan.

According to the data of IDeA charitable foundation more than 1.5 million dollars<sup>8</sup> was spent on the restoration of the mosque. In 2019 after the restoration the mosque was opened acquiring the status of a museum<sup>9</sup>.

Hence, the tolerant cultural policy pursued by the Republic of Artsakh and exemplified by the Persian mosque in Shushi evidences that both secular and religious authorities of Armenia have been unanimous in taking measures for the restoration of a foreign, in this particular case, Persian cultural monument. This, in fact, is a distinctive feature originally absent from the policy that Azerbaijan since its formation as an independent state has been pursuing in historical Artsakh's territory even more so after Azerbaijani military occupation of the area.

Thus, under these circumstances a necessity emerges to expect a response from the Iranian authorities: a feedback given in regard to the Blue Mosque when in February, 2022 the Azerbaijani parliamentarians visiting Armenia for participating in sessions held by the committees of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly called the architectural monument an "Azerbaijani monument" and in this way tried to expropriate this unique specimen of the Persian cultural heritage. The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran issued the following statement: "Those who are interested in history understand very well the origin of the 200-year old Blue Mosque and its great cultural, architectural value with its Persian inscriptions. It is a great pleasure that these historical epigraphs have been preserved"<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, it is probably a fortunate fact that similarities in the inscriptions of the Persian Mosque in Shushi and the Blue Mosque in Yerevan are obvious, as they are powerful arguments on the agenda of Iranian-Azerbaijani discussions of the problem of cultural tolerance policy".

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am/am/news/2017/04/14/%D5%87%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B7%D5%AB-%D5%B4%D5%A6%D5%AF%D5%AB%D5%A9/1761638 retrieved 07.12.2022.

<sup>8</sup> 1,5 մլն դոլար՝ Շուշիի մզկիթին. «IDeA» հիմնադրամը վերականգնում է Արցախի պատմական ժառանգությունը, <https://factor.am/184699.html> retrieved 22.12.2022:

<sup>9</sup> For more on this see Մկրտչյան 2022, 229–241:

<sup>10</sup> <https://twitter.com/iraninyerevan> ՀՀ-ում ԻԻՀ դեսպանության թվիթերի retrieved 25.05.2022:

It should be added that Azerbaijan's cultural policy on Persian monuments in the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh is strongly backed by Turkey. Accordingly, the propaganda of disseminating disinformation can be neutralized by Iran's active participation and its co-operation with Armenia. The joint efforts of the two countries can definitely countervail Azerbaijan's policy of falsifying the origin of historical monuments.

***About certain traces of unique Persian Monuments in the territory of the Republic of Armenia***

Apart from the aforementioned, it should also be taken into consideration that presently certain traces of unique Persian monuments or buildings in general have been preserved in the territory of the Republic of Armenia. After the Treaty of Turkmenchai signed in 1828, most of these buildings were annihilated by the Russian Empire. In the years of Soviet rule, along with many other Christian monuments of native Armenian origin, the Persian ones were wiped out in the territory. Doctor in Architecture, Professor Marietta Gasparian mentions in her monograph that in the XIX–XX centuries there were residential buildings and houses, bearing a Persian imprint. These are: a house on Demirbulagh currently Hanrapetutyun St. 19 in Yerevan, Jafar bek Baghirov's house on the left bank of the Hrazdan River where the famous district Dzoragyugh is situated, Panah Khan's house on Ter-Ghukasov St<sup>11</sup>.

Noteworthy are foreign travelers' testimonies which also evidence that the region being under the Persian political domination, bore its cultural influence. I. Chopin<sup>12</sup> writes about the residential houses built with a Persian design in the first half of the XIX century.

Notable is the fact that nowadays certain Persian toponyms such as Tokhmakhgyol (one of the lakes in Yerevan having been used for irrigation<sup>13</sup> since the late Middle Ages) have also been preserved. It is common knowledge that the river was restored (according to traditional Persian testimonies it was built) during the rule of Tokhmakh Khan<sup>14</sup> in 1578. At the end of the XVIII century the river

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<sup>11</sup> Гаспарян 2008, 113–115.

<sup>12</sup> Шопен 1852, 892–894.

<sup>13</sup> Հալիբրյան 1969, 65, 131:

<sup>14</sup> Շահազիզ 1931, 84, 177:

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dried up and was restored again on the eve<sup>15</sup> of Eastern Armenia's inclusion into Russia.

To sum up it can be concluded that at present singular samples of buildings designed with Persian architectural motifs have been preserved, the best of which are the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the Persian consul's room of 1876–1920 on Hanrapetutyun Street in Yerevan. The latter has murals rich in both Persian and Armenian patterns (see picture 2).

It should be mentioned that Armenians have always treated the foreign cultural monuments with special care. Nevertheless, after the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia the new authorities having atheist ideology caused a considerable damage to the preservation of religious-cultural monuments. In the 1930s the Armenian Church was subjected to severe persecutions. Many churches were closed down<sup>16</sup>. Ancient churches were destroyed or at best they were transformed into objects serving different purposes. This is the reason why certain Persian cultural monuments were destroyed in those years. Otherwise stated, all the destruction was due to the *modus operandi* of the ruling authorities of the day. In fact, it was not discrimination but rather a manifestation of general ideology that the Soviet authorities had back in that time. Whereas, it should be taken into account that during the same period thanks to the efforts of the great Armenian poet Yeghishe Charents, the Mosque was not destroyed but transformed into a museum. The literary critic of Charents's works Davit Gasparian states that the poet himself was not directly involved in saving the Mosque, however, his was an implicit contribution<sup>17</sup>.

In June, 2018 a special event was held at the Mosque in acknowledgement of Charents's contribution to saving the Mosque. The Cultural Adviser of the Iranian Embassy in Armenia Seyed Mohammad Reza Heydari noted: "Charents is loved and respected in our country. We do not forget that he did everything in his power to save the Mosque"<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Հակոբյան 1971, 264:

<sup>16</sup> Մելքոնյան 2018, 349:

<sup>17</sup> ՀՀ-ի մահմեդական հուշարձանները, կամ ինչպես եղավ, որ Կապույտ մզկիթը գինու գործարան չդարձավ, <https://armeniasputnik.am/20210107/hh-mahmedakan-hushard-zanner-kapuyt-mzkit-ginu-gortcaran-26024242.html> retrieved 17.12.2022

<sup>18</sup> «Զարենցը Կապույտ մզկիթի պահապաններից էր», «Կապույտ մզկիթ»-ում մեծարեցին Զարենցին, <https://alikonline.ir/news/culture/item/47661> retrieved 07.12.2022:

After the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Armenia when contacts were established with the Islamic Republic of Iran the cultural-religious cooperation between the two countries was marked by the return and restoration of worship monuments. On October 13, 1995 a memorandum of cooperation was signed in regard to the reconstruction and restoration of the Blue Mosque in Yerevan<sup>19</sup>. To put into effect the aforementioned memorandum, in 1994–1998 the Mosque was reconstructed thanks to the investment of the Iranian capital and under the supervision of Iranian and Armenian experts in culture. The Culture Center, the Islamic ties of IRI and the executives of Mostazafan and Janbazan Foundation arrived at the decision to devolve the responsibility of preserving the Mosque on the Culture Center<sup>20</sup> founded at the Iranian Embassy in Yerevan, in 1998 (see picture 3 and 4).

Nowadays the Blue Mosque has truly become the religious-cultural center for many Iranians carrying out activities in the Republic of Armenia. Religious ceremonies along with Persian classes are regularly held at the Mosque. It also evidences the mutual respect between Armenians and Iranians, their freedom to practise their own religion openly. Whereas the indicative of Azerbaijan's cultural policy was the destruction of 5000 khachkars (cross-stones) in Old Jugha, in 2005. Only this fact suffices for gaining an insight into the consistent cultural policy that Baku's authorities have been pursuing over the last decades. The policy is basically directed against civilization as a whole. Due to the fact that this country does not have its own culture and is bound to "creating" it, the authorities of this republic unspairingly choose to annihilate Armenian monuments in general or at best expropriate them with "legal-historical substantiation".

Hence, albeit it is difficult to find buildings of Persian architecture fully preserved in Yerevan, certain traces are still there. The best-preserved and most impressive of them are undoubtedly the Blue Mosque and the Persian consul's study (1876–1920) rich in various murals.

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<sup>19</sup> The Blue Mosque was built in 1765 during the rule of Hussein (Hoseyn) Ali Khan, the ruler of the Yerevan Khanate. The Mosque covers 7000 square meter, having a minaret of 24 metres height and 28 cells. After the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia the Mosque housed the Museum of Natural Sciences and History of Yerevan.

<sup>20</sup> Երևանի Կենտրոնական (Կապույտ) մզկիթ, 2004, 7:

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It should be emphasized that the Persian monuments are protected by the state. Under the culture legislation<sup>21</sup> of the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh any assault on Persian monuments is just as punishable as any encroachment upon any object of Armenian cultural-historical heritage. Otherwise stated, the protection of cultural monuments is part of society's consciousness and has a great significance for the large public circles.

#### ***Conclusions***

The Persian monuments in the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh are protected by the state and under the culture legislation in Republics of Armenia and Artsakh any assault on them is as punishable as any encroachment upon objects of Armenian historical-cultural heritage.

The scarce Persian monuments that are still preserved, testify to the good neighborhood relations and peaceful co-existence between Persians and Armenians in different epochs.

In the article parallels have been drawn between the cultural policies pursued in the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Azerbaijan, and the peculiarities of the policy have been emphasized. The aim of the present article has not been to delve into the cultural and architectural value and significance of various monuments.

Turkey strongly supports Azerbaijan to shape its cultural policy on the Iranian monuments in the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh. Hence, Iran's active cooperation with Armenia will help neutralize the propaganda of disseminating disinformation and counteract Azerbaijan's policy of cultural falsifications.

It is of vital importance that Turkish-Azerbaijani military-cultural cooperation be countervailed by Armenian-Iranian joint fight for culture.

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<sup>21</sup> On the bases of cultural legislation see (Irtek.Am) article 30 retrieved 14.01.2023.



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**ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ԵՎ ԱՐՑԱԽԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ  
ՏԱՐԱԾՔՈՒՄ ԳՏՆՎՈՂ ՊԱՐՍԿԱԿԱՆ ԿՈԹՈՂՆԵՐԻ  
ՊԱՀՊԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՐՑԻ ՇՈՒՐՋ**

ՄԿՐՏՉՅԱՆ Կ.

**Ամփոփում**

***Քանալի բառեր***<sup>1</sup> պարսկական կոթողներ, Հայաստանի և Արցախի հանրապետություններ, մշակութային արժեք, մշակութային քաղաքականություն, Ադրբեջանի կեղծարարություններ, Երևանի Կապույտ մզկիթ, Շուշիի մզկիթ:

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության և Արցախի Հանրապետության տարածքում գտնվող պարսկական հուշարձանները պահպանվում են պետության կողմից և դրանց հանդեպ իրականացված ցանկացած ոտնձգություն ՀՀ և ԱՀ մշակութային օրենսդրությամբ պատժելի է ճիշտ այնպես, ինչպես հայկական պատմամշակութային ժառանգության օբյեկտների դեպքում:

Ինչ վերաբերում է մինչ օրս պահպանված սակավաթիվ հուշարձաններին, ապա դրանք վկայում են պատմական տարբեր ժամանակաշրջաններում հայ և իրանցի ժողովուրդների բարիդրացիության և խաղաղ գոյակցության մասին:

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության և Արցախի Հանրապետության տարածքում գտնվող պարսկական կոթողների նկատմամբ Ադրբեջանի մշակութային քաղաքականության մշակման և իրականացման գործին անմիջականորեն աջակցում է Թուրքիան: Ըստ այդմ, թուրք-ադրբեջանական քարոզչամեքենայի ապատեղեկատվության տարածմանը կարող է հակակշռել իրանական և հայկական կողմերի գործակցությունը առհասարակ մշակութային կոթողների պատկանելության հարցում:

## К ВОПРОСУ О СОХРАНЕНИИ ПЕРСИДСКИХ ПАМЯТНИКОВ, НАХОДЯЩИХСЯ НА ТЕРРИТОРИИ РЕСПУБЛИКИ АРМЕНИЯ И АРЦАХ

МКРТЧЯН К.

### Резюме

**Ключевые слова:** персидские памятники, Республики Армения и Арцах, культурная ценность, культурная политика, фальсификации Азербайджана, Ереванская Голубая мечеть, мечеть Шуши.

Персидские памятники, находящиеся на территории Республики Армения и Республики Арцах, сохраняются государством, и любое посягательство на них карается культурным законодательством Республики Армения и Республики Арцах, как и в случае с армянскими историческими памятниками и объектами культурного наследия.

Сохранившиеся памятники свидетельствуют о добрососедских отношениях и мирном сосуществовании армянского и иранского народов в разные исторические периоды.

В проведении культурной политики в отношении персидских памятников на территории Республики Армения и Республики Арцах азербайджанцам оказывала содействие Турция, и посему распространению дезинформации турецко-азербайджанской пропагандистской машиной можно противостать лишь совместными действиями иранской и армянской сторон.

**Picture 1.**



**The minaret of the mosque in Shushi with a tracery, having Persian inscriptions**

**Picture 2.**



**A mural with motifs of Armenian cross-shaped patterns**



Preserved murals from the Persian Consul's study (1876–1920)

Picture 3.



The Blue Mosque in Yerevan with  
patterned Persian inscriptions on the  
façade

Picture 4.



The inscription in Persian on the wall  
of the Blue Mosque in Yerevan