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ORIGINAL STUDY

Re-assessment of the Urban History of Azerbaijan from Ancient Times to the Present in the Context of General Turkic Culture

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ABSTRACT

While the Turks have often been depicted as a nomadic people in Western and former Soviet historiographies, recent archaeological evidence and research reveals that they were instrumental in the development of settled urban civilizations, particularly during ancient and medieval times. This is particularly evident in Azerbaijan, a region historically inhabited by Turks, where they significantly contributed to the establishment of urban centers. These cities, along with their infrastructure and architectural features, have been well-documented in Greco-Roman, Arabic, Persian, and other primary sources from the period. Azerbaijan, located at the crossroads of East-West trade routes, has a long history of urbanization, with the establishment of cities dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE. Over time, these urban centers evolved, contributing to the development of modern urban life. Today, the cities of Azerbaijan remain important hubs of trade and craftsmanship, serving as living legacies of ancient and medieval urban civilizations. This paper seeks to examine the historical evolution of urban life in Azerbaijan, focusing on the cities created by the Turks. It will explore the characteristics of these urban centers, their social, economic, and cultural functions, and the ways in which these features have persisted or been reflected in contemporary urban life. By investigating these historical cities, the paper will highlight the enduring impact of ancient and medieval urbanism on the modern urban landscape of Azerbaijan.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Turkic, City, Urban, Ganja, Tabriz, Baku, Shusha

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Introduction

The formation of the first city-type settlements began during the Middle Bronze Age in the territory of Azerbaijan, which was located in a favorable natural-geographical and strategic position. Unfortunately, both former Soviet and Western historiography have studied the urban history and urban culture of Azerbaijan through an ideological lens, on ideological grounds in most cases.¹ Primarily, researches on urbanism and urban culture in Azerbaijan have been studied mostly in the context of *non-Turkish* culture. According to this concept, the local population of Azerbaijan was presented as “*sedentary*”, and the Turkic ethnic groups who later migrated here were presented as representatives of a “*nomadic*” culture. However, in light of recent research and archaeological records, it has been accepted by the scientific world that Turks lived in Central Asia four thousand years ago and are considered representatives of the *Andronova Culture*.² The Turks, extending from their ancestral homeland to various parts of the world, have built infrastructure systems of such excellence that they continue to astonish observers even after centuries. They established cities that serve as landmarks of human culture, characterized by centers of science and education, places of worship, social institutions, and palaces. Although nomadic pastoralism persists in some Turkic societies today, this should not obscure their significant engagement with urban planning and development. The Turks have demonstrated an exceptional ability to balance their nomadic heritage with the creation of advanced urban centers, reflecting sophisticated organization and cultural achievement. The ancient Turks (Göktürks, Uyğurs) used to call the city *balig*. It is known that this word was also pronounced in the style of *balğ* later. In the 11th century, it is seen that the Qarakhanid Turks and Oghuz Turks used the word *kent* (city) instead of the word *balig* (Sumer, 1984, p. 1). The fact that the *Gokturks* put a high value on agriculture, and for this purpose, they acquired agricultural tools and seeds from China, is revealed by first-hand sources (Orkun, 1994, p. 464). Agriculture is one of the most important indications of settled life. Nomadic pastoralism or *Steppe culture* is not the life of people whose homeland is not known, and which regularly changes their homeland. The ancient Turks built houses for shelter in the winter, apart from the pastoral life which is necessary in the summer months. The value given by the Turks to *Otuken*, which has been regarded as a homeland and a sacred place from the *Huns* to the *Uyghurs* for centuries, clearly reveals this fact. As is known, the Turks built farms, orchards, and irrigation canals in *Otuken*. According to Chinese sources, the *Göktürk Khaganate* had strong settlements and established centers (Eberhard, 1996, pp. 77–87) There were centers such as in Long on the Ongin river of Modu (Mete), yaylag (summer quarter) in Chogai and *qishlaq* (winter quarter) in Karagum of Ilterish Qaghan, *yaylaq* in Ek-dag and *qishlaq* near the Issyk Lake of Istemi Khagan, *kishlak* in Tokhmaq of Tong yabgu (Kafesoglu, 1998, p. 352). B. Ogel noted the possibility that the winter capital of the Second Turkic Khaganate was in the place where the Orkhon inscriptions are found. The fact that these inscriptions were erected on the mountaintop, in a place where people do not live, could not make any sense. There are also some remains of the city of *Ordu-Baliq*, which was founded by the Uighurs. Islamic authors such as al-Istakhri, ibn Fadlan, and al-Masudi gave information about the cities of

¹ Altman, M (1949). Historical essay on the city of Ganja, Baku, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences; Ashurbeyli, Sara (1964). Essay on the history of medieval Baku (VIII - early XIX centuries). Baku, Publishing house of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR; Babayev, I., Ahmadoy, G (1981). Gabala (Historical and archaeological essay). Baku, Elm; Mammadov, R. (1977). Historical essay on the city of Nakhchivan. Baku, Elm; Muradov, V (1983). Medieval Azerbaijani Cities, Baku, Maarif Publishing House; Pigulevskaya, Nina (1956). Cities of Iran in the Early Middle Ages. Moscow.

² For further information see, Yıldırım, Elvin (2020). The Birth of Turkish Steppe Culture, Andronovo Culture, İstanbul, Ötüken Publications.

Balanjar and Samandar of the Khazars, also about their capital *Idil Khanbaliq*. The perfect state and army model, administrative organization, and high culture created by the Huns and Göktürks could not appear suddenly. The prominent sinologist Wolfram Eberhard proposed the idea that the Zhou dynasty, founded in China in 1050 BC, was Turkic origin, and noted that the Zhou brought the horse, the chariot, the Chinese zodiac, and the religion of Heaven to China (Eberhard, 1943, pp. 25–26). The ruins of Bulgar, the capital of the Idil Bulgars have been discovered. Research has revealed that the *Oghuz-Yabgu*, which existed in the Middle Ages, and subsequently the founders of the Seljuk state, were among the Turkic tribes who had settled and possessed urban cultural traditions, particularly in urban planning, before coming to Anatolia (Sumer, 1960, pp. 567–594). In this context, the paper reassesses Azerbaijan's urban development by examining Turkic contributions through archaeological evidence and medieval sources, arguing for a revision of the long-standing narrative that underplays their role.

Occupation of the Urban population of the Turks in the ancient and medieval periods

Mining and metallurgy were among the primary economic and technological activities of the Turkic tribes inhabiting the Altai Mountains in Central Asia. Archaeological excavations have yielded substantial evidence of the tribes' expertise, including weapons, military equipment, household tools, and various ornamental objects. The widespread presence of these artifacts highlights the advanced craftsmanship of the ancient Turks, whose proficiency in ironworking is well-documented and widely acknowledged in academic literature. Information found in Chinese chronicles, Byzantine authors' works, and the accounts of Islamic geographers in their travelogues play a crucial role in shaping our understanding. *"We arrived from the Turkic lands to Vahan and Sebin. In Vahan, there are unique gold mines in terms of abundance and quality. In the valleys here, gold nuggets brought by floods and flowing waters are found in dust form. People gather and take away this dust."* Russian archaeologists discovered in a Hun settlement near Lake Baikal in Selenga, surrounded by four ditches, on a 75-hectare area, 80 houses along with iron and bronze workshops, and grinding stones (Sheshen, 2001, p. 97). Korean and Mongolian archaeologists, in a study featured in the American Journal of Physical Anthropology, detail their findings from a Hun burial site. Among the discoveries, there are a gold necklace, a silver spoon, and various artifacts decorated with gold and bronze, shedding light on the artistic and metallurgical advancements of the Hun culture.³ The discoveries from Hun burials in Talas and the ornate objects unearthed from what is believed to be a Shaman burial in *Karaqalinka* near Alma-Ata are pivotal in illustrating the evolution of ancient Turkic art. Artifacts specific to the Huns from the Essik mound dating to the 5th-6th centuries, such as silver vessels bearing a 26-letter alphabet, golden cataphract warrior, and other artistic pieces, are crucial in showcasing the depth and sophistication of Turkic civilization, thereby dispelling superficial understandings prevalent in Western Turkish history and culture. It is also possible that the industrial and artistic craftsmanship of that era began in residential neighborhoods. Chinese records state that the ancient Turks built their houses out of wood or pounded soil. The thick woodlands encircled Bulgar City's perimeter (Ogel, 2014, p. 245). The Byzantine writer Procopius made the following interesting observations on the Turkic Sabirs in the 5th century AD, *"The Sabirs have machines that no one in Iran*

³ For further information, see, Handbook of Turkic World (1992), Turkic Culture Research Institute, Language-Culture-Art, A-23, Series 1, First Volume, Second Edition, Ankara, p. 219.

or the Roman Empire has ever thought of from the earliest times” (Procopius, 1914–1919, p. 504). Both empires had their own mechanical inventions, and siege engines were regularly maintained. However, no invention resembling those of these ‘barbarians’ has ever been created or functioned as efficiently as theirs. This is undoubtedly a marvel of human ingenuity” (Kafesoglu, 1998, p. 168).

From Priscus’ records, it is understood that the capital of Attila in Hungary consisted of small and large palaces, military garrisons, armories, and granaries for supplies, along with houses for the people. He also tells Attila and his wife’s palace was adorned with silver and gold plates, divided into halls with columns, embellished with carved wooden decorations on the walls and filled with tables, seats, and cabinets. Priscus also mentions the bathhouse built by Roman craftsmen (Priscus, 1995, pp. 41–45). It should be emphasized that the early Turks before Islam did not prefer living in cities surrounded by walls and fortresses. This was contrary to their lifestyle. But later on, citadels and fortifications for military purposes were built (Kafesoglu, 1998, p. 355).

Important cities of azerbaijan in the ancient and medieval period

The Turks, in line with the changing conditions of time, have adapted their concept and styles of city-building, creating some of the world’s most beautiful cities. In this regard, Azerbaijan represents not only a Turkic legacy but also a significant contribution to global urban history. One of the ancient states established in Azerbaijani geography is the Alban (Alpan) state. According to the information provided by early written sources, there were nearly 30 cities within the territories of this state (Ptolemy, 1991, pp. 122–123). The administrative, military-political, and religious center was the city of *Gabala*, also called *Kabalaka*. Material evidence obtained from archaeological studies indicates that the urban settlement of Gabala was established during the Iron Age and continued its city life for a period of 400 years. By the 2nd century AD, urban life in Gabala declined, prompting residents to move to an area called *Salbir* in the *Chaggali plain* (Dostiev, 2016, p. 8). During the archaeological studies carried out in the city of Gabala, public and religious buildings, as well as a large-scale warehouse, have been discovered. Among the warehouses dating back to the 4th-3rd centuries BC, a jar containing 240 liters of preserved wine was found (Dostiev, 2016, p. 8). Information about this ancient Turkic city in Azerbaijan can be found in sources dating back to the early centuries of our era. Various detailed information regarding the geographical position of Gabala city, etc., can be found in the notes of Pliny, Ptolemy, and M. Kalankatuklu’s historical work on Albania (Pliny, 1847–1848, p. 109; Ptolemy, 1991, p. 123; Kalankatuklu, 2006, p. 79). According to the research of Z.V.Togan, in Iran towards the end of the rule of Qubad ibn Firuz (488–531), the Sasanian army advanced north of the Aras River and later to the north of the Kura River, eventually occupying all of Albania up to places like Darband during the reign of Nushiravan. During this time, these areas remained under the suzerainty of the Khazars, or more precisely, the Huns (Togan, 2009, p. 44). According to the conclusions reached by researchers working on the ancient city remains, it is believed that in the *Salbir* part of the Gabala, there existed three different cultural periods and environments spanning from the 3rd to the 12th centuries. During this time, both Christian and Muslim cemeteries have been found.⁴ Although the central authority of the Alban state was relocated from Gabala to Barda in the 5th century due to northern incursions, Gabala retained its cultural and commercial

⁴ For further information see, The Gabala Archaeological Expedition Findings 2005–2010, (2011). Edited by İ. Babayev. SBS, Baku.

significance (Kalankatuklu, 2006, p. 83). There is information in sources about the city maintaining its significance during the medieval period as well. Hamdullah Qazvini, who lived in the 14th century, reported that the city was built during the reign of the Sasanian Shah Qubad, and he provided information about the cultivation of high-quality *silk, cotton, and other fabrics* there (Ghazvini, 1919, p. 93).

Archaeological studies in Qalatepe, a 26-hectare site in the Agcabadi district near ancient Gabala, unearthed significant urban remains. Another significant site, identified as part of the ancient cultural layer, is the remains of Barda, known as Berda or Bardos, located on the ancient caravan route between Barda and Ardabil. Additionally, the ancient city-fortress of *Bayat*, and the city site known as *Orangala*, situated 17 km northwest of present-day Beylagan district center, known as a key geographical point on the Silk Road route in Azerbaijan, highlight the antiquity of urban civilization (Dostiev, 2016, pp. 8–9).

The Orangala, divided into two parts as Big and Small City, reveals remnants such as artisans' quarters, ruins of structures like the Mil Minaret monument, fragments of clay architecture, coins, and fragments of pottery and glass. These cities, serving as overnight and resting places for trade caravans, played a significant role in the development of Azerbaijani Turkic culture. The caravan going from Orangala to Ardabil was supposed to move along the Beylagan road, which is the shortest route, and after crossing Kondalanchay, reach Horadiz, the village of Babi, where the *tomb of Sheikh Babi*⁵ is located, and then reach Khudafarin, which was built on the Araz river between Mahmudlu and Soltanlı villages of Jabrayil district. After Orangala and Tazakent, another city site called Altangala was discovered on the Ardabil Road (Ahmadov, 1997, p. 6). Further south, there are the ruins of the medieval city of Bərzənd. Islamic geographers of the 9th-10th centuries such as al-Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal, and al-Mukaddasi provided information about cities like *Barda and Beylagan*, as well as the caravan route between *Barda and Ardabil* (Valikhanli, 2016, pp. 270, 290, 308). Although sources from the 5th to the 7th centuries provide a lack of data about the city of Barda, it continued to maintain its significance as the capital of Albania (Kalankatuklu, 2006, p. 22). The influx of various Turkic tribes crossing the Darband pass and migrating into the northern and eastern regions of Azerbaijan compelled Albania to move its capital further inland to Barda. In response to continued Khazar attacks, the Catholicos of Albania, Abas, relocated the patriarchate's residence to Barda in 552. During the early 7th century, Barda, like other cities in Albania, suffered significant damage during the renewed conflicts between the Sassanian and Byzantine empires. After the defeat of the Sassanian Empire by the caliphate armies, the forces of *Salman ibn Rabia*, who had conquered Nakhchivan, entered the *Arran* territories via Gorus. Barda emerged as one of the cities in this region that offered the most serious resistance to the Arab Islamic armies (Hagverdiyev, 1991, p. 25). During the Islamic Caliphate era, Barda became one of their strategically important strongholds, and a large garrison was maintained in the city. The Caliphate under Abdulaziz recognized the importance of spreading Islam in Barda and constructed a mosque there. During the Islamic period, Barda produced many scholars and writers such as *Said ibn Amr Abu Osman al-Azdi al-Bardai*, *Ahmed ibn Omar Hassan al-Bardai*, *Ibn Harun al-Bardici al-Bardai*, *Abu Said al-Bardai*, and *Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Yahya Hilali al-Bardai*, who authored notable works. In the year 944, Barda did not escape the destructive invasions by the Rus of Scandinavian origin (so-called Vikings) who raided Azerbaijan cities via the Caspian Sea for plunder. Barda was devastated in 944, and its population was massacred. Although this event dealt a severe blow to Barda's position as a center of craftsmanship and trade, the city began to recover and regain its status as a

⁵ Built in 1273–1274 in honor of most likely a Sufi sheikh Sheikh BabiYaqub.

major political and economic center during the Seljuk influx and subsequently under the rule of the Ildegizid dynasty in Azerbaijan. Zakariya al-Qazwini, who lived in the 13th century, wrote, “*Barda has a market known as al-Qurki, which is set up every market day near Bab al-Akrad (the Kurds’ Gate), forming a square area for commerce. People come here from everywhere and in all directions to trade*” (Valikhanli, 2016, p. 338). In the 14th century, the renowned public figure Qazi Mahiaddin Bardai, who protested against Mongol rule, later relocated to the capital of the Golden Horde, the city of Sarai, where he continued his activities (Ghazvini, 1990, p. 27).

The city of Beylagan also became the capital of Arran, the northern part of Atropatene, which is present-day Northern Azerbaijan. According to G. Ahmadov, who analyzed different explanations about the etymology of the city’s name means “*paytakht*” (*capital*) and “*Arran*”, meaning “*capital of Arran*”. (Ahmadov, 1997, pp. 23–24). Arab cosmographer and geographer Zakariya al-Qazwini described Beylagan as a large and famous city surrounded by fortresses in Arran (Bunyadov, 1976, pp. 45–56). In the 8th century, the circulation of coins minted in Beylagan found in territories as far as Russia and the Baltic states indicates the city’s significant role in regional trade. In Moisey Kalankatlu’s historical work on Albania, mentioned a person named *Sanaturk* being crowned in Beylagan (Kalankatuklu, 2006, p. 30). Alongside other cities of Azerbaijan, Ibn Khordadbeh also provided information about Beylagan in his work “*Kitab al-Masalik wal-Mamalik*” (Book of Roads and Kingdoms) (Khordadbeh, 2008, p. 106). Another medieval geographer, Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Jabir al-Baladhuri, also mentions Beylagan in his work “*Kitab al-Futuh al-Buldan*” (Book of Conquests of Lands) (el-Beladuhri, 2013, p. 233). Ibn Rusta, in his work “*Kitab al-A’laq al-Nafisa*” (Book of Precious Stones), written in the early 10th century, described the confluence of the Aras River with the Kura River and mentioned that Beylagan is located between these two rivers (Valikhanli, 2016, p. 235). Ibn Hawqal, in his work “*Kitab al-Masalik wal-Mamalik*” (Book of Roads and Kingdoms), provides detailed information about Beylagan when listing the cities through which caravan routes of the Arran region pass (Haukal, 1800, pp. 160). According to A. Toksoy, the city of Beylagan, originally founded by Qubad b. Firuz, a ruler of the Sassanid Empire, became a significant Turkic region following the arrival of the Turks in the Caucasus. The region flourished under the rule of various Turkic groups, including the Huns, Agajeris, Sabars, and Khazars, before coming under the control of the Muslim Arabs. Following the Arab conquest, Beylagan remained under Arab rule for an extended period, until it was subsequently conquered by the Seljuks. During the Seljuk period, the city experienced a period of prosperity. However, with the decline of the Seljuks, Beylagan became a site of conflict. It later became a region where the Oghuz Turks settled, marking a shift in the city’s political and cultural landscape (Toksoy, 2021, p. 239). During the periods of the rise of Turco-Islamic civilization in the 9th to 12th centuries, Beylagan saw the construction of fortresses and palaces. The city’s water needs were met through a canal drawn from the Araks River, and irrigation activities were carried out in the surrounding agricultural fields.

Despite the damage caused by Mongol invasions to the city’s population and infrastructure, Beylagan received special attention for restoration following the conquest of Azerbaijan by Tamerlane. Under his orders, the city was first planned out, and then deep trenches and walls were built around it according to the plan. Inside the city, markets, numerous houses, baths, caravanserais, squares, and agricultural fields were constructed. Furthermore, Tamerlane ordered improvements to Beylagan’s water supply by establishing a water supply system from the Araz River with the goal of enhancing irrigation (Shami, 1987, pp. 344, 346).

One of the current issues in Turkish historiography is the comprehensive study of the history, architecture, administrative systems, and defense strategies of cities established

along the ancient Silk Road routes, especially from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Archaeological studies in the regions stretching along the Kura River, such as the ancient remains discovered in Shamkir, Narginqala, Saritepe in Qazakh district, and the studies in Garajamirli, highlight the extensive and ancient urban civilization along the Araks-Kura basin (Dostiyev et al., 2013, p. 14–15). Despite the destruction of Shamkir city in 752 AD during a rebellion, it was restored by the Arab army under the command of the Turkic-origin commander Buqa al-Kabir, who renamed it Mutevakkiliyya after the caliph. However, the people continued to call it Shamkir. According to al-Baladhuri Buqa al-Kabir settled in the city people from *al-Khazar* who, because of their interest in Islam came, and sought security (el-Beladuhri, 2013, p. 234).

Shamkir was a center of the metalworking industry in Arran, manufacturing swords and other metal goods exported to various countries worldwide. These cities formed, thanks to the Great Silk Road mentioned above, turned into important military, administrative, artistic, and cultural centers that fascinated and attracted travelers, scholars, and traders with their beauty. They also ensured the intensive activity of caravans along routes such as Barda-Ardabil and Barda-Tbilisi.

In the Greater Caucasus Mountains' southeast slopes, with its various beneficial mineral springs and rich resources, Shamakhi has been one of Azerbaijan's most important cultural and commercial centers in ancient times. According to some authors, the toponym "Shamakhi" is related to the name of the Khazar tribe, Jimax, mentioned in the events of the first half of the 4th century by Faustus of Byzantium, who lived in the 5th century (Ashurbeyli, 2006, p. 45). However, the Arab historian Ahmad al-Baladhuri in the 9th century explains that the name "Shamakhi" is associated with the Arab emir Ash-Shamakh ibn Shucan (el-Beladuhri, 2013, p. 241). According to the 13th-century historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi, it is known that the city of Shamakhi was founded by the Khazar Khanate's ruler, Cebu, in honor of his son Shad, whom he sent as a commander of the army to establish it (Gandzaketsi (1976), p. 101).

The city of Shamakhi is situated within the historical and ethnographic region of Shirvan. There are various etymological interpretations of the word "Shirvan." This toponym can also be found in Central Asia, Khorasan, Turkmenistan, and Anatolia. It is presumed that Shirvan was originally a city name that later became the name of a province. The historical territory of Shirvan city is located between Shamakhi and Quba (Jiddi, 2013, p. 15–16). The exact construction history of Shamakhi city cannot be fully determined, but archaeological studies confirm human habitation in this area since the Bronze Age. In the 10th century, renowned geographers such as Istakhri and Mukaddasi wrote the name of Shamakhi as Shamakhiya or Ash-Shamakhiya. (Valikhanli, 2016, pp. 273, 310). According to the Ahmad Yaqubi, during the time when Caliph Abu Ja'far sent troops against the *Khazars*, he built the city of Kamakh and turned it into a military stronghold to combat the Khazars. Apparently, a fortress fence was built around the city or the city changed its location (Sharifli, 2013, p. 331). Shamakhi, positioned on a major international trade route, saw its architectural and urban layout shaped by geographical factors and the requirements of trade caravans. Archaeological discoveries of building remnants, samples of weaponry, and artifacts of craftsmanship highlight the city's early development in architecture and various artistic disciplines dating back two millennia (Jiddi, 2013, p. 17). According to the information, there was a large-scale metalworking workshop in Shamakhi during the 9th to 12th centuries. According to ancient sources, the Shirvan region was once home to a number of Turkic tribes, including the Huns, Khazars, Pechenegs, Bakans, Sharvan, Sabirs, and others (Ashurbeyli, 2006, pp. 23–25).

The period from the 9th to the 12th centuries in Azerbaijan can be characterized as a time when Islam was widely adopted by the Turks, and the Seljuk rule got strengthened.

It was also a time of significant development in urban life, particularly in cities such as Baku (known as Baqavan), Barda, Ganja, Tabriz, Ardabil, Maragha, Shamakhi, Darband, Shabran, and others. With a population of over 100,000, these cities functioned as hubs for the convergence of intellectual and manufacturing potential. Cities like Ahar, Zanjan, Baku (Baki), Gabala (Qabala), Shabran, and Shamkir could be considered moderate-sized cities during that era (Dostiev, 2016, p. 9).

In 1192, a severe earthquake struck Shamakhi, which led the Shirvanshahs to relocate their capital to Baku. This move was prompted by the devastation caused by the earthquake and the need for a more secure and strategically advantageous location. Baku, situated along the Caspian Sea, offered not only greater security but also significant economic and trade benefits.

In the 13th century, the region faced further destruction with the Mongol invasions of Azerbaijani territories. The Mongols, under Genghis Khan and his successors, caused widespread devastation to cities across the Caucasus. Their invasions left a lasting impact, bringing about both physical destruction and significant cultural and social changes in the region. Despite these challenges, Baku emerged as a resilient city, maintaining its prominence and eventually developing into one of Azerbaijan's key cultural and economic centers.

However, with the decline of Mongol rule, cities in Azerbaijan, which had continued economic and cultural relations with successor states of the Golden Horde and Russian principalities like Shirvan, experienced a revival period. Shamakhi had developed into one of the best silk production hubs in the world, according to accounts given by Western explorers in the fifteenth century (Schiltberger, 2010, p. 45). The city continued to draw the attention of traders as a result of the goods produced here being exported to Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, France, and India (Jiddi, 2013, p. 28). But from the 16th to the 18th century, the Shirvan area and Shamakhi city suffered great devastation not just from powerful earthquakes but also from continuous Safavid-Ottoman warfare that turned the territory into a battlefield. The people of the city were moved to Aghsu during Nadir Shah's military campaigns in the Shirvan zone, and it was deserted for about fifty years (Jiddi, 2013, p. 20). Like other Azerbaijani khanates, Shamakhi Khanate was occupied by Russia in the beginning of the 19th century. Shamakhi was a part of the Caspian Province, the Shamakhi District, and finally the Baku Governorate during the Tsarist era. The city nearly collapsed after suffering enormous damage from earthquakes in 1859 and 1902. During the height of the Armenian terror in 1918, numerous historical sites and mosques were damaged. Reconstruction efforts on the city started during the Soviet era. Shamakhi has long been known for its traditional crafts, which include wood carving, metalworking, carpet weaving, textiles, and pottery. The ancient settlement of Binashirvan, known as the origin of the city, is still recognizable today. The Maiden and Güllüstan castles were the most important of the city's medieval fortifications, acting as formidable barriers against outside invaders. The neighborhoods of the old city of Shamakhi were called Qaladibi, Inner Fortress, Saritorpaq, Deremehelle, Lower Qalabazar, and Upper Qalabazar, after the physical and topographical aspects of the area. Neighborhoods like Padarlar, Arabs, Ardabilis, Kuschu, and Qurds were called based on the ethnic identity of their inhabitants and their occupations.

A number of villages and localities surrounding the city have also been named after religious leaders, including *YukharıImamlı*, *Sheykhminaz*, and *Sheykhsakhirli*. Traditional construction materials such as stone, brick, clay, and wood have been used in building houses. Another ancient city in northern Azerbaijan, where Turkic tribes settled from ancient times, is Darband. Arab authors have referred to this city as "Bab-ul Abvab" or "El-Bab" (el-Beladuhri, 2013, p. 225; Khordadbeh, 2008, pp. 105–106), The Persians

called it “Derbend-i Hazeran (Anon, 2020, 104), while the Turks named it “Demirkapı,” (Tashagil, 1998, p. 117). The word “Darband” is formed from the combination of the Persian “dar” meaning pass or crossing, and “band” meaning to hold or dam up. It has been used to denote a pass, border, or barrier in ancient texts. Terms such as “*Albanian Gate*” or “*Gate of the Caspian*” have been used in reference to Darband in some ancient sources. Since ancient times, Darband has served as a crucial point of intersection in the processes of mutual influence between states and nations, acting as a bridge connecting the Southern and Northern Caucasus. In the inscriptions of Bilge Khagan and Kul Tigin, the term “Demirkapı,” which also means “Iron Gate,” appears multiple times (Tekin, 1967, p. 232). Darband is defined historically as a western border point of the geographical areas where Turks spread. It is known that the Huns, Avars, Sabirs, and Khazars settled in the region and organized migrations towards the South Caucasus territories using the *Darband passes*. In the first half of the 7th century, sources mention the *Khazars* crossing the Darband pass to begin raids towards Azerbaijan and Georgia and besieging Tiflis (Tashagil, 1998, p. 117). Currently, located in Dagestan within the Russian Federation, the city of Darband is situated on the northwestern coast of the Caspian Sea. Darband has a very ancient history, with estimates suggesting that it was originally established as a fortress-like structure strategically located between the Caspian Sea and the slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains. In the fifth and sixth centuries, Darband underwent a transformation from fortress to city under Sasanian rule, and it later became an important central city of the border province of *Arran or Azerbaijan* (Oktay & Nezahat, 2017, p. 38). During archaeological studies in the city, material cultural artifacts dating back to the Sasanian period and the remains of city walls have been discovered (Minorsky, 1958, pp. 86–91). Darband was renowned as a city of fortifications in the early Middle Ages, and the road that passed through it was crucial for trade and military purposes. Darband’s advantageous location made it a pivotal point in fights between the Byzantine and Persian armies, the Khazar and Islamic Caliphate, and others. As a port city on the Caspian Sea’s coasts and as a northern frontier, Darband retained its strategic significance during the Caliphate era. Many Arab writers have contributed fascinating details on the history, architecture, and economics of the city. The Darband Walls constructed of stone, brick, and mud encircled the city. According to *Al-Istakhri* the merchants and other travelers from the countries of the unbelievers and other places used it as a *port in the Caspian Sea* (Valikhanli, 2016, p. 272). Muhammad ibn Khalid received Darband as an iqta (land donation) from Caliph Mutawakkil in the year 851. Darband’s populace independently chose *Hashim ibn Suraka al-Sulami* as their ruler (amir) in 869. The city attained city-state status under his rule (Dostiev, 2016, p. 31).

During the rule of the Shirvanshahs, Darband primarily served as the northern border city of the Shirvan state. During the periods of the Sajids and later the Salarids, sometimes the northern border of these states extended as far as Darband (Sharifli, 2013, p. 342). Darband’s cultural and political prominence grew under the rule of Seljuk Sultan Malik-Shah (1072–1092) when the Seljuks cemented their control over the Shirvanshahs. Later, this influence extended to the Great Seljuks and subsequently to the Atabegs of Azerbaijan. Archaeological studies conducted during the Soviet era revealed that Darband consists of two main parts, Narin Qala and the city district. Narin Qala housed the city’s defense fortifications, military garrison, palace, administrative buildings, water reservoirs, and other structures. Extending approximately 600 square meters, the palace complex was located in the eastern region of Narin Qala (Dostiev, 2016, p. 31).

One of the oldest cities of Azerbaijani Turks is Nakhchivan. Cultural artifact materials and works from the second millennium BC have been uncovered by archeological study, proving the existence of early urban civilization in the area (Aliyev, 1979, pp. 9–10).

Its geographical location facilitated close interaction with the Near East and Anatolian geography, fostering increased cultural exchanges and vibrant commercial and scientific life. Ptolemy mentioned Nakhchivan as “*Naksuana*” in his work “Geography” (Ptolemy, 1991, p. 124). In medieval Arab and Persian historical sources, the city of *Nakhchivan* is referred to by various forms, including “*Nakhchuvan*,” “*Nashavan*,” and “*Nuhchuvan*.” Scholars have suggested that the etymology of the name “*Nakhchivan*” is closely linked to the figure of the prophet Noah. Specifically, it is proposed that the toponym may be derived from the Persian words “*Nuh*” (meaning “Noah”) and “*chuvan*” (interpreted as “place of” or “homeland”). This would suggest that the name “*Nakhchivan*” signifies “Noah’s homeland,” a reference to the biblical narrative of Noah’s Ark. Nakhchivan suffered and faced destructions during the Byzantine-Sassanian wars, just like other cities in Azerbaijan. Nakhchivan was ruled by a number of principalities founded in Azerbaijan following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate and the start of the Abbasid era, especially the Sajids. It later became the capital of the Atabegs state after the dissolution of the Great Seljuk Empire. During the Soviet period, archaeological studies in Nakhchivan unearthed various material evidence spanning from the 9th to the 15th centuries, revealing the vibrant life and cultural activities during that period.

In 1162, a mausoleum built by *Ajami Abubakr oğlu Nakhchivani*, famously known among the people as *Atababa Gumbazi*, was constructed in the city. *Mominah Khatun’s mausoleum*, which honors the wife of Azerbaijani Atabeg founder Shamsaddin Ildeniz, is another noteworthy architectural landmark designed by the same architect. Certain buildings here are among the most brilliant examples of Seljuk architecture. With an inside diameter of 5.8 meters and a height of 14.6 meters, Yusif Kuseyir oğlu’s tomb is constructed out of burned brick. An underground crypt, a body portion, and a pyramid-shaped dome make up the mausoleum (Chelik, 2019, pp. 61–62). In the courtyard of the tomb known as *Atabey Gumbazi*, there is an inspiring couplet inscribed, “*Biz gedirik, ancaq qalır ruzigar. Biz ölürik, əsər qalır yadigar*” which translates to “*We pass away, but the wind remains. We die, but our deeds remain as a legacy.*” Nakhchivan was devastated and declined throughout the Mongol invasions until Ghazan Khan’s reforms. The city was later restored. Nakhchivan was part of the Kara Koyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu states, and during the Safavid-Ottoman conflicts, it occasionally became a battlefield. But in periods of peace, the city prospered in trade and craftsmanship, and famous scholars emerged from the madrasas that had been opened. The Russian army invaded Nakhchivan in 1827. It rose to prominence in 1918 as a major city under the Araz Turkish Republic. Nevertheless, the Republic fell apart when the British seized control of Nakhchivan in the beginning of 1919.

Shabran, another historical site in Azerbaijan, has been inhabited since ancient times, according to ancient and medieval records and archaeological studies carried out within the city. Shabran was identified as *Shoptran* in Ptolemy’s writings (Ptolemy, 1991, pp. 122–123). Based on the examination of manuscript records, fieldwork, archaeological research, and place-name information, it is hypothesised that the Huns and Sabirs established the city of Shabran during the 5th and 6th centuries (Dostiev, 2004, p. 11). Major medieval Arab historians mention that the city of *al-Shabran* was constructed during the reign of Sasanian monarch *Qubad*, in addition to the cities of Darband and Muscat (el-Beladuhri, 2013, p. 225). Shabran was formerly one of Azerbaijan’s advanced political and cultural hubs, according to archaeological discoveries including early Middle Ages ceramic vessels, fortification walls, and other artifacts. Ancient Shabran city is estimated to have existed on an area of more than 110 hectares, covering both banks of the Shabran River. Furthermore, the discovery of tools like millstones, flints, and quern within the city, along with the production of rice and cotton in the adjacent areas, points to the growth of a variety of artisan fields.

Another ancient city in Azerbaijan, which holds an important place in Turkic history and culture, is Ganja, located approximately 7–9 kilometers northeast of present-day Ganja (Dostiev, 2016, p. 32). Up to the present day, approximately 500 historical and architectural monuments have been discovered in the city of Ganja. The meaning, origin, and historical periods of the term “Ganja” are subject to several interpretations. The epic of Dede Korkut mentions Ganja as an Oghuz Turk settlement on the northern frontiers. Based on the data supplied by Hamdullah Qazvini, the city was established between 659 and 660 (Ghazvini, 1919, p. 93). Ganja, according to Al-Istakhri, was a minor city where caravans stopped on route from Barda to Tiflis during the conquests of the Arab Islamic troops. According to the works of M. Sharifli, Ganja’s founding year has been confirmed to be 245 (859–860) based on M. Kalankatukly and Munajimbashi (Sharifli, 2013, p. 351). Ganja became the first capital city along with the state of the Shaddadids. Barda lost its position as the capital of Arran with the establishment of Seljuk power in Azerbaijan, and Ganja became a hub for trade and craftsmanship. The son of *Malik-Shah, Muhammad Tapar* was appointed as governor to Ganja. During this period, palaces, caravanserais, and bridges were constructed, and the city’s foundation expanded. In 1063, the city gates of Ganja were prepared by *Ibrahim ibn Osman oglu*. Ganja remained significant to Azerbaijan even under the Eldiguzid dynasty, which followed the breakup of the Seljuk Empire. As “the last frontier outpost of the Muslim world,” Ganja was highly valued for its fortification by all of its rulers, including the Atabegs (Bunyadov, 2007, p. 166). Ganja has bestowed upon Turkish literature great figures such as *Nizami Ganjavi, Mahsati Ganjavi, Abul Ula Ganjavi, and Qiwami Mutarrizi*. Ganja became the capital of the newly established Karabakh Beylerbeyi during the Safavid era (Efendiyeve, 2007, p. 231). Ganja served as a battlefield of the Ottoman-Safavid conflict during the 16th and 17th centuries. Early in the 17th century, *Shah Abbas the Great* ordered the construction of several structures in Ganja. *Javad Khan* who belonged to the Qajar Ziyadoglu clan resisted the Tsarist invasion until the end. Following the invasion, the city was renamed *Elisabethpol* in honor of Tsar Alexander I’s wife, however, after Azerbaijan attained independence, its old name was restored.

Tabriz is another important city in Azerbaijan’s political legacy as well as Turkish history and culture. This historic Turkish city now serves as Iran’s main center for commerce, industry, and education. It is surrounded by Karacadag in the north, the Sahand mountain in the south, and in the west, located in a plain bending towards Lake Urmia. The name of the city is derived from the combination of Persian words “*teb*” and “*riz*,” meaning heat, fire, and finally from the word “*riz*,” which means to be poured. According to legend, in the year 791, the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid’s companion Zubeida Khanum fell ill with an incurable disease, but she was healed after entering the healing spring of Tabriz. The name Tabriz, which means “place of fever healing,” has been used to the city ever since (Chalabi, 1984, p. 525). However, S. Onullahi believes that the original version of the name “*Tabriz*” was “*Tarui-Tarmakis*,” and the fact stating that this was first recorded in an Assyrian inscription that described the 714 BCE expedition of Assyrian King Sargon II (reigned 722–705 BCE) against Urartu (Onullahi, 1982, p. 39). From the early centuries of our era, various sources began to provide more information about Tabriz. According to Arab geographers, the city is called “*Tibriz*,” while it is referred to as “*Tavrez*” in Byzantine and Armenian sources (Bosworth, 2007, pp. 486–487). During the caliphate of *Umar*, when the city was captured by the Islamic armies, the largest city in the region was not Tabriz but Ardabil (Aydogmusoglu, 2007, p. 11). Tabriz was destroyed in the year 858 due to an earthquake and was later rebuilt by the Abbasid caliph *Mutawakkil*. In the 9th and 10th centuries, the city was under the rule of the Sajid dynasty, founded by a Turkish commander named *Abu Saj Divdad*, and later under the rule of the Rawadid dynasty (Yildiz, 2019, p. 134). From the late 11th century onwards, Tabriz and Ardabil came under the

rule of the Turkic commander *Ag Sunqur* and his family (Sumer, 1999, p. 2). Politically and culturally, Tabriz's significance started to rise sharply throughout the Seljuk era. Under the Seljuks, Tabriz functioned as the hub of Azerbaijan. While in Tabriz, *Toghrul Beg* proposed marriage to the caliph's daughter and got a favorable reaction. There, he organized a lavish feast and gave the Tabriz residents dinars and dirhams (Bosworth, 2007, p. 488). During the reign of the Atabeg dynasty, Tabriz developed as the military and political center of the state. Specifically, during the rule of *Atabeg Qizil Arslan* (1186–1191), Tabriz became the capital city of the state (Bosworth, 2007, p. 488). *Atabeg Ozbeg* had built a beautiful palace in the city. Despite initial Mongol invasions affecting its development, Tabriz rose to its highest level of prosperity during the *Ilkhanid dynasty* established in the region. The declaration of Tabriz as the capital of the state by Ilkhan Abaqa Khan (1282–1291) marked a significant turning point in the city's history. In essence, Tabriz had become the economic and political center of the Ilkhanate state (Onullahi, 1982, p. 51). A city called "*Ghazaniyya*" was founded in 1297 over a large expanse southwest of Tabriz during the reign of Ghazan Khan (1295–1304). This small city, also called "*Sham Ghazan*" or "*Shanb Ghazan*", was home to the mausoleum of Ghazan Khan, the Friday mosque (Jame mosque), Shafi'i and Hanafi madrasas (religious schools), a hospital (dar-ash-shifa), a library, a courthouse (beit-ul qanun), a royal palace (khanegah), the Sayyid house (beit-ul seyyid), *mütavelli evi*, a bathhouse (hamam), and other structures (Rashid al-Din, 2021, p. 357). Social, economic, and political development of city was suffered during the turbulent time of the Ilkhanate's dissolution. But *Qara Yusuf*, the Turkmen *Kara Koyunlu* ruler, took control of the city in 1406, and he reinstated it as the capital. Later, Tabriz came under the authority of Shahrukh, who ruled over Tamerlane's reign, and he named Jahan Shah to be the city's ruler. Famous structures such as the *Gök Masjid* (Blue Mosque) and several other mosques and hospitals were constructed during his reign (Aydogmusoglu, 2007, p. 15). When *Uzun Hasan* took over Tabriz in 1468, his buildings made a substantial contribution to the growth of city architecture. Among his noteworthy accomplishments was the building of the *Hasan Pasha Mosque*, the inscriptions of which were written by the renowned scribe Yakut-i Mustasimi of that time. The travelogue "*Sayahatname*" by *Evliya Celebi* also contained information about this mosque. In addition, Yaqub, the son of Uzun Hasan, constructed the *Nasriyya Madrasa* and the *Dariüşşifa* (hospital) adjacent to the mosque in 1477 (Aydogmusoglu, 2007, p. 20).

Tabriz, which has been a crucial center of Turkic civilization and statehood throughout history, faced significant political and economic transformations. Initially under the rule of various Turkic dynasties such as the Seljuks, Atabegs, Ilkhanids, and Kara Koyunlu, Tabriz flourished as a cultural and commercial hub. The palace constructed by Sultan Jalayir is one of Tabriz's most impressive architectural landmarks. Later, during the Safavid period under Shah Ismail I, Tabriz experienced forced Shia conversion policies which disrupted its traditional stability but soon regained its prominence. Tabriz suffered from the Ottoman-Safavid war that followed the Chaldiran war. Despite the rapid changes of ownership, the city was ruled by the Safavids from the time of the *Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin*, which was signed in 1639, until the Safavids' fall. Tabriz saw both commercial and cultural development during the Afshar and Qajar eras. There were new architectural monuments unveiled. The Qajar era saw the establishment of Tabriz's first printing press, the opening of cannon foundries, the production of military hardware, and an increase in the city's economic growth. Under Kazim Garabekir's leadership, Ottoman forces invaded Tabriz in 1918 and were forced to leave the city in the middle of 1919 in compliance with the *Mudros Agreement*. This city holds enormous significance for the entire country of Azerbaijan, spanning from the north to the south, with its population consisting primarily of Azerbaijani Turks from the *Avshar*, *Bayat*, *Shahsevan*, *Khalach*, and *Sungur* tribes. The

capital of the Iranian state's East Azerbaijan province is currently Tabriz. Given its national cultural character and historical significance, Tabriz is viewed as an appealing location for the over 30 million Turkish population living in Iran. Throughout history, Tabriz has played a pivotal role in the Silk and Spice Routes, positioned strategically where trade routes from Kerman and Baghdad to India converged and linked to China and Central Asia via Nishapur and Urgench. Today, under Iranian governance, Tabriz remains a major city after Tehran, Mashhad, and Isfahan. Like the cities in Northern Azerbaijan, Tabriz has experienced the influx of Turkic tribes since ancient times, and Turkification has been a process since then. Throughout the ages when the Great Seljuks, Atabeks, *Ilkhanids*, *Kara Koyunlu*, *Ak Koyunlu*, *Safavids*, *Afshars*, *Khanates*, and *Qajars* rode horses over vast swaths of territory, Tabriz remained one of the principal pillars of Turkish statehood and culture. Tabriz was well-known during the Middle Ages for its carpets and other handicrafts. Through the ages, the miniature school of Tabriz, carpets and prostrations, and shoemaking have all maintained their allure. One of the most significant economic hubs in modern Iran is Tabriz's old, covered bazaar.

Another historical Azerbaijani city with a beautiful setting is *Ardabil*, which is located at the foot of the *Sabalan Mountains*. In the Middle Ages, Arab and Persian authors mentioned the city under the names “*Erdubil*” or “*Ardavil*” and attributed its foundation to the Sasanian ruler Firuz (Valikhanli, 2016, p. 335). The Safavid movement, which deeply influenced Anatolian and Azerbaijani Turks, laid the spiritual foundations of their authority in Ardabil before transitioning into the political arena. The presence of Safavid sheikhs' tombs there, along with its strategic location at the crossroads of trade routes, had already made Ardabil a center of attention in earlier times. Another event that brought Ardabil into prominence in Islamic history was the Khurramiyya uprising led by Babak. The famous Abbasid commander of Turkic origin, Afshin, who suppressed the Khurramid rebellion, appointed his lieutenant, Mangu Churu, as ruler of Ardabil (Aliev, 1995, p. 277). Ardabil was the capital of Azerbaijan since the late 9th century. Muqaddasi writes, “*Ardabil is the capital and provincial city of Azerbaijan. The city has an impregnable fortress around it. . . Its area is spacious; the Juma Mosque is located behind the citadel, on a hill. People live in the surrounding areas of the city, and much of the buildings are made of clay. There is abundant flowing water in the city, a permanent military presence, ample food supplies, and beautiful public bath*” (Sharifli, 2013, p. 356; Valikhanli, 2016, p. 310). Ardabil was known as a city that developed economically during the Great Seljuk and Azerbaijan Atabegs (Ildeguzid) periods. Despite facing certain destruction and decline during the intermittent *Georgian* and *Mongol* invasions, it became one of the most developed cities in Azerbaijan during the *Ilkhanid period* under *Ghazan Khan*. The city of Ardabil was distinguished among medieval Azerbaijani cities due to its religious and mystical significance. This city served as a significant center for the Safavid sheikhs, who practiced their religion there. Consequently, Ardabil became the epicenter of the religious ideology initiated by the Safavid sheikhs during the Turkmen dynasties. It also became the primary center for the Safavid Qizilbash Shia ideology. The city's Sheikh Safi complex served as a center of knowledge and a sizable socio-economic structure in addition to being a place of worship. Along with its painters, Ardabil became well-known in the Middle Ages for its calligraphy and bookbinding school. The calligrapher *Ustad Maksud Ali* produced the chest that was embellished with engravings from *Shah Ismail Khatai's* mausoleum. The Sheikh Safi mausoleum was restored and embellished during the Safavid era, drawing artisans and calligraphers from far-off places. Many libraries across the world currently have copies of literature that scribes from Ardabil copied. Ardabil served as the khanate's capital when the Azerbaijani khanate was commenced in the 18th century. The city's vibrant cultural environment suffered significant harm during the occupation of Tsarist Russia. Paskevich ordered the removal of some texts and art items from Sheikh Safi's

mausoleum to Petersburg. Ardabil, a historic Turkish city with a predominantly Azerbaijani Turk population, has lost much of its allure during the Pahlavi era.⁶

The capital city Baku, famous for its oil and fire temples, is an important port city laid on the Caspian Sea coast, located about 60 km southwest of the ancient *petroglyphs of Gobustan*. These rock carvings, which are commonly found in Turkic regions, have further intensified interest in studying the ancient history and civilization of the city. It extends to the further east until the edges of the Pacific Ocean. It was announced in various publications that there are numerous instances of which are located in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and within the boundaries of Tajikistan. In addition of these, it was determined that there are lots of drawn Turkic character pictures and figures on the rocks in many parts of Azerbaijan. Even, in Gobustan which is located on the coasts of Caspian Sea is the most important station of the rock pictures and figurines with some Turkish characters. (Demir, 2013, p. 395). The ship drawings in the rock carvings, and the images of the sun on the bows of boats indicating the direction of the sea route, represent the existence of shipping along the Caspian shores during the Bronze Age and even earlier (Ashurbeyli, 2006, p. 19). Archaeological studies conducted in areas around Baku such as Keshla, Binagadi, and Khirdalan have revealed that these were inhabited areas dating back to ancient times before our era. The existence of the Baku castle before the 7th century and the configuration of the Baku fortress indicate that Baku was already established as a port city along the seaside even when the castle was still in existence. Some researchers have connected Baku to ancient communities that have been documented in historical texts such as Qaytara, Albanopol, and Baruka (Bosworth, 2007, p. 47). Scholars have proposed that the city of Alban mentioned by Ptolemy corresponds to Baku, and the hypothesis suggests that the name derived from the ancient Turkic tribe known as the “Gargar.” (Ashurbeyli, 2006, p. 36). In most medieval sources, Baku’s economy is depicted as being based on the production of oil and salt, as well as the cultivation of saffron in the Absheron region (Hudud al’Alam, 1970, p. 145; Valikhanli, 2016, pp. 260, 272, 273, 282, 307–309, 318, 327). From the 10th century onward, Baku evolved into one of the main port cities of the Shirvanshah state. Archaeological studies conducted in the Inner City (Icharishahar) of Baku reveal that during the 9th to 13th centuries, it was a significant port city on the western coast of the Caspian Sea and one of the major centers of craftsmanship, trade, and culture in Shirvan (Valikhanli, 2016, p. 183). After the powerful earthquake in Shamakhi in 1191, Baku became the capital of the Shirvanshah state (Ashurbeyli, 2006, p. 90). In his work written in 1402, the medieval author *Abdurreshid Bakuvi*, who was originally from Baku, described the city as follows, “It is a city built of stone on the shores of the Caspian Sea, in one of the districts of Darband, near Shirvan. Its walls are surrounded by sea waters. The sea waters reach many of its walls and come close to the mosque. Its soil is rocky and many houses are built on rocks, the air is good, the water is sweet, and the wells are dug in rocky places. The water of the wells is from underground springs. . . Here, there are abundant figs, pomegranates, and grapes. The vineyards are away from the city, and most of the population goes there in the spring, stays there for a certain time, and then returns to the city. This happens every year. The city has two strong castles built of stone. One of them is large and is located by the sea, on a steep slope. This is the castle that the *Tatars (Mongols)* could not conquer. The second castle is above the first one. Its upper side is scattered with catapults. One of the distinctive features of this city is that the wind blows here day and night. Sometimes, when the wind blows fiercely, a person cannot stand

⁶ For further information see, Litvak, M. (2017). Construction of Iranian national identity, an overview. In Litvak, M (Ed.), *Constructing Nationalism in, From the Qajars to the Islamic Republic*, Routledge, pp. 10–32.

against it, and it lifts horses and sheep and throws them into the sea in winter. Here are oil springs and tar (bitumen) deposits, producing around two hundred camel loads of oil every day. There is another *spring next to them that runs white oil like jasmine oil continuously day and night. Its estimated monthly rent is over one thousand dirhams. There's also something that resembles yellow clay and burns like wax close to the springs. They disassemble it and transport it to the city to be used as a heating source for homes and bathrooms.*" (Bakuvi, 1992, p. 104–105). In the subsequent period, Baku, one of the important trade and port cities of the Safavid Empire, continued to maintain its significant stance. From the second half of the 18th century until 1806, Baku existed as an independent khanate. However, in the later period, it fell under the occupation of Tsarist Russia and could not immediately escape the negative impacts of colonial policies. This trend initially slowed down Baku's development (Bosworth, 2007, p. 47).

Following the Russian Empire's invasion of the South Caucasus and the forced migration of Muslim Turks from their ancestral lands, another Turkish city that has been subjected to Armenianization efforts is İrevan, which is currently the capital of Armenia. The city's ethno-demographic situation has gradually changed. Turkish kingdoms that were created from antiquity to the present have ruled over the Turkic tribes of Azerbaijan in İrevan throughout history. Azerbaijani Turks made up the great bulk of the Iravan Khanate's population prior to the Russian invasion. Prior to the Armenian Catholicosate being relocated to Iravan, then known as *Chukhursad*, in 1441, no Armenian towns were found in the area, according to all historical sources. (Gozelova, 2014, p. 2). We will not delve into the details of the Armenianization of the Iravan (Chukhursad) region, as it goes beyond the scope of our current research. It is also a historical truth that the Turkic tribal confederations, especially those from the *Qaraqoyunlu Turkic tribes*, ruled over the Iravan (Chukhursad) region. For example, *Amir Saad of the Karakoyunlu* dynasty, the ruler of Iravan who died in 1411, is buried close to Iravan, and his son *Pirhüseyn* became Iravan's (Chukhursad) ruler. During Pirhusein's reign, Iravan fortress became the capital of his principality, which is an indisputable historical event (Mahmudov, 2010, p. 17). This location is referred to as "Yerkrin Sahal" - "Sahadin olkasi" (State of Sahad) or "Sahatapos" - "Hollow of Sahad" (in Armenian texts) (Mahmudov, 2010, p. 18). Travelogues from the Safavid era have given us remarkable insights into architecture and urban planning of Iravan, as well as the city's population's economic, religious, and ethnic diversity. In 1647, *Evliya Chalabi* traveled to Iravan and wrote about the walls of the fortress, which were constructed by *Tokhmaq Khan and Farhad Pasha*, and the other gates that surrounded the ancient city around Chokan Square, including Tabriz, Yayla, and Korpu Gates. He also mentioned the mosque and the market bazaar near Korpu, as well as Khanbagi, Khan's residence, and the bathhouse. Evliya Chalabi noted that the city had 2060 houses and distinguished the area outside Yayla Gate as the old city (Aydin, 2008, p. 27–28). Most Christian travelers have given a geographical description of Iravan, emphasizing the city's location along major commerce and caravan routes, with its lush pastures and fertile fields situated on the border between Safavid and Ottoman empires (Tavernier, 2006, p. 73–75). In 1554, when Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent launched a campaign towards Revan, the beglerbegi (viceroys) of Chukhursad was Hussein Khan Rumlu. After him, Shahqulu Sultan Ustaclu was appointed to that position. According to the treaty of 1590, Chukhursad Beglerbegy came under Ottoman rule, and detailed records regarding Revan and Nakhchivan were registered in the State Register. From these records, it is understood that the absolute majority of İrevan's population were Turkish Muslims. After the death of Nadir Shah, one of the khanates established in Azerbaijani territories was the Iravan Khanate centered in the city of Iravan. This khanate was later invaded by the Russian Empire, and until the Soviet era, various methods were used to forcibly deport Azerbaijani Turks from Iravan,

where ethnic cleansing policies were implemented. With the establishment of Armenian rule, the city of Irevan witnessed the largest cultural genocide in history against Muslim Turkish monuments. The fortress of historical Irevan, which was built by Shah Ismail's vizier Revanqulu Khan, was also destroyed.

Shusha city - past and present in the context of modern urbanism model

Shusha city is one of the best examples of medieval urban planning and architecture, and it has a special place in the history of Azerbaijani Turkic culture. Known for being the capital of the Karabakh Khanate, this city has given rise to notable individuals who have had a profound impact on the intellectual and artistic life of the Turkic world as well as Azerbaijan. Those who have risen from Shusha and made significant contributions include *Khurshidbanu Natavan*, *Molla Panah Vagif*, *Mir Mohsun Navvab*, *Ahmed bey Agaoglu*, *Firudin bey Kocharli*, *Uzeyir Hajibeyov*, *Najaf bey Vazirov*, and *Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli*. First established as a fortification, the *Panahabad fort* was named *Panahabad* or *Shusha* due to the fact that *Panahali Khan Janvanshir* personally oversaw its construction ([Karabaghname](#), 2006, p. 46). Under the leadership of *Panahali Khan* and his son Ibrahim Khalil, the prominent figures of Karabakh built palaces, mansions, and mosques in Shusha. It is known that after the assassination of *Nader Shah Afshar*, in 1747, Panahali Khan, the leader of the Javanshir tribe, established the Karabakh Khanate. While cities like Ganja, Baku, and Shamakhi served as political and economic centers of other khanates in Azerbaijan, Karabakh Khanate did not have such a city. Panahali Khan built the foundation of *Bayat Castle* in *Kabirli District* as a political hub. The Khan first conquered the Albanian Christian princes in Karabakh to maintain internal unity and order as well as to show off the might of his state. As a new fortress, *Shahbulag Castle* was constructed. The castle of Panahabad was begun to be erected in 1756–1757 with the intention of strengthening the city's defenses and removing foreign threats, particularly those from Qajar Iran. The next several years saw the start of work on the city's 2.5 km long fortress walls, which were finished in three years. In 1795, during the first attack by *Agha Mohammad Shah Qajar*, Shusha Castle was besieged for 33 days before the Shah withdrew without capturing the city.

The Karabakh khanate was compelled to accept the protection of the Tsarist administration when Russia started to invade Azerbaijani khanates at the beginning of the 19th century. *The Kurakchay Treaty* was signed in 1805 by Karabakh Khan Ibrahim Khan and Sisianov, the leader of the Russian occupation army. Following the Russo-Iranian wars and the signing of the treaties of Gulistan and Turkmenchay, Azerbaijan was divided into two parts, marking a new era in the political and cultural life of Shusha. During the colonial period, Azerbaijan's first secular school was opened in Shusha in 1830. Initially a district within the Shamakhi governorate under the Russian Empire, Shusha became a city in 1848. That year also marked the beginning of theatrical performances in the city ([Anon](#), 2021, p. 25).

In 1864, under the leadership of Mirza Rehim Fana, the literary assembly called "Majlis-i Uns" (Assembly of Inspiration) was established in the city. After the creation of the Ganja governorate, Shusha district became part of it, enriching the city's cultural and literary environment further. Another literary assembly, "Majlis-i Farmushan" was founded under the leadership of Mir Mohsun Navvab. To further meet the water needs of Shusha's populace, Khanum Khurshidbanu Natavan built the Khan's Daughter Spring in the second half of the 19th century. Water is brought into the city via stone pipes that are connected to the slopes of Saribaba Mountain. In addition, she built a bathhouse in the city that catered to men and women on different days. A library and elementary school for females founded by the Shusha Charitable Society were operational by the late 19th century. The

first city school in the Caucasus was also established during this period in Shusha. In the years 1905–1907, Shusha city suffered from increased Armenian terrorism, resulting in the burning of several buildings during attacks. A four-time-weekly newspaper called “Shushinskaya Jizn” was published in the city in 1913–14. The Caucasian Islamic Army drove out Armenian armed gangs from Shusha after they massacred the city’s Muslim population in 1918–1920. The Karabakh Governorate, which includes Shusha, was founded following the declaration of independence by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. On one hand, combating Armenian separatism in Karabakh and Zangezur, on the other hand, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic continued its efforts in education and culture, establishing the Cultural-Educational Technical College and the Fine Arts School in Shusha (Anon, 2021, p. 26). The city saw the opening of museums honoring Shusha’s literary and artistic traditions, including those of Uzeyir Hajibeyov, during the Soviet era. Additionally, the theater structures were constructed, and the Govhar Agha Mosque housed the History Museum. In 1977, under the direction of Heydar Aliyev, the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR declared Shusha a historical architectural reserve. A year later, Bulbul’s house-museum was opened in the city. In 1982, also initiated by Heydar Aliyev, the Molla Panah Vagif museum-mausoleum complex was constructed and opened for public use. The same year, the bust of Khurshidbanu Natavan was unveiled, and the Vagif Poetry Days began with a grand opening ceremony.

Events like the Khari Bulbul Music Festival, which takes place in the Chidir Plain, are just one example of how scientific and cultural investments have continued to enhance the city’s cultural life. Because of these initiatives, Shusha became well-known throughout the Caucasus. However, as part of their strategy to eradicate the national and spiritual legacy of Azerbaijani Turks in the city, Armenians invaded Shusha in May 1992, seizing the opportunity presented by the newly established Azerbaijani army and statehood. The earlier-discussed historical structures, museums, and mosques were demolished as part of the Armenization policy in Shusha and other occupied Azerbaijani lands. The Azerbaijani people and state, with their determined national stance and the bravery of their army, liberated Shusha from enemy occupation on November 8, 2020. *President Ilham Aliyev*, delivered the historic news with great excitement and enthusiasm to the people from the *Martyrs’ Alley*. This day became a triumph in the history of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani soldiers entered the city, displaying unparalleled courage, climbing the steep cliffs. This operation will be written into the annals of world military history and has prompted in-depth research at military academies. Two brotherly nations, Turkey and Azerbaijan, strengthened their solidarity and fraternity throughout the 44-day Patriotic War. The Azerbaijani people were most appreciative of Turkey’s extraordinary assistance during the liberation of Shusha and other occupied Azerbaijani lands. The Shusha Declaration, which was signed by the two presidents, had a major impact on Turkic history and further cemented the high-level connections between these two critical partners. Shusha was declared a brother city with Turkistan city of Kazakhstan, and selected as the cultural capital of the Turkic world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the Turks have made their unique civilisation dominant in all the geographies they have spread and this has clearly manifested itself to this day. One of the most important indicators of this is the urban civilisation. In the regions where ancient and medieval Turkic states existed, cities, which are the most important indicator of settled life, were built along with the nomadic lifestyle, and this has been revealed both in medieval sources and as a result of archaeological excavations. Azerbaijan is one of the geographical areas where the Turks have lived since ancient times and one

of the most prominent regions of the Turkic urban heritage. The presence of Scythians, Huns, Khazars, Qipchaks, Oghuz, and other Turkic tribes in this geography significantly impacted their urban life. The geographical position of Azerbaijan - one of the routes of trade routes connecting Asia and Europe, especially the Silk Road - had a serious impact on the development of the urban life of this region. As a result of this, in the sources of the period, we detected the names of Shamakhi, Ganja, Tabriz, Baku, Ardabil, Barda, Shabran, and other historical cities with both their economic and political impacts which were the centers of trade and craftsmanship with the infrastructure built by the Turks. The modern Azerbaijani state, which has the heritage of urbanism that existed in Azerbaijan in ancient and medieval times, continues this civilization today and benefits from the urban innovations of the new world. Recognizing cities as a part of historical civilization heritage, modern techniques are also used in the reconstruction and restoration of cities liberated from occupation as a result of the Patriotic War. As a clear example of this, we can see the reconstruction of the urban heritage in the Karabagh region of Azerbaijan on the example of the city of Shusha.

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