

REPORT ON AZERBAIJAN LIBRARIES

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A Glimpse of History

Libraries appeared in what is now Azerbaijan with the first sprouts of statehood. Churches and schools possessed small arrangements of books in Albanian as early as the 5th century A.D. – as soon as Albanian writing emerged. The Arab conquest brought Islam in its wake, and libraries were attached to mosques and madrassahs in the 7th century.

The Azeri mediaevality knew palace, clerical, research and private libraries. The Tabriz had pride of place among palace libraries. Shah Ismail Khatai, brilliant 16th century statesman and general, who stood at its cradle, signed a decree on librarianship in 1522. The Maraghi Observatory possessed the best of research libraries, which appeared in the 13th century and possessed 400,000 volumes. Nizami, Khatai, Bahmaniar and other Azeri celebrities had a private library each.

The latter half of the 19th century saw the emergence of public libraries and reading rooms in Azerbaijan. Technical libraries for the petroleum industrial staff appeared toward the end of the century.

The Soviet time gave a mighty impetus to librarianship in Azerbaijan as elsewhere in the USSR. Libraries came into the foreground of Azeri cultural, scholarly, educational and economic progress, and were among the Communist ideological pillars and vehicles. The year 1926 ushered in government financing of libraries. Azerbaijan possessed 2,037 libraries in 1934, said an all-Union library census of that year. The Baku State University started librarian training in 1947. Library allocations skyrocketed to bring ample fruit – the republic had 5,776 libraries in 1958, with a lump exceeding

twenty million copies, and 9,548, total collection exceeding 114 million copies toward the end of the 1980s.

Azeri libraries of the Soviet years were part and parcel of the USSR's entire library system. They shared its developmental patterns. Smooth communications linked all republics, and there were contacts and exchanges with colleagues abroad.

All republics fell into a bad economic depression with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Things were worse in Azerbaijan than anywhere else, an armed conflict with Armenia raging on. The dire developments desperately hit libraries, and their revival is only starting nowadays. Azeri authorities, librarians and all cultural activists have taken up the baffling effort of all-round library updating with no allocations to speak of. The country needs a cultural policy that would start library modernization from scratch. That is a crucial task.

Current Situation

General information

Azerbaijan has approximately 9,500 libraries, total collections 118,900,000 storage units, total personnel roughly 30,000.

The library network is structured as follows:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Holdings, mln</u>
Public	4,293	--
Academic	38	4
Technical	160	20
Medical	150	2

Agricultural	46	1,5
Government college & university	17	10
General & vocational school	4,750	30
Trade union	90	1,5

Standing out among all those numerous and versatile libraries are the principal and largest, which possess the biggest and the most valuable collections, and play a central part in library organisation on the national scale.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Holdings, mln</u>	<u>Users, thou</u>
Akhundov National Library of Azerbaijan	5	40
Central Research Library, Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences	>3	35
Republican Science and Technical Library	>1,800	30
Republican Library of Agriculture	0,4	13
Republican Medical Research Library	0,5	10
Baku State University Research Library	2	15
Republican Pedagogical Research Library	0,09	

Kocharli Republican Children's Library	0,2	18
Jabarli Republican Youth Library	0,15	8

Azerbaijani Legislation on Culture and Librarianship

Two instruments form the legal basis of librarianship in the Republic of Azerbaijan: the Law on Culture and the Law on Library Activities, the latter adopted in 1998.

The Law on Culture generally stipulates essential principles of government policies, and legal bases of cultural activities and patterns of international cultural contacts, which guarantee civil rights and freedoms, preservation and development of the national cultural treasury, and democratic organisation and management of the cultural network. The law guarantees the preservation and progress of national culture, and identity of all ethnic communities long-established in Azerbaijan or those who have found shelter there. The law proclaims an equal status of nationals, aliens and stateless persons in their access to culture. It prohibits violence, propaganda of racial and religious superiority, cultural activities which clash with universal human values, promotion of drug addiction, and dissemination of pornography.

The law regards librarianship as part of cultural activities, and libraries as part of the government cultural network. It stipulates the following types of libraries: national, public, youth, children's, for the blind, town, rural, township and the branches thereof, central library networks, branch, and research. Library work aims to guarantee citizens' right of free access to information, and to satisfy demands for the various kinds of printed matter. The Culture Law also stipulates legal deposits.

The Law on Library Activities develops on the premises of the former. It stipulates fundamentals of state policies in librarianship, the general principles and organisation of the library system, standards of collection development and preservation, library financing sources, citizens' rights and duties in library use, and principles of international library cooperation. The law determines general patterns of the legal deposit system.

Side by side with the declarative clauses, the law contains detailed practice-oriented clauses that may be described as method-setting. It stipulates numerous governmental functions. The law authorises library privatisation, the National being the only exception. The National Library is a method-setting centre for all libraries in the country. The law gives a legislative status to the category of "State Library Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan", and determines essential principles of its formation and functioning. Fund replenishment allocations shall make a separate budget clause, and be steadily replenished. As the law has it, librarians' salaries shall not be below those of researchers and educationalists.

Visits to libraries

The Akhundov National Library of Azerbaijan

The library is the country's largest and most prominent in terms of preserving materials, and activity scope and content. It is in the foreground of Azerbaijan's cultural and educational infrastructure, and has the highest status and the greatest influence of all.

The library possesses six million storage units on every branch of knowledge, so it has an exhaustive range of users from housewife to scholar and statesman. Parliament Deputy Speaker frequents the Akhundov Library. The Culture Minister

visits its versatile events every month. So the library director has no problem offering its predicaments to the national top for consideration.

The Akhundov Library has a total floor space of 14,500 sq m, with 750 seats to accommodate users – of these, 250 in the reading room, and the other 500 in special branches and offices. Up to 1,200 visit the library a day, and 300 or more during summer vacations. The library employs 330.

The library is going through thorough repairs, which promise it an attractive up-to-date look and becomes convenient to the users and the personnel alike. This change is of great importance, and comes as the most optimistic of its current developments.

The Akhundov Library came through a decline and fall after the USSR collapsed. Things look brighter now, though much has to be done before the library gets into a satisfactory state.

Grants have increased within a few preceding years. Library financing, however, remains miserly. This year's budget slightly exceeds US\$200,000 – all that for salaries, premises upkeep, municipal fees, book and equipment acquisition and, last but not least, duties as the country's central library, which include research and method-setting.

In the Soviet years, the library was acquiring up to an annual 100,000 new editions, 70,000 of this free – all Russian- and Azeri-language publications that came from print throughout the USSR – plus an annual 40,000 the library was purchasing for its own money.

Naturally, the collapse of the USSR robbed the library of a precious privilege which had entitled it to legal deposits – free books and periodicals put out in Russia and the other former Soviet republics – Russia alone put out more than 100,000 book titles in 2003.

The Akhundov Library acquired 14,413 books last year – of this, 3,613 in Russian, 9,897 in Azeri, and 903 in other languages. Regrettably, the library is not registering titles, only the number of copies.

Automation is only budding. The library opened to its readers an Internet room, seating 17, on a Eurasia Foundation grant, 2002. Before, it had no access to Internet. It even did not possess a single computer though its attempts at active contacts with tentative donors started in 1999. US-based foundations are principal donors to Azerbaijan, while the US legislation prohibited its government funds' aid to Azeri government offices.

At present, the US-based VTLS Inc. has offered its software to the Akhundov Library, which the latter is installing. The initial automation stage is estimated at US\$105,000. Three sponsors will pay – the Eurasia Foundation, \$44,000, software; the Soros Foundation, \$36,000, the server, ten PCs and furniture; and the IRTCL, or International Research and Training Center for Librarians, affiliated to the US Embassy to Azerbaijan, \$25,000, premises redecoration and personnel training.

The library bypassed electronic cataloguing to start digitising books by the twenty foremost Azeri literary classics on international Project GUTENBERG.

The law entitles the library to four copies of every book put out in Azerbaijan, and two of all other printed matter. As things really are, a mere 70-75 per cent of Azeri editions find their way to the National Library, say expert calculations by Kerim Takhirov, library deputy director. One of the reasons may lie in the law binding publishers to pass 24 (sic!) copies of each of their editions to libraries – something they are loath to do as the arrangement looks like expropriation, rather than concern about preserving the entire national range of publications.

Nine library employees previously trained on special methods conduct classes in the library training centre. The staff of Azerbaijan's all principal libraries and of the Akhundov Library's leading departments have gone through postgraduate classes in the centre.

In the Soviet years, the Azeri Book Chamber was making a register of all printed editions that came out in the republic in whatever language. The Chamber had the duties of:

- national bibliographic agency;
- national printed matter depository. Unlike the National Library, it offered publications out of its reserve to users only on extremely rare occasions – that for better fund preservation;
- collection of legal deposits from publishers, and their distribution among libraries;
- last but not least, national ISBN agency.

The collapse of the USSR ushered in a collapse of the Azeri Book Chamber, and of the legal deposit arrangement. As the result, the National Library incorporated it, funds – close on two million storage units, duties, problems and all, January 2003. The National Library found itself in an even worse plight than before. Only one Book Chamber duty, that of ISBN agency, came over to the Khazar University library.

The Central Research Library under the Azerbaijani National Academy of Sciences

The Society for Azerbaijani Studies established the library in 1925. The Society, in its turn, appeared in 1923 to honourably contribute to research in Azeri history, archaeology, ethnology and natural resources. At that time, educational and research establishment were mushrooming in Azerbaijan. They developed into principal seats of science and research personnel training.

The library makes an emphasis on catering for persons engaged in fundamental research at institutions under the Academy of Sciences. College and university professors and magisterial students are also among its users. As in all post-Soviet countries, the Academy of Sciences is, de facto, a ministry for the progress of fundamental research. The Azeri academy supervises and finances 29 institutes under it, which account for a greater part of the national research potential.

As far as its structure, duties and activities go, the library resembles the Moscow-based Library for Natural Sciences under the Russian Academy of Sciences. It centres the library network of all the 29 institutes mentioned above. Before 1992, it entirely processed and catalogued printed matter acquired for all those libraries. The Central Research Library is to this day making a union alphabetical card catalogue, and a card index of publications on Azeri culture. Work started in 2004 on an electronic catalogue of Azeri literature.

The library is publishing a printed catalogue of its latest acquisitions for those who have no computers and are not on the Internet. There is a bibliography of dissertations defended in Azerbaijan, 1920-1980.

The Central Research Library occupies a part of huge dilapidated premises. Its basement book depository, of several storeys, is long full to overflowing. Thorough repairs are on there to reinforce the foundation and pillars, which an earthquake of 2001 badly damaged. There was no money to remove books for the works, and they are in peril with the dirt, dust and welding sparks.

The library possesses three million storage units, as against a total four million in all libraries under the Academy of Sciences. New acquisitions are coming in at an annual average 15,000 units, 500 journals included – 150 of these in the Russian language. Soviet-time acquisitions made an annual 50 to 60 thousand, 15,000 of the total in Russian, a negligible

amount in Azeri, and the rest in other languages, mainly European.

The situation somewhat improved in a few preceding years as the library was upgraded to the status of a research institution, took on another twenty employees to bring the total to 140. It acquired the right to employ staff researchers. Salaries doubled. Now, the personnel are better off than any other Azeri librarians, earnings exceeding their two- or even threefold. Everyone is eager to find an employment here, says the library director – that despite a modest library budget, \$110,000 for the entire 2004. The library is apprehensive with prospects of even these miserly allocations never reaching it. At any rate, Library Regulations, which the President of the Academy of Sciences recently approved, pass the library budget in conspicuous silence. Obsessed with finance problems, the Academy all too often channels target allocations to other institutions.

Library automation has barely taken start. The automation department has four PCs for primary adaptation and installation of the Russian integrated library system, Library 5.0, which many Russian public and university libraries are extensively using. The young department manager, recent publishing house editor, does not think the library can afford even this low-price arrangement, and so is parallelly working on a system all his own, proceeding a Library 5.0 from a demo version, believe it or not. Meanwhile, the library has a total fifteen computers, seven of them at the automation department. The Government Petroleum Company promised a gift of another 35 after the President of the Academy of Sciences applied to the company bosses. The library manager thinks it would be far better to take up the American VTLS integrated library system, as the Akhundov National Library is doing – but there is no hope to speak of that the library will ever get the money.

It is the library's cherished dream to establish on its premises a republican collection conservation centre. Meanwhile, even rarities and other precious editions are stored with no consideration for even essential standards. The Soros Foundation donated \$6,500 a few years ago to make the library proud possessor of a vacuum cleaner, some new furniture, and 500 cardboard book containers.

The library is living from hand to mouth. Not only its experts but also managers cannot afford to attend professional conferences outside Azerbaijan. Neither the library director nor her deputies have ever been abroad while, in the Soviet years, they were regularly travelling about all republics of the USSR.

The library remains obsessed with problems, though the Academy now has it on the priority list, she complains. The country has not implemented a single notable library project. If it only had, the manager could face the Academy President with a reproach: "Look, other offices have done the thing – why can't we?"

The government must make all-round improvements on all libraries in the country, or this particular library will never cope with its problems. That is her conviction.

The Fizuli Manuscript Research Institute under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences

The country's largest – and practically sole – depository of the national written heritage combines an archive, library, research institute, museum with exposition halls, and workshops. It possesses approximately 40,000 storage units, of these, manuscripts roughly account for 27,000. Written from the 9th century A.D. into this day, they are in many languages, mainly Arabic, Persian and Turkic – Azeri, Turkish, Ancient Uzbek and Kumyk. The institute employs 170. Its premises, of breathtaking beauty, are in a bad state of repair. The house cannot provide safety and proper storage of a collection of

unique value and scope, one of the world's treasures. Institute experts are doing much to study and popularise the precious heritage. School, college and university students regularly appear here on excursions. The Institute puts out numerous catalogues in printed form, though electronic cataloguing and fund digitalisation have not started, as yet. The Institute has no web site of its own, either.

"We can do only negligible work on scanty government allocations, and we don't receive grants. We occasionally call our personal friends in Germany to send us glue and necessary preparations," complain Institute employees.

The Republican Children's Library

Small but of essential importance, the library looks cosy and attractive with brand-new furniture and latter-day design. Its handsome principal reading room seats forty, multimedia room twelve, and Internet classroom six, with an hour's work free of charge.

The library possesses 207,000 storage units. The young readers previously demanded three-fold more literature in the Russian language than in Azeri. Now the demands are equal. The demand for Azeri-language books is much greater in the four library branches in Baku's industrial worker-populated suburbs.

The library purchased approximately two thousand books, 2003, close on 70 per cent of the stock in Azeri. As participant of the Pushkin Library project, launched by the Soros Foundation Moscow branch, the Republican Children's Library was acquiring the best of contemporary Russian books at half the price.

The library caters for eighty to a hundred young readers a day. Even kids of seven or eight frequent the Internet room.

The library provided a basis for free computer literacy classes, active within the previous three years. The Soros Foundation took all payments upon itself.

The library employs 82, with average monthly salaries of US\$18-20. Young librarians are eager to find a job here, despite all. "This place has computers," they explain. The library has a web site of its own, though it still leaves much to be desired.

Affiliated to the library is the Tiny Tot children's drama society. The Azeri television has a monthly programme on children's books, which the library regularly prepares. It helps young authors to put out their books. Every weekend, 25 boys and girls gather in the library to restore and bind books at five dollars a month.

We can only regret that the promising and dynamic personnel cannot afford to go anywhere. The library director went abroad only once within the preceding 13 years – to the 1995 IFLA General Conference in Istanbul. Her deputy went to the USA on one occasion. That was all, though everyone is anxious to get abroad for training.

The Republican Youth Library

Established as a public library in 1928, it was upgraded, 1976, to become the republic's principal library for young people, and method-setter for all libraries of its kind. Similar libraries were appearing all over the USSR at that time, Young Communist League offices for ideological supervisors. Many doubt their expediency and economic efficiency, and debates have been seething round such libraries for twenty-five years now. Many of these rather artificial entities in Russia – especially the least efficient – have merged, within the previous ten years, with children's libraries or public libraries for adults.

The Republican Youth Library of Azerbaijan retains its status to this day. It is huddling in the ground floor of a dilapidating five-storey dwelling house, built in the Soviet years. Its approximate 120,000 storage units are divided according to language – a Russian

section and an Azeri. The funds took shape back in the Soviet years, with only token later additions. The library acquired 500 new books in 2003, with the year's budget at US\$30,000. It has \$8,000 more for this year, and intends to spend ten thousand to buy something like two thousand books. The library employs sixty – 36 librarians plus technical personnel. There are not many users – a daily 28 to 41 for the Azeri section, and 74-77 the Russian, for May 2004, i.e. slightly over a hundred a day.

The library has three computers. It is out of the world web, and is not making an electronic catalogue.

The library makes it a point to keep a Visitors' Book. Its grateful entries point out librarians' fine expertise and utmost consideration for users. Many readers say they could not find a book they needed anywhere but here. This is a doubtful compliment – it rather shows that things are even worse in the other Azeri-based libraries.

Public Libraries of Baku

The city possesses 54 municipal-financed public libraries, fifty of these on two centralised library system, and four independent. I had the luck of visiting two, the best-known.

The Sabir Central City Public Library

In the city's heart, it occupies the first floor of an exquisite late 19th century building. You enter it through the doorway of the ground floor, which is a dwelling area. A white marble staircase that leads to the library is an architectural gem. The library takes up a vast posh flat, owned by one of the city's wealthiest and most influential families before the Revolution of 1917.

Stucco ceilings, ornate fireplaces, crystal chandeliers and grandfather clocks survive to this day. The place abounds in potted plants, the personnel's pets. Though the place has long

gone with no repairs, it preserves the cosy air of Granny's home. The atmosphere has come from the 1960s or, maybe, even 30s. Once you come in, you have an impression that time has stopped within these walls. "Users love this library," says its director. A literary circle attached to the library gathers young poets and prose writers on Saturday nights. "Libraries are to serve their nation in an intellectual and highly moral way. They must be free – we Azeris are badly-off now," goes on the wonderful woman, who is making do with a salary of \$32 a month. She sends off appeasing and reassuring waves of peace and assurance of her righteous cause. It is sheer pleasure to listen to her as she goes on at no end of stories out of the library past, or ratiocinates on this life and the library mission. She never addressed me on my first name; neither did she take up a formal, "Mr. Kuzmin". Hers was "Comrade Kuzmin", an old Soviet form of address to which she got used when a young girl. To tell the truth, no one addressed me that way even in the Soviet years.

With 200,000 storage units, the library was generously replenished in the Soviet time. It purchased 300 new books, 2003, and received an equal number as gifts. A quarter of those books are in the Russian language. The reading room seats eighty, and has a daily average 140 to 150 users. The twenty employees arrange many public events of all kinds, when the room has to hold 150 at a time.

The library is open six days a week, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. "We ought to update the place, and install computers. The premises are too small – we must take up the second floor," complains the director. Meanwhile, the library has only one computer, in her tiny office. All employees use it. When you look at the personnel, they all give an impression of blood ties, looking one friendly household.

The Sabir and another library have their accounting offices in still another library, in which they have also opened their bank accounts. That hospitable library has the name of

Maxim Gorky Central Itinerant Fund

The library was established in 1924. Baku people chose not to change its unconventional original name, which it owes to batches of books regularly leased to other organisations for temporary use. At present, it has contracts with fifty – among them, a technological college, several hospitals, a recently established university, the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources, and limited-abilities women's league, which is presently keeping more than 300 books.

With 220,000 storage units, the Gorky Fund currently has 50,000 of these in itinerant libraries, and the other 170,000 cooped up on the permanent premises, floor space 600 sq m. The depository is no less crammed than the reading room, with its dwarfish desks seating ten. When more users are gathering, the personnel bring extra chairs, though it is a problem squeezing them in.

The library finished a redecoration quite recently. It is a spick-and-span place, cosy and lovingly preserved. It employs twenty.

The library purchased 500 books last year, and received another thousand as gifts from authors and readers. It is getting ever greater allocations to buy new books.

The library put out a huge luxury two-volume album on its past. It is a museum piece of tremendous cultural historical value.

Public Libraries in Sumgait

Second-largest Azeri city, 100 kilometres off Baku, national capital, Sumgait rose in the 1950s. Young people from every part of the Soviet Union gathered to build the industrial

centre. It is a yuppie town, 35 being the population's average age – young, dynamic, educated, it is a 335,000-strong community. Refugees from Karabakh and Armenia account for 100,000 of it. The city possesses many higher educational establishments, the Sumgait State University being the largest. It has many technical colleges, among them a chemical technological; music, medical and certain other secondary colleges; vocational schools; and 42 secondary general-educational schools.

A notable Soviet industrial seat, it is a major Azeri industrial centre now, dominated by chemical works. Industry went through an utter collapse early in the 1990s, what with an Azeri-Armenian armed conflict and the Soviet Union falling apart to sever long-established economic ties. Azerbaijan has only started raising its industry from the ruins now. Sumgait accounts for second-largest national fiscal revenues, coming after Baku. Its efficient mayor is doing all he can to improve urban living conditions and step up cultural activities.

Two huge community centres came through recent and ambitious repairs. The one, attached to the government Azerchemistry concern, will host Russian stage companies' guest performances during next summer's grand-scale festival of Russian Culture Days. Azerbaijan's President ordered a posh centre redecoration done within three or even two months – and the job was done. The centre theatre, seating 650, received pioneer equipment. Its 120 floodlight projectors, of various force and colours, alone cost \$45,000.

The centre has many children's circles, total membership exceeding 300. Several music circles, with three classes a week, teach playing many instruments with tuition on top world standards. There is a drama school, a recital circle, a dance company, and a karate circle, to mention but few. The classes cost students' parents a mere \$3-4 a month. The centre also has

a folk music trio, an amateur adult drama company, a folk music ensemble, and women's courses.

Kept up on municipal allocations, the city children's music school charges a token seven cents a month – as against \$350 at a private general-educational school in Baku.

Alongside libraries under educational establishments and industrial companies, Sumgait has its public library system – central library with 19 affiliates, five children's libraries included. The library system director is among the country's most influential persons. Not only municipal authorities but also the national Culture Ministry reckons with her. In charge of all Sumgait public libraries for twenty years, the disinterested lady has a monthly salary of 30 dollars, while an industrial shop floor worker is making 200 dollars. Other library employees earn even less – a beginner librarian \$13 a month, and a department head 25.

The Central Library Network possessed 615,000 storage units, as of January 1, 2004 – of this, 354,000 in Russian, 261,000 in Azeri, and the rest in other languages.

The city's twenty public libraries altogether have a Xerox machine and two computers, all bought on a Soros grant and lovingly preserved at the central library. Both computers are on the Internet with telephone lines, which are in a deplorable state. Living from hand to mouth on municipal allocations, the library barely affords telephone fees. The Public Library System employs eighty – 24 of these at the central library, the others dispersed in its branches, two or three for each. All librarians have gone through Internet classes, and share a cherished dream, to set up an Internet centre in the network.

Fund replenishment has spectacularly improved since the 1990s. The library spent \$4,500 in 2003 to purchase 3,623 copies of new books, and received a gift of 692 books – 317 of these from the National Library. There were a total 391 copies in Russian, and 2,690 in Azeri. The library afforded to

subscribe to 24 newspapers and 17 magazines. Its branches have in offer one to two titles each of present-day periodicals.

A sum similar to last year's has been earmarked to purchase new editions this year. Now, if it could proceed from acquisition standards the IFLA and UNESCO are recommending, the Public Library System of Sumgait ought to be acquiring an annual exceeding 82,000 new books, or 250 per thousand population.

The central library reading room caters for up to a hundred users a day. One of its branches, which specialises on young people, has a similar number, with a mere two librarians for 34,000 books.

Things are similar in the children's branch, with 41,000 books – 24,000 in Russian and 17,000 Azeri. It has daily a hundred or more users, who receive up to 200 books, with three librarians of excellent qualifications. The branch arranges an annual hundred public events. For the most part, these are book recitals for children. The library looks forward to another Soros donation coming up to but a computer. The branch received 240 new books this year – as against more of a monthly thousand in the Soviet years.

Our appearance in the youth branch of the Central Library was something of a thunderbolt. Once there, I fell into a conversation with a client. Fortyish, with a fluent Russian, English and Azeri, he is an amateur psychologist, and has been regularly visiting almost all Sumgait libraries for the preceding ten years. He likes the youth branch the best, he said. The man is enthusiastic about Sumgait librarians for their professional and personal qualities alike. The greatest government and public attention ought to belong to libraries, he said. My chance acquaintance specially insisted on higher salaries for librarians. "A hungry soldier makes a bad fighter," he figuratively remarked.

The Republican Medical Research Library

One of Azerbaijan's foremost in the Soviet time, it was among the libraries that played a key part in its library development. Its role further enhanced early in the 1980s after it moved into excellent brand-new premises. The library hosted regular conferences and seminars which gathered spokesmen of medical and public libraries from every part of the republic. As all major Azeri specialized libraries, the Medical Research had close links with its analogues in the other Soviet republics.

It was arranging Azeri medical library contests, and its method-setting aids were deservedly popular.

The collapse of the USSR brought the Popular Front into office, and its government robbed the library of its fine home to pass it to the US Embassy.

The Medical Research Library has been huddling ever since in the worst conceivable nooks, and so cannot keep up its activities in their previous scope and up to the once achieved standards.

The Baku State University Research Library

The university presently has 15,000 undergraduates. Its library collection approaches 2.5 million storage units – more even than the Central Library under the National Academy of Sciences boasts, say university library people. The library possesses impressive collections of rarities and other valuable books.

It retains close friendly and professional links with its analogue of the Moscow State University, which was, in the Soviet years, method-setting center of all USSR university libraries.

The university library is on an upswing in almost all respects. Its reading rooms are in an excellent state of repair, and well-equipped. They produce a fine impression. A Carnegie

Foundation grant of \$20,000 gave the library an access to the EBSCO online journal collection.

Libraries of Azeri colleges and universities together established an Electronic Information Consortium for collective access to electronic publications. Its members will soon be affording to pay fees, so digital resources will open to the entire country at a mere \$10,000.

Though the library has 32 computers, its proper up-to-date automation has barely taken start.

Book acquisition is increasing – 11,000 last year, as against 9,500 in 2002. The figures appear fabulous after an annual 3,000 early in the 1990s, immediately after the USSR collapsed. Still, the latest hopeful statistics cannot stand comparison to an annual ceiling 35,000 of the Soviet time.

The library director has been holding the post for 21 years now. She found employment with the library 44 years ago. “Our readers must never hear the word ‘no’. That’s my cherished dream,” she says. This is why the library registers every refusal on a card to analyze the file toward every year’s end.

The university library is entitled to two legal deposits of all printed matter that comes out in Azerbaijan.

It had an independent budget in the Soviet years. That paradise is lost now, and librarians have to apply to the Rector’s office every time a purchase becomes necessary.

Collection preservation is, to all appearances, the worst problem of all. The library cannot for now afford depository repairs. The personnel and collections, rarities included, are in appalling conditions.

The Khazar University Library

Established quite recently, the private Khazar University possesses the most advanced of all Azeri libraries, to see it was a delightful surprise. The personnel is extremely small but

young, dynamic and efficient. All orient on the highest Western standards and recur to trailblazing information and managerial technologies and know-how.

One can talk volumes about its achievements, and say no less on how to make it ever more proficient. That will be pointless, however, in this particular context – Khazar University library problems have nothing in common with hardships obsessing all the other Azeri libraries. They would fabulously gain if each librarian came through training in that unique library which deserves, and is in duty bound, to become the principal and closest ally of the Culture Ministry.

The US Embassy Library and Its Library Program

The US Embassy plays a tremendous role in Azeri life. It recently moved its house library out of the premises to offer the host country's entire population unabridged access to it. Now, the library is at the US-Azerbaijani Education Center, which houses many other US organizations, as well – suffice it to name the IREX, Project Harmony and ACCELS.

Small but lovingly selected, with 1,500 choice American books in it, the library has two rooms of middling size. With excellent design, it has top-notch technical facilities and other equipment. Its very outlook is inspiring and reassuring.

Shahla Khudieva was a mere several months ago, director of the Khazar University library. She is coordinator of a Library Development Program of US Embassy in Azerbaijan, launched in October 2003.

The Embassy ordered from the Sabre Foundation an impressive batch of research, educational and reference books for 25 major Azeri government libraries – research, public and university alike.

There are blueprints to donate a choice of children's books, fiction and modern classics, and reference literature, at a

thousand dollars a batch, to public libraries based in ten out of a total 69 Azeri districts.

The Exxon Mobile is out with a generous gift of its own. It sponsors the publication of an Azeri Children's Encyclopedia, in Roman lettering. Sixteen volumes are out of print for today. The company has earmarked three complete encyclopedia sets to each of the other libraries in the ten districts. English-Azeri thematic dictionaries, ten titles for each library, are coming in addition.

The US Embassy library offers librarians intensive training sessions on topical subjects:

- Library as an Information Center;
- Library as Community Center;
- Online Resources. Online Databases for Education and Research. AzLIC (Azerbaijan Library Information Consortium) eIFL.net.project;
- Information Creation, Storage and Retrieval;
- Legal Issues. Local Library Laws;
- Library Management/General Management: Personnel, Budgeting, Planning, Marketing & Promotion, Policymaking, Leadership, Decision-making;
- Fundraising. Grant Writing, Project Management, Team Building, Quality Issues;
- Intellectual Freedom, Freedom of Information;
- Security and Restoration of Book Collection;
- Professional Ethics.

Admitted to those sessions are the best of librarians, who come through selection by questionnaire and interview, which US ambassadorial officers arrange all over Azerbaijan. Conducting classes are leading experts of the National Library, the Baku State University and the American Studies Centre. Once through classes, the students can conduct similar sessions on their own, to their country's gain.

Library and Information Department of the Baku State University

The Philology Department received its library branch, 1947. It was upgraded to a university department status in 1962. Today, it is the only place in Azerbaijan to train librarians with an academic degree. Professor Ismailov, department dean, is President of the Association for Library Development in Azerbaijan.

Five thousand have graduated from the department since 1962. The annual enrolment was 270 in the Soviet years. It has shrunk to 130 now, 25 of these to train in book expertise. 55% of undergraduates are entitled to free tuition, while the other 45% pay an annual \$1,350 tuition fee. A great many alumni prefer not to take up library jobs as token salaries have desperately undermined the social prestige of librarian's profession.

Azeri-based libraries currently employ slightly more than 9,500, a mere 10% of these with academic degrees.

Library Financing

As the whole world, Azerbaijan finances its libraries from various sources, and at a number of levels.

National libraries are financed out of the national purse through founder ministries and other central offices. Thus, the National Library and another three of a national scope – children's, youth and for the blind – get their money via the Culture Ministry, allocations earmarked in the Culture budget clause; the Research Library under the Academy of Sciences, through the latter, Research clause; the Republican Medical Library through the Health Ministry, etc., etc. College and university libraries are no juridical persons and so are financed by the mother establishment, which depends on the national budget for the bulk of its money.

The Azeri national budget is very modest, barely approaching a billion US dollars in 2001.

Regional and municipal public libraries are financed out of respective budgets, Culture clause.

As things were in the 1980s, 30-40 per cent of national cultural allocations was channeled to library development. The share shrank to 12-13 per cent, 1990, to slightly rise to 15-18%, 2003.

Libraries are entitled to an approximate 3 per cent of total cultural expenditures in Baku, with 4 per cent for museums, 6-7 per cent the theatre and pageants, and a spectacular 80 per cent for music education – whether municipal bosses wish it or not, their preferences demonstrate their value scale and practical priorities in cultural policies.

A trend emerged within a few recent years to increase the library share in overall cultural expenditures at the various levels, though the share and lump sums remain miserly.

It is up to higher offices to approve or turn down library expenditure estimations. Varying from library to library, 64 to 70 per cent goes to salaries and other social payments, and 18-28 per cent to premises maintenance. A mere 7-12 per cent is sliced off to purchase new books and equipment.

Paid services are bringing libraries no more than 1 per cent of their total budget.

There are three basic sources out of which libraries can expect a more generous money inflow.

First, Azerbaijan has prospects to improve its overall economic situation and so replenish its national purse.

Second, the Culture Ministry may, from next year on, reshuffle its expenditures in libraries' favor.

Third, the ministry may come up with a target program of library development. It can, for instance, make 2005 Library Year with relevant allocations.

Mr. Khagani Rzayev, in charge of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance social financing department, told me all that as we met in the presence of Culture Ministry department heads for cultural policies, and the economy and finance. Mr. Rzayev, a dignitary on whom so much depends, was sincerely shocked to hear from me about the disastrous state of Azeri libraries and what detriment it brings the country. Really, it is hard to expect successful reforms when utter poverty dooms an overwhelming majority of the nation to information isolation. Despite high educational standards, the Azeri public has access to a mere channel or two on the national television plus public libraries, with their desperately outdated arrangement of books.

The high official had never to that day heard such critical opinions. That was evident. There is no evil that has no cure, he remarked in reply, and promised to help. However, he pointed out, the matter will never be settled unless the Culture Ministry is efficient, dynamic and persevering about it. It is Culture Ministry priority arrangement that matters as government cultural priorities at the national, regional and municipal levels alike largely depend on the ministry value scale.

Librarians: Earnings and Moods

I was referring above to the salaries of particular librarians in the foremost Azeri libraries. The monthly average is US\$13 – enough to buy ten kilos of tomatoes or five kilos of beef at the Baku market last May.

When we take up the matter, we must take into account a huge – monstrous in certain countries – social stratification that the last 15 years brought to the eastern bloc. The public has divided in the exorbitantly rich and the abjectly poor. Azerbaijan is no exception. Sweeping economic and political changes hit educated social sector employees harder than

anyone else. 90 per cent of that sector was established and developed in the Soviet time. A decline and fall came next, and is going on to this day. Some reasons for that are objective. Others lie in the avarice and shortsightedness of economic reform makers. Libraries and librarians were ousted farther into the margin than anyone else.

Good old things are dying out. New, also good – and some much better – are budding and sprouting. Just one practical example strikingly illustrates a dire contrast of the new and the passing.

No place I saw on my visit made me more despondent than the dilapidating Republican Youth Library. Next to it is a brand-new private general-educational secondary school, with its symbolic name of “21st Century”. It is kids’ paradise with the latest equipment, pretty and comfortable furniture, the staff polite, hearty – and dressed to kill. The school has an exquisite patio full of lush, well-groomed Oriental greenery, an exposition hall, a dance floor, an excellent library with computers on the world web, and printed matter kept in moveable shelves on the latest compact arrangement. This list of school treasures is far from full.

The school charges \$350 a month per child – quite an affordable fee, a West European would say. Yet it exceeds tenfold (sic!) the director’s monthly earnings at the Republican Youth Library, which ranks among the foremost government libraries of Azerbaijan.

The law or labor contracts order employees to keep their remuneration secret in the USA and many West European countries. That is why a question about one’s earnings is awkward, putting it mildly. Yet I find it impossible, and downright immoral, to pass the matter in silence in this report. In fact, it is among the essential if we are to take proper stock of Azeri library problems and prospects.

I have not yet overcome a Soviet penchant for talking about wages, so I posed the question to every librarian I met. Each replied without hesitation, even eagerly. In that, each man's and woman's look and voice reflected a wide range of feelings I know so well in my own country, whose librarians' plight is only a tiny bit easier. There were grudges against the powers-that-be, there was docile fatalism, self-derision for clinging to the job. Yet there was a profound sense of duty, and modest dignity that is librarians' trademark in the whole wide world. There was in their eyes a timid hope for the community to see, one fine day, that progress is out of the question without libraries – the hope that made Soviet librarians tick. In short, what I saw was a peculiar blend of humility, apathy, and challenge.

Azerbaijan has no supporters of library reforms more ardent than librarians. Women account for their majority. They, their husbands, parents and children are among principal sponsors of Azeri library service for now.

Things are similar in many countries of those who got free from the late unlamented “developed socialism” to arrange democracy and a market economy on Western patterns.

Conclusions

Azeri librarianship is getting through cardinal reforms from goals and duties to technologies as the entire national life is changing apace. On the one hand, the structure and content of the publishing and information market, and of information itself, are getting ever more sophisticated. On the other hand, every population group and stratum, with token exceptions, have thoroughly new cultural, educational and information standards and demands – all that as a dire economic crisis is on.

The role and functions of libraries are changing worldwide. In developed Western countries, that is due to information society progress. In countries on a par with Azerbaijan, these developments are much more complicated as statehood and social arrangements are going through a sweeping and far-reaching change. The situation is at its most dramatic in small municipal libraries, in tiny low-income towns, and in rural areas.

With scanty allocations, a majority of Azeri libraries are not merely dropping progress pace – they get stagnant, decline, and die.

Premises are dilapidating with unaffordable maintenance.

Library collections, dated to the Soviet time, are desperately outdated with no sizeable chance of replenishment.

Storage conditions are deteriorating to destroy collections.

The best of the personnel are leaving in search of more rewarding jobs, and there is no one to replace them.

The number of users is dwindling as libraries are losing social prestige.

Ever more people think there is no use of libraries at all.

Libraries have got into a vicious circle – as allocations shrink, they are falling ever worse behind current public demands and standards put by the ruling circles and the most socially active population groups, which influence the way government allocations are distributed. Skepticism and misunderstanding are growing where libraries' present opportunities and potential are concerned, though they are impressive even today, whenever sufficient money comes in.

All that holds true for a greater part of libraries but not for all.

That is a point to bear in mind. The larger libraries will certainly keep afloat, and revive sooner or later. Guaranteeing that prospect is independent Azerbaijan's increasing openness

as it eagerly integrates into global developments. The knowledge economy and other information society benefits are making progress in that country to give a new lease of life to the older information institutions and promote pioneer patterns.

Exemplifying the new are two private educational establishments – the Khazar University and the 21st Century school, with their small but excellent latter-day libraries. Such libraries will certainly be mushrooming. Their sheer presence will benefit the social environment to encourage other libraries' updating. In fact, this beneficial impact is evident even today.

The old life, whose doubtless pros are going hand in hand with its just as evident cons, is dying off all over the world as new goods and evils are appearing. The change is at its most graphic in Eastern Europe, and at its most dynamic in the post-Soviet countries. So here, too, Azerbaijan is no exception.

All that does not mean that we ought to put up with the natural way of things. We must not wait idly for the fruit of natural library evolution – for some libraries to curl up and die, others coming to replace them, and still others rise again for rapid progress.

Library updating efforts are to get out of their present deadlock, say many leading Azeri librarians and Culture Ministry officers.

I talked to them on many occasions, and perused analyses they had made, published and kindly offered me. I also visited many libraries. All that led me to a profound conviction: Azeri library modernization has taken start and is going on, however slow, spontaneous and unruly the progress might be. Almost all libraries I visited were demonstrating initial tokens of updating, however small they might be. What matters most, everyone sees that updating is a must, and there are people in every library eager to study and upgrade their professional qualities.

Azerbaijan is progressing to integrate into Europe, acquire a developed up-to-date market economy, promote

democracy, and achieve European patterns and standards of organization and the people's life. The very purport of national development vouches for the success of those trends, and gives them a necessary impetus.

A number of objective and subjective influences determine the pace of this change. Here are the principal:

- a middling level of national economic development, with scanty library allocations;
- scanty of public ideas on what an up-to-date library should be, and on its vast power as vehicle of progress;
- librarians' incompetence as they attempt to explain to the ruling top and the entire community just how big and involved library duties are.

Many prerequisites, however, are ripe now to pace up library updating.

First, a majority of principal national libraries have come through the peak of their crisis.

Second, many top and rank Culture Ministry functionaries are anxious to improve matters. Here, they share the desires of foremost people in library theory and practice.

Last but not least, many of those people have been, throughout recent years, and are now keeping abreast with developments in the West and in the neighboring countries, with the focus on Russia. That is why they understand, sufficiently for the start, which road to take, what programs to launch, which projects to promote, and what to tackle all together.

Only one thing is left to do – see what patterns and tools the cause needs.

Forecasts and Recommendations

There are people who see clearer than others that things are not to go on the way they do now. To give an impetus to rapid library updating, they must pool in their efforts and creative drive. People of the like minds are to get together on a think-tank to launch the cause and implement pilot projects. The cause needs ambitious leaders to convince at least a part of the professional elite from the start, and make them join in. It would be fine if an overseas manager is among such leaders. He can be employed by, let say, the Council of Europe or a major foundation. The manager will need a free hand Azeri authorities are to grant him, and a sum, however small, to remunerate and encourage the most diligent and promising of his local colleagues.

The Azeri library network emerged in the past as a well-knit entity. Now, it is going through an all-round crisis, which reflects similar dire developments in the entire Azeri community. The situation demands an all-round cure. The bigger libraries have to join hands if they are to cope. Yet professional effort alone may prove insufficient. I have an impression that the milieu is not organized and consolidated enough. There are only occasional, initial tokens of a new influential professional elite emerging. Today, directors of major libraries, who have occupied the post for many years, account for the bulk of that budding elite – or such was my impression.

Library directors alone will be unable to correctly launch many library modernization efforts, such as automation, i.e., implementing the latest information technologies – especially when it comes to arranging a net feedback, corporate cataloguing, bibliographic exchanges in a unified format, team efforts for a union electronic catalogue, etc., etc. The formidable job needs a thoroughly new professional

community, which I would like to describe as second-level elite. Gathering on it must be experts who feel at home with library software and are well-versed in the intricacies of cataloguing theory and practice. Someone ought to give a starting impetus to this expert community, provide a venue for its regular conferences and debates, and a platform on which it will work out shared stances, come up with declarations, and blueprint and implement pilot project series. Its implementation may bring forth an ambitious national program, or result in other fruit.

The Ministry of Culture and Its Unique Mission

The Ministry of Culture is, for today, Azerbaijan's only government office able to stand up for library interests, and launch and implement related national policies that would meet today's and tomorrow's demand of the entire Azeri community for the latest information and knowledge.

The Culture Ministry needs to establish an independent library department directly subordinate to a deputy minister – or even the minister, for the start. The department ought to have close links with the cultural policies department of the same ministry. It will assume leadership of, and responsibility for library updating as it arranges blueprinting and implementation of the many new programs and projects. The department will need an independent budget, of which it will dispose after consulting ad hoc expert teams – for automation, collection preservation and safety, bylaw drafting, personnel upgrading, etc. Allocations will certainly have to be agreed upon at the ministerial top.

The Culture Ministry has to win more generous financing, if all those new goals, programs and projects are to become true. It ought to spend extra allocations solely in the

grant form, channeling them not only into the four libraries which the ministry is currently financing on its fiscal year budget. The sums may reach libraries under all other central offices – and not libraries alone but professional guilds and private companies who are able to offer practical patterns of tackling tasks of a national scope. As contest winners are determined, preference is to belong to key projects aimed to tackle all-round challenges topical in the entire national library network. At first, however, it may concern only a majority of the largest and most advanced libraries. The efforts are to keep within stringent limits of library-political priorities.

The ministry ought to place on its top library-political priority list the elaboration of policies in the many aspects of librarianship – suffice it to mention implementing pioneer information technologies, working out new standards and regulations, collection development and preservation, personnel training and upgrading, and, last but not least, international conferences and other contacts with overseas libraries. The ministry is to rely on its new dynamic personnel as it monitors trailblazing ideas in librarianship, highlights pioneer practical patterns and promotes them, and work for closer contacts between libraries thus to give rise to a new library infrastructure. New professional guilds will eventually emerge. Responsibility for the progress of particular aspects of library work may gradually pass to such guilds. Teams of leading experts need trips to many countries – tourist visits and thematic training alike. Such trips are to be arranged as soon as possible, and get on a regular footing in the future. Azeri librarians have spent the preceding twelve years walled off from their colleagues in other countries. That is one of the main reasons for Azerbaijan lagging behind in librarianship as a high technological field.

Final Remarks and Acknowledgements

While in Azerbaijan, I met Polad Byul-byul ogly, its Minister of Culture, in a frank and outspoken discussion. His address to Alexander Sokolov, his Russian counterpart, was its first, and unexpected practical fruit – much to my pleasure. He calls for a special library partnership agreement between the two ministries.

Both ministers signed the document, 12 June 2004, as prepared by my staff and me at the Russia Ministry of Culture to duly coordinate it with the partner country.

The agreement envisages, in particular, a joint Russian-Azeri commission for multilateral library partnership to set up, and two-week training sessions in Russia for Azerbaijan's foremost librarians. Russia expects to host 15 Azeri colleagues on a maiden trip even within this year. The guests will see Moscow's best libraries, and hear an intensive exclusive sequence of 30 to 40 lectures, two hours each. Russia's best library experts will be specially invited for the purpose.

Russia and Azerbaijan have always had extremely close friendly contacts. They have been looser than before within these last twelve years of independent Azeri statehood. Things are at their worst in culture – largely due to economic reasons. Russians hardly know much about present-day Azerbaijan, while Europeans know much less even than they do.

Despite all that, Azerbaijan is a full-fledged European country, though on Europe's outskirts. Its educated population – urban, at least – orients on Europe.

I shall be proud and happy if my visit to Azerbaijan as Council of Europe expert and a Russian spokesman contributes to improvement of Azeri libraries and promotes European integration. At any rate, I vouch to do all I can for the cause, and everything within my competence and influence.

I have left a part of my heart in that country forever. I hope the memory of my trip will not fade with the time. Built by Italian and French school architects in the 19th and early 20th century, Baku won me with its inimitable charm and an atmosphere as no other. I met wonderful people – hospitable, well-wishing, of excellent education, my new acquaintances are disinterested enthusiasts of their country's modernisation and cultural revival.

I am grateful the most to Dorina Bodea and Marie-Pierre Fronteau of the Council of Europe, and Sevda Mamedalieva, Nigyar Akhundova and Yashar Gusseinov of the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan.

Last but not least comes the Azeri cuisine, delicate, refined, highly original, and extremely versatile. I enjoyed pilaff the greatest. Quite unlike its Central Asian analogue, it is a delicious dish – you never can have your fill.

APPENDIX I. LIST OF CONTACTS

Mr. Polad Byul-byul ogly	Azerbaijan's Minister of Culture
Ms. Sevda Mamedalieva	Azerbaijan's Deputy Minister of Culture
Nigyar Akhundova	Azerbaijan's Ministry of Culture, cultural policies department head
Mr. Yashar Gusseinov	Azerbaijan's Ministry of Culture, cultural policies department deputy head
Mr. A.G. Ismailov	Azerbaijan's Ministry of Culture, library and museum department head
Mr. Khagani Rzayev	Azerbaijan's Ministry of the Economy and Finance, social sphere financing department head

Ms. Leila Gafurova	Akhundov National Library, director
Mr. Kerim Takhirov	Akhundov National Library, deputy director
Ms. Tatiana Zaitseva	Khazar University Library manager
Mr. Nadir Ismailov	Republican Science and Technical Library director
Ms. Latifa Mamedova	Research Library manager of the Academy for State Management under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Ms. Mahabbat Veliyeva	Headmaster for tuition and upbringing, 21 st Century private general-educational secondary school, Baku
Ms. Segua Alekperova	Librarian, 21 st Century private general-educational secondary school, Baku
Ms. Shafiga Mamedova	Legal adviser, 21 st Century private general-educational secondary school, Baku
Mr. Takhir Sadykhov	Jabarli Republican Youth Library, director
Ms. Khalida Mussayeva	Jabarli Republican Youth Library, deputy director
Ms. Fizura Chassymova	Kocharli Republican Children's Library, director
Ms. Zakhira Dadasheva	Kocharli Republican Children's Library, deputy director
Mr. Khalil Ismailov	Library & Information Department dean, Baku State University
Mr. Abuzar Khalafov	Chair of Library Studies head, Library & Information Department, Baku State University

Mr. Rassit Kyazimov	Candidate of Pedagogics, Assistant professor, Library & Information Department, Baku State University
Ms. Sarah Ibraghimova	Baku State University Research Library, director
Mr. Tural Davydov	Master, Library & Information Department, Baku State University
Mr. Pasha Kerimov	Deputy Director, Institute of Manuscript Research under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences
Ms. Nailya Mustafayeva	Executive Custodian, Institute of Manuscript Research under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences
Ms. A. I. Alieva-Kengherli	Central Research Library under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences, director
Ms. F.I. Gusseinova	Deputy director for research, Central Research Library under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences
Ms. G.A. Jafarova	Academic Secretary, Central Research Library under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences
Mr. D. Jafarov	Department head for library work automation, Central Research Library under Azerbaijan's National Academy of Sciences
Ms. Solmas Kadyrova	Sabir Central City Library, manager, Baku
Ms. Nushaba Alekperova	Maxim Gorky Central Itinerant Fund, manager

Ms. Svetlana M. Agayeva	Sumgait Public Library System, director
Mr. Aidyn Assadov	Sumgait music school principal
Mr. Nazim Gassanov	Amateur psychologist and library user of Sumgait
Ms. Leila Gulieva	Librarian and former manager, children's branch of the Sumgait Central Library Network (work record, 30 years)
Ms. Shahla Khudieva	Coordinator, Library Development program of the US Embassy in Azerbaijan

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Х ц л а с я

АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН КИТАБХАНАЛАРЫ ЩАГГЫНДА МЯРУЗЯ

Йевзени КУЗМИН

Азербайджанда китабханаларын тарихи чох гядим заманлара эдиб чыхыр. Гядим Албанийа, Яряб истиласы, Щцлакцляр вя Сяфявиляр дюрцндян тутмуш, мцасир дюрвя гядяр Азербайджанын мцхтялиф шыярляриндя йерляшян елм оъаглары щям дя юз китабханалары иля мяшщур олмушдур.

Мягальдя мцяллиф Азербайджанда китабхана мяданийятинин тарихия гыса нязр салдыгдан сонра, Азербайжан китабханаларынын буэцнкц вязийятини юйрянян нязри-практики арашдырма апарыр. Бу тядгигат чярчивясиндя мцяллиф Бакыда вя Сумгайытда 10-дан чох мцхтялиф типли вя профилли китабханада олуб арашдырмалар апармышдыр. Китабханаларын малийясиндян тутмуш пешякарлыг сявийясиня гядяр Азербайджанда китабханачылыьын мцхтялиф аспектлярини юйрянян мцяллиф, этдийи китабханаларын ишчилари, щямчинин бир неча мцвафиг дюрлят рясмиляри иля эюрцщб, мцзакиряляр апармышдыр.

Апарылан арашдырмалар сайясиндя мцяллиф бу нятиъая эялмишдир ки, Азербайджанда китабханалар вя китабханачылыг чятин вя чохтяряfli кечид дюрцнц йашамагдадыр. Бир тяряфдян информасийа базарынын вя цмумийятля, информасийа ъамийятинин юзу тямилляшмякдя вя мцряккябляшмякдядир. Диэяр тяряфдян бцтцн бу дяйишикликляря айаг уйдурмаг цццн апарылмалы олан комплекс ишлацатларын щяйата кечирилмяси ъидди игтисади чятинликлярин йаратдыьы манеяляря цзяшмякдядир. Бунун нятиъясиндя, Азербайджанда китабханаларын яксярийяти замана айаг уйдурма билмир вя беляликля, онлара олан иътимаи мараг азалмагдадыр. Анъаг мцяййян истисналар да вардыр.

Мясялян, Хязяр Университясинин вя 21-ъи Яср Мяктябинин кичик, анъаг модерн китабханаларынын ефектив фяалиййяти эяляъякдя бу тип китабханаларын сайынын артаъаъы цмидини йарадыр.

Мцяллифин фикринъя, щал-щазырда Азърбайъанда китабхана системинин реформу цчцн лазым олан щяраит йетишмишдир. Биръя дцзэцн метод вя васитяляри мцяййян едиб, ислащатларын апарылмасы йюнцндя фяалиййятя башламаг галыр...