

# Cultural Analysis of the Current Situation of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of Western Azerbaijan

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## ABSTRACT

Western Azerbaijan has a rich cultural and historical heritage. The study of heritage is a very necessary issue today. At present, the current state of heritage resources in the region has been changed. Thus, the names and functions of some resources have been replaced. In this article this problem is presented.

**Keywords:** Western Azerbaijan, cultural and historical heritage, cultural-historical resources, monuments, culture analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan has a long and famous cultural history. The culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan is currently recognized at the world sphere. The ancient culture of the country is evidenced by the historical and cultural resources currently available in the area. It is for this reason that every cultural resource must be carefully protected.

Western Azerbaijan also has a very ancient and historical heritage. However, the factors such as military conflicts, occupations, natural disasters, etc. that occurred at different times have caused the disappearance of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in this region. The most important among these factors was the policy of occupation and appropriation of our cultural heritage by Armenians. The discussion of this issue in the article makes it relevant. It is known that researching of the historical and cultural heritage of Western Azerbaijan, analysis of the positive or negative factors affecting its development and investigating of its current state are among the most important issues at this period.

The object of research of the article is the samples of tangible and intangible heritage of Western Azerbaijan. Its subject is the researching of the current state of these heritage examples in the world system as a result of the factors affecting them.

The scientific novelty of the research is the analysis of the current state of cultural heritage samples of Western Azerbaijan in the international system, which is one of the most pressing problems of the modern era.

The main goal of the article is to study and analyze the current state of the cultural heritage of Western Azerbaijan.

The various scientific-research sources and internet resources were consulted in the writing of the work.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE TANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF WESTERN AZERBAIJAN

The tangible historical-cultural monuments of Western Azerbaijan are currently in a different state. Most of the monuments had been victims of military operations and some of them had been destroyed as a result of natural disasters.

### 1.1. The Studying the Impact of Historical Conflicts on Monuments

The issue of cultural preservation is one of the world's pressing problems, which is the main priority of the

activities of the international organization UNESCO. In this context, adopted laws such as the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols (1954 and 1999) are very important. The Hague Convention (1954) is the main international instrument on the prevention of historical conflicts and the protection of monuments (<https://www.unesco.org/en/heritage-armed-conflicts>).

Scientific and literary sources show that wars have occurred throughout history. Western Azerbaijan is one of the regions of the world that has suffered the most from military conflicts, and the wars have also affected the monuments in the region. Thus, various defense facilities, religious monuments, complexes, etc. existed in the region, but as a result of the wars, some of them were destroyed and some of them turned into ruins. Since ancient times, it has been one of the main focus of military conflicts in the West Azerbaijan region. In this part of the article, we present examples of those events.

The Teishebaini fortress, thus recognized as an ancient monument, was built in the mid-8th century BC and was destroyed at the beginning of the 6th century on the eve of the war with the Saka, Cimmerians and other tribes.

The ruins of a palace and temple dating back to the 4th century were found in the ruins in the Garnibasara area of the village of Dvin, Gamarli district. This area was destroyed by the Persians in the 6th century and completely destroyed by Mongol-Tatar attacks in the 13th century.

The Garni temple, which was considered a pagan temple, suffered some destruction due to the emergence of new religions, but was restored in the 11th century with the efforts of Hülagü Khan. However, in the 15th century the temple was destroyed by an earthquake. In the 20s of the 19th century, during the Russian-Iranian war, it was destroyed again and became a ruin. It was restored again in 1969-1974.

Erivan Fortress, Sardarabad Fortress, Abbas Mirza Mosque and others are examples of monuments damaged as a result of Russian aggression policy in the early 19th century. The Erivan Fortress was completely destroyed in 1930. Abbas Mirza Mosque was completely demolished in 2008 (Aliyev, 2023, p.17-48).

The fact that Western Azerbaijan was subjected to the Armenian occupation policy for a long time was a very important factor in changing its fate. As a result of the aggression, the region suffered both materially and morally. Thousands of local people were killed, disappeared and the entire region was left in ruins. In addition, examples of cultural heritage were burned, ravaged and destroyed: Gafan Fortress, Sardar Palace, Shah Abbas Mosque, Haji Novruzali Mosque, Demirbulag Mosque, Korpubulag Mosque, Garachanta Village Mosque, Gizilbulag Village Mosque, Shikhlar Village Mosque, Urud Village Mosque, Veliushagi Ken Mosque, Tagli Mosque, Okhdar Village Mosque, Zahmat Village Madrasa, Iyis sanctuary, Hazrati Abbas sanctuary, Albanian temple in the village of Yukhari Kilsa, Albanian temple in the village of Khosrov etc. (Aliyev, 2023, Alakbarli, 2021).

One of the most horrific events was when Armenians invaded the city in 1918 and burned the Sardar mosque, considered a religious object, along with the Muslim population inside (Aliyev, 2023, p.35). Regrettably, West Azerbaijan had witnessed many such horrific incidents.



Figure 1. Monument of Ashiq Alasgar

(<https://westaz.org/az/person/asiq-elesgerin-qebirustu-abidesi-xx-esr>)

In addition to architectural examples, examples of decorative applied arts were also damaged by the Armenian occupation. In 1971, in honor of the 150th birth anniversary of Ashiq Alasgar, the main representative of Ashiq art, a bust was erected in his grave in the cemetery of the village of Aghkilsa. However, in 1988, Armenians attacked the village and destroyed the grave and monument of Ashiq Alasgar. In 2021, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev ordered the preparation of an event plan dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the master artist Ashiq Alasgar (Aliyev, 2023, p.97; <https://president.az/az/articles/view/50672>). In this way, the Republic of Azerbaijan has once again demonstrated to the whole world that despite all the difficulties, it values and protects its culture and artists.

## 1.2. The Impact of Natural Disasters on Monuments

In addition to historical conflicts, natural disasters also create the conditions for the destruction of monuments. Western Azerbaijan has no shortage of such monuments. For example, monuments such as Shah Ismail Mosque, Erivan Fortress, Garni Temple, Vaghudi Temple and Talin Temple were destroyed in the earthquake (Aliyev, 2023).

The above factual information shows that despite the fact that the region was the main center of military conflict between various states, it was hit the hardest by Armenian terrorists. Some monuments were destroyed, vandalized, ransacked, completely removed, turned into ruins, turned into a place of residence of Armenians, used as churches. All this has led to the crisis of the cultural heritage of Western Azerbaijan.

In addition, natural disasters are also the main factors causing the destruction of monuments.

## FALSIFICATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE WESTERN AZERBAIJAN

It is known from the researches that the names of many monuments and settlements in Western Azerbaijan have been changed, they are used for functions other than their cultural duties, in short, the current situation has changed. The main goal here is to pave the way for the destruction of Azerbaijan's historical and cultural heritage. This process has become more extensive since the Soviet years, especially after the deportation of Azerbaijanis in 1988. Research has shown that more than 3,500 historical and cultural monuments, nearly 400 mosques and more than 500 cemeteries have been destroyed (Aliyev, 2023).

### 2.1. Tangible cultural heritage

Factual evidence proves that the names of historical and cultural monuments, regions and many other places in Western Azerbaijan have been changed. Armenians have changed these place names according to different principles:

1. basing Soviet ideology on propaganda;
2. dedicating the name of the heroes of the Bolshevik Revolution;
3. giving the names of historical people of Armenians;
4. translating literally;
5. to Armenianize words such as “böyük” (big), “kiçik” (small), “yuxarı” (upper), “aşağı” (lower), “kənd” (village) in the names;
6. adapting to Armenian pronunciation (Alakbarli, 2020, p.6-8).

Based on this, the names of the historical and cultural monuments that have changed include:

1. Amir Saad mausoleum - Turkmen mausoleum;
2. Goy Mosque - Fars Mosque;
3. Temple of Goy Melekler - Zvartnos;
4. Vaghudi temple - Vorotnavank church;
5. Kecharus temple - Armenian church;
6. Guneyvang temple - Kirants-vank;

7. Amaghu temple - first named Anabat, then Noraveng;
8. Erdepin monastery complex - Yeghegis;
9. Gargaveng Temple - Zoravar etc.

Armenians changed to many monuments, removed their existing elements, made their own additions and armenianized their activities. Jujavang Fortress, Khanavang Church, Teghar Monastery, Sagmasavang Temple Complex, Uchnefli Kasakh Basilica, Khorakart Church, Agharchin Temple, Avan Basilica, St. Ripsime Temple, Gayana Temple Uchkilsa, Heydarbay Temple, Sisavang Temple, Khrimzivang Church, Talin Temple, Gamsarakan Temple, Talish Albanian temple, Aysasi temple, Tatev temple, Sanain Albanian Church, Aghbat Albanian Monastery Complex, Magharavang Temple Complex, Tovuzgala Fortress, Galandar Fortress, Safiyya Temple, Sachli Khanim Temple, Khorvirab Monastery, Albanian Temple in Beyburd village etc.

It is clear that each cultural monument follows its function and creates conditions for the cultural development of the country. Nevertheless, at certain times and for various reasons, monuments are used for functions outside of their main functions. There are many such monuments in Western Azerbaijan.

The German traveler August Haksthausen reported about the city in the 40s of the 19th century and stated that the Rajab Pasha mosque in the fortress was used as a Russian-Greek church, and the Sardar mosque was used as an armory. The Islamic religious decorations of the Rajab Pasha Mosque were removed and a cross and a church bell were added, and it was turned into a Russian Orthodox church, and then into a Christian temple. The church was destroyed in the 1930s. At the beginning of the 20th century, Armenian refugees who moved from Turkey began to live in the Sardar Mosque. During the Soviet Armenia, the Sardar Mosque was destroyed and residential houses were built in its place. Another monument that functions as a residential house is the madrasa on Tumanyan Street in Erivan. Also, the mosque of the madrasa was destroyed. One of the monuments of the region, the Goy Mosque was first turned into a history museum, and now Armenians know it as the “Fars Mosque”. Another mosque is the Zal Khan mosque, in the large hall of which “Yerevan” hotel was built. The Sevan Hotel was built on the site of the Gurcu caravanserai built in Yerevan in the 18th-19th centuries. In the middle of the 20th century, a large number of Armenian signs and symbols were added to Ergaz (Arkazan) sanctuary and they began to armenize it (Aliyev, 2023, Alakbarli, 2021).

## 2.2. Intangible Cultural Heritage

Recent studies show that in recent times, Armenian separatists are trying to assimilate the material heritage of Azerbaijan as well as its spiritual culture. These can include cultural fields such as folklore and cuisine.



Figure 2. Erivan dolması

[https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi\\_Azerbaycan/metbex.htm](https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/metbex.htm)

The texts of Azerbaijani folk songs and the names of dance melodies have been changed, other intonations have been added to the melodic content of our folk music. The Azerbaijani dances have also been renamed and given a new choreographic structure. These include the song “Sari Gelin”, dances such as “Yalli”, “Uzundere”, “Jeyran”, “Shalaxo” ([https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi\\_Azerbaycan/yallilar.htm](https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/yallilar.htm)), <https://medeniyyet.az/page/news/73323/Qedim-metnlerde-ermeni-saxtakarligi.html>).

In the 20th century, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Armenian SSR and the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR carried out extensive work in the process of privatization of Azerbaijani cuisine. With initiatives, the book “Armyanskaya kulinaria” (1960) was published and the initial stage in the assimilation of Azerbaijani cuisine was completed.

In general, the culture called Armenian cuisine belongs to regions such as Goycha and Zangazur. Also, Armenians tried to adopt various blessings of Azerbaijani culinary culture, such as dolma and lavash (Mustafa and etc., 2018, p.256-265, [https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi\\_Azərbaycan/metbex.htm](https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azərbaycan/metbex.htm)).

Thus, mastering the samples of the intangible cultural heritage of the Western Azerbaijan region is one of the main priotet for the disappearance of its culture. With this in mind, Azerbaijan cultural policy takes special steps to introduce and study our cultural heritage examples on a world scale. The inclusion of our heritage samples in UNESCO is of great importance in this process. Based on the list, we present some examples:

1. Art of Azerbaijani Ashiq (2009);
2. Flatbread making and sharing culture: Lavash, Katyrma, Jupka, Yufka (2016);
3. Dolma making and sharing tradition, a marker of cultural identity (2017);
4. Yalli (Kochari, Tenzere), traditional group dances of Nakhchivan (2018) and etc.

(<https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/azerbaijan-AZ?info=elements-on-the-lists>).

## CONCLUSION

At present, it is one of the important issues to protect every cultural asset in the world and to properly pass it on to future generations. Therefore, the UNESCO international organization takes special measures in this matter and as a result calls many countries to be united in this matter.

In the article, we tried to study the current situation of the rich cultural heritage of Western Azerbaijan by showing examples. In the article, we analyzed resources by dividing them into tangible and intangible cultural heritage. It turns out that most of the wealth was destroyed during military conflicts. The names and duties of some of them have been changed and appropriated. It is clear that the main purpose of such activities is based on damage and destruction of Western Azerbaijani culture.

As a result, in order to prevent them, the Republic of Azerbaijan does special things and implements measures to introduce the cultural heritage of Western Azerbaijan to the world.

It is for this reason that we consider it expedient to study the cultural history of Western Azerbaijan more widely.

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