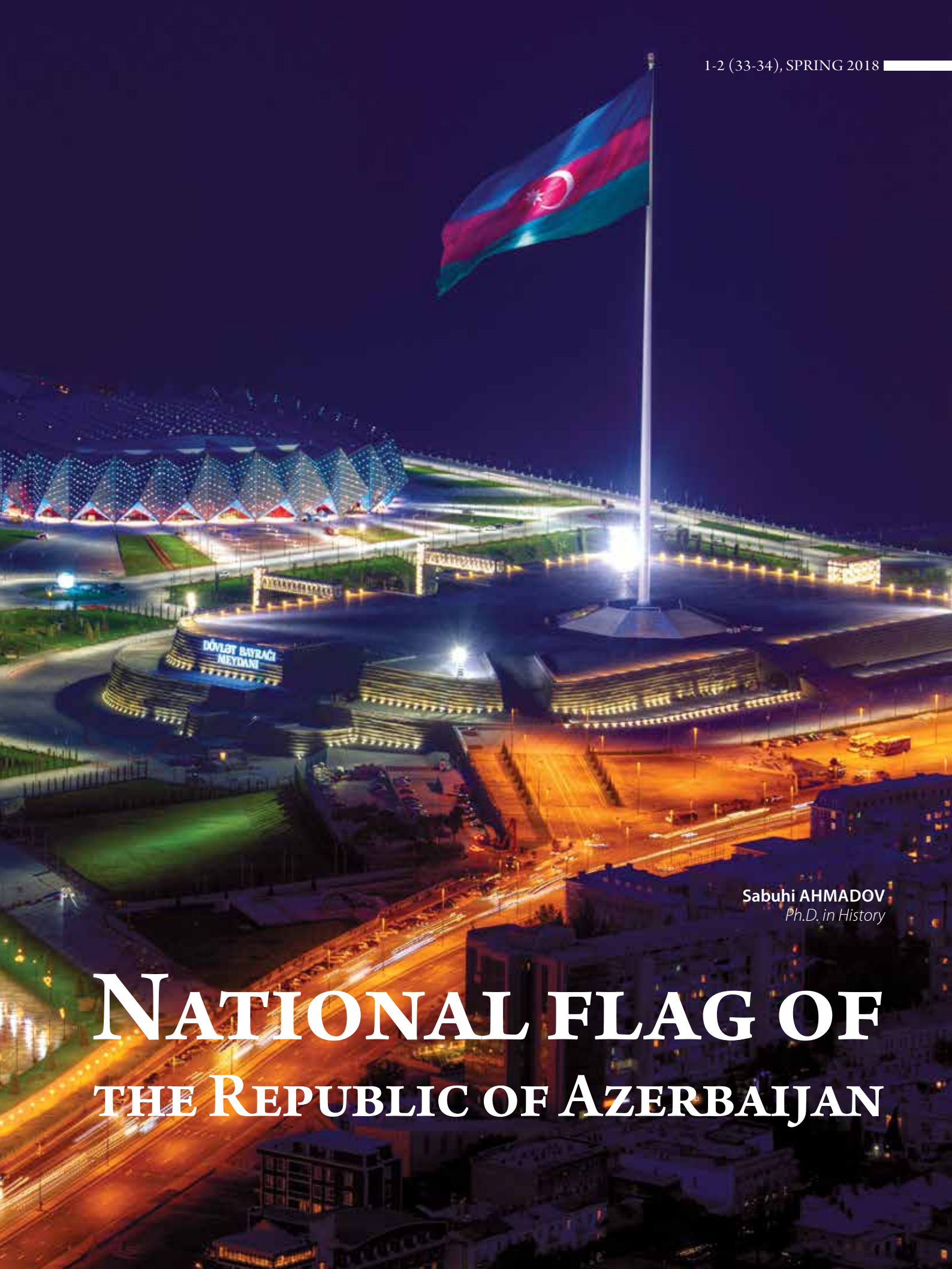


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# Azerbaijan Democratic Republic-100





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# NATIONAL FLAG OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

One of the priorities of any state is the adoption of state symbols. State symbols are usually developed with the consideration of past historical experiences and traditions. However, they can gradually change in line with historical realities. In his appeal to the people of Azerbaijan in the threshold to the new millennium of 2001 the Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev stated, that **'the attributes of the modern Azerbaijani statehood are parliament, government, army, currency, flag, emblem, anthem, constitution,** which corresponds to the contemporary world approach to the attributes of statehood.

Cultural and historical life of mankind is impossible without symbols. They are predominantly used where there is a need for a global universalism, in such matters as religion or statehood. The symbols usually represent brief rational values. In ancient times people believed in supernatural forces, ancestral spirits embodied in specific physical forms. The images of sacred animals were placed on the poles so that they could be seen by the whole tribe. Such images were gradually transformed into generic marks – which caused the emergence of the first symbols. **Symbol – is a concentrated abstract form of reflection and fixation of human knowledge with a stylized mark (1, c.9). Symbols can be in the form of individual objects or their mixture.** In modern society the symbols are as significant and important as the words - they are quickly recognized and serve to overcome the language barrier. Symbols also have a functional effect at different levels: some are known and recognized only in one country or culture, while others have entirely different meanings in other places. Symbols represent the beliefs and social customs of particular time and culture. They were usually borrowed through trade, conquest, cultural (often religious) relations with neighboring societies.

Often, the symbols were portrayed on the banner – as an element which could affect conscious of many people. The banners are born in a certain socio-political system and absorb its main ideas. Colors of flags and shapes on them - are the symbols through which ideas are expressed. **The banner can be seen as a kind of declaration disclosing the worldview and ideology of its owner.** In the history of peoples and in the modern times banners as objects that symbolize the unity of the people, have a value which is not exaggerated at all. The banner - is a symbol of unity, since in the battlefield fighters used to gather around it and fought as a unique stronghold. Symbols and emblems on the cloth



*Image of an eight-pointed star on the bow of a ship. Rock paintings of Gobustan, Mesolithic Age*

reflect the past or indicate the desire for the future. In both cases each flag represents the fate of its country by the language of its color and placement of signs on it. Sometimes peoples lose their independence or statehood, but never forget the formation of colors and emblems on their flags.

The first banners emerged in the East which was the land where the first states were formed. In ancient Mesopotamia, the banner appeared in the form of votive Standard: a bronze or a gold cover in the form of the solar disk was put on the pole. The oldest image is the banner flag on a pole on the wall paintings of Egyptian pharaoh Ramses III (1204-1173 BC.) (2, c.5). The most ancient written reference to the banner dates back to 1122 BC. - during the reign of the emperor of China Chow (3, c.13).

The history of symbolism in Azerbaijan dates back to antiquity. A unique standard with an image of a sun and a deer are in the collection of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (refers to the second half of III millennium - the second half of II millennium BC) (4).

Symbols are usually expressed in colors and marks or pictures and inscriptions on the banners. A color plays a significant role because it diversifies meanings of the various characters, makes the possibility of distinguishing them and allows to create multiple combinations, where each color refers to a specific meaning. **All States express their national, political and ideological positions, taking advantage of historically accepted colors, which enable to reflect their main features and peculiarities.** Every nation interprets different colors in its own way, therefore each color should be studied on the basis of traditions and perceptions of this nation. For example, in Europe the color of mourning is black, but in China it is white (5, c.7). At the same time there is a common symbolism of heraldic colors. For

*Women's breast ornament "ay-ulduz" ("crescent and star") was traditionally decorated with red, blue and green stones. NMHA, 19th century*



*Image on the Momine-Khatun mausoleum. 12<sup>th</sup> century. An eight-pointed star is engraved in the blue circle in the center of which is the word "Allah"*

instance the golden color means the supremacy, the greatness, and wealth; the silver represents – wisdom and purity; the red – shows strength, courage, and love; the blue - glory, honor, and loyalty; the green – indicates freedom, hope, health; and the black – expresses constancy, modesty, and death (6, c.236).

For many people, even people living far away from each other, symbols have the same (similar) values: a lion means - strength, generosity, courage, power; a horse means – a courage of a lion, an eagle eye, the power of an ox, a speed of a deer, a fox agility; a bull means - fertility, prosperity; an eagle means – power, insight; a fish means – vigilance; a snake - an eternity; an oak - a fortress, power; a laurel - glory, honor; the sun means - richness, abundance, etc (7, c.3-6).

Ultimately, the combination of different colors and symbols attributes an emblem of the state.

It is known that during the collapse of the Russian Empire, the Azerbaijani people got a chance to restore their statehood. On May 28, 1918 Azerbaijan National Council adopted a Declaration of Independence. One of the first measures taken by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) was the adoption of the state attributes. Initially a flag of the Ottoman Empire was taken as a banner. **On June 21, 1918 statesmen adopted a national flag of ADR, representing a white crescent**

**and a white eight-pointed star on a red background.** It should be recalled that the Ottoman flag depicts a five-pointed star.

Later, a decision to change the flag of ADR was taken due to thorough study of historic past of the country and strengthening of the statehood. The new flag should reflect three aspects: Turkism, Islamism and a desire for progress. It should be noted that the formation of these ideas was considerably influenced by the works of the famous philosopher Jamaleddin Afgani (1838-1897), who in his books 'The philosophy of national unity and true essence of a religious association' and 'Islamic unity' sought to prove that the progress of the Muslim peoples is conditioned by the religious consolidation, the national unity and a study of progressive traditions of European states. The philosophy of Jamaleddin Afgani served as a source of inspiration for the works of such ideologues as Ismail-bey Gasprinskiy, Ziya Gokalp, Ali-bey Huseynzade, Ahmed-bey Aghayev, Mohammed Amin Rasulzadeh, who formalized his ideas in the form of 'nationalism, Islamism, modernity' (8, c.I, s.328) In 1914 series of articles by M. Rasulzadeh were published in Baku magazine 'Dirilik' where he stated that the revival of the nation required attributes reflecting a national identity, religion, language, historical past, modernity and progress (8, c.I, s.328).



**November 9, 1918 on the basis of the report of the Prime Minister of ADR Fatahi-khan Khoyski a new state flag was approved. This time the flag represented horizontal blue, red and green fields with the white crescent and eight-pointed star located in the center of the flag** (8, c.I, s.158, 310). Crescent symbolizes Islam while eight-pointed star according to F. Khoyski points to 8 letters of 'Azerbaijan' (as written by Arabic alphabet) (9, c.10). According to researchers, 8 rays of the star can also symbolize the Arabic script representing imaginative name of Azerbaijan as a – 'Land of Fire'. A new interpretation of the flag was given in the official newspaper 'Azerbaijan' in the article titled 'Flag of Azerbaijan' (10, s.74-75). On December 7, 1918 a new national flag was raised over the Parliament building. In his speech M.A. Rasolzadeh noted: '... this tricolor flag symbolizing the independent Azerbaijan, raised by the National Council and meaning Turk freedom, Islamic culture and modernity, will always wave over us ...' (11, c.I, s.34). On December 10, 1918 an article was published in newspaper 'Azerbaijan' stating that the three colors on the national flag of ADR mean '**symbol of the Turkic ethnic culture, a modern European democracy and Islamic civilization**' (10, c.75). An outstanding composer and musicologist, an author of the national anthem of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic Uzeir Hajibeyov wrote: 'Azerbaijan Republic has risen on a sound national basis and Turkic mind ... At the same time, Azerbaijan has sought to establish a new society, to act in

*ADR flag: temporary flag used from June to November 1918 and the flag approved on November 9, 1918*

accordance with the European state of mind. Three colors of our flag symbolize all of these elements (10, s.76). On May 28, 1919 an article by U. Hajibeyov titled 'One year' was published in the newspaper 'Azerbaijan' where he noted: 'The meaning of our flag is explained by blue color - the color of Turkism, green - the color of Islam, and red - the color of the progress and culture' (10, s.76).

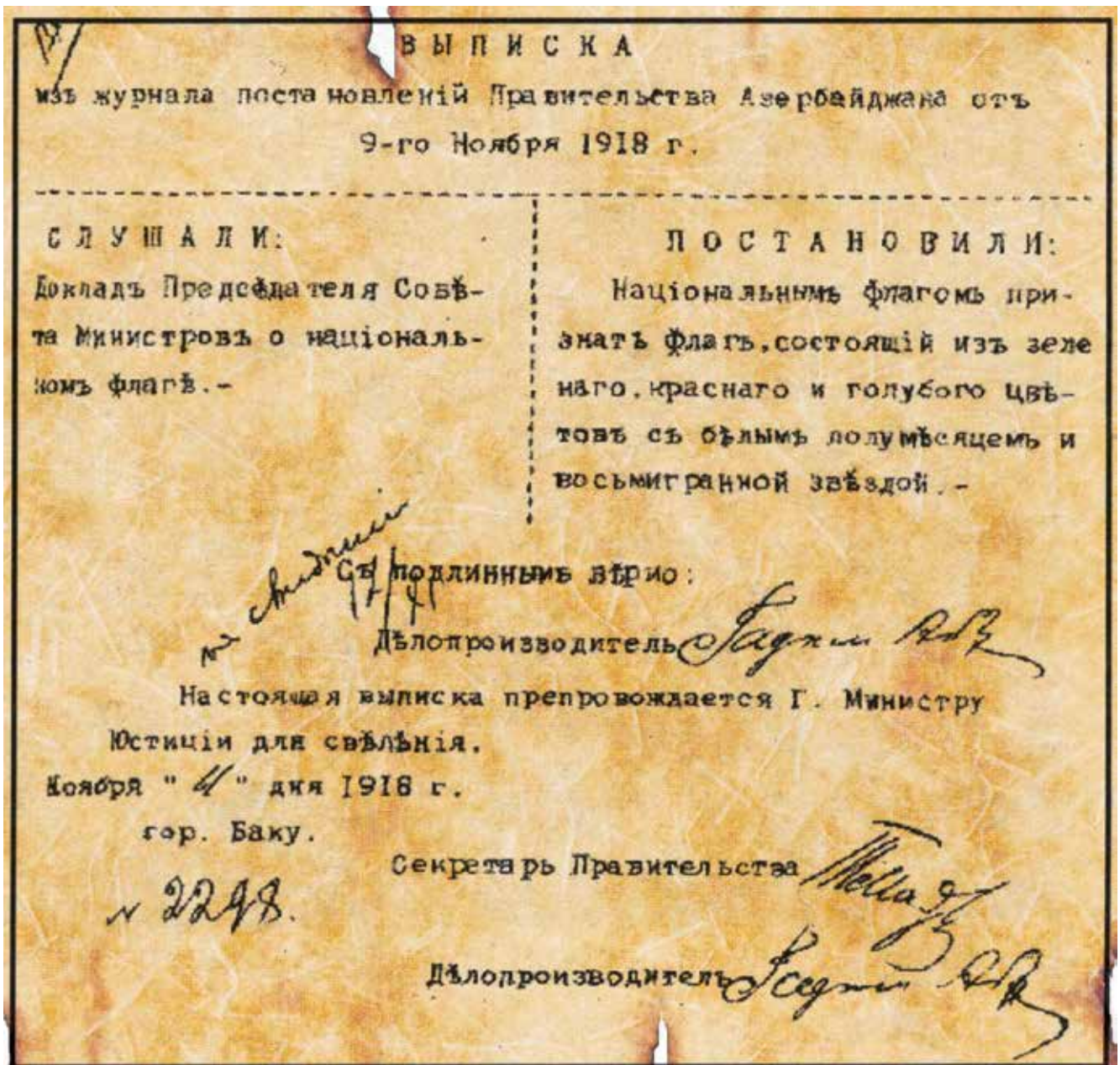
Red banners in Azerbaijan written sources date back to VIII-IX centuries in the times of Khurramites who led the liberation struggle against the Arabs. In Persian sources they are called 'surhalem' (Red Banner), while in the Arab – 'muhammira' (dressed in red). Khurramites who sought to restore pagan religion of fire worshiping in Azerbaijan, chose red flags and red clothes as a symbol of fire. However, it would be wrong to consider red color as a symbol of struggle or fire worshiping. Review of old miniatures, textiles and carpets have shown that red was one of the favorite colors in Azerbaijan, perceived as a synonym for beauty. Red color had a lot of values, one of which interpreted as a symbol of progress by the Azerbaijani ideologues in the beginning of the twentieth century.

In contrast to red, green means only good. It is a color of the vegetation and the birth of a new life. The blue color as a color of Turkism is associated with the traditional worship of the Turkic peoples to the heavenly god - Tanri (tengri). This is where the name 'Göktürk' - Blue Turks takes its roots. By the end of the nineteenth century green color was seen as a color of Islam while blue - the color of Turkism in the East and Europe. Thus the national flag of Azerbaijan was adopted to be in three colors blue, red and green. During Soviet power the national flag was changed leaving only blue and red colors but this time with different meanings. Green which symbolized Islam was completely removed from the flag.

In the modern heraldry red symbolizes strength, power while dark blue expresses - honor and dignity; green - freedom, hope and health (6, c.236).

**Extensive use of a combination of blue, red and green colors we can see on the products of traditional Azerbaijani crafts.** Thus, the combination of precious stones of blue, red and green colors can be seen on the Tabriz helmet of XVI century, shield of Shamaki craftsmen of XVI century, steel bracers of XVI century, on a leather shield of Tabriz masters of XVII century,

Extract from a decree of the ADR government on the adoption of the tricolor state flag. November 9, 1918



maces of XVII century kept today at the State Armory in Moscow, on a throne constructed in Tabriz, and presented as a gift by the Safavid Shah to Tsar Boris Godunov (12, c.46-48, 136, 56, 140). The National Museum of Azerbaijani History contains a large amount of jewelry decorated with precious stones of blue, red and green colors with images of a crescent and star. The combination of these colors is found in carpets, embroideries and even on the architectural structures.

In the European historiography, it is believed that at one time the crescent was a Byzantine symbol borrowed by Ottoman Muslims after the capture of Con-

stantinople by the Turks (13, c.156). However, **studies show that the crescent and eight-pointed star were used as a symbol in the East even earlier** (14, pctr. 143, 510; 15, c.29; 16, c.9, 14). For the ancient Egyptians, believers of pagan religion, the crescent was a symbol of their goddess Isis and Khathor and was considered a symbol of prosperity and growth. In ancient Egypt the moon god was presented with the lunar disk and crescent on his head. In ancient Mesopotamia, the crescent and star – were symbols of the goddess Ishtar. In the Sassanid Empire images of crescent with a star were found on coins of almost all the rulers. Image of



*Postage stamp of the ADR depicting a warrior with a three-color flag. 1919*

crescent on the flags of the Arab Caliphate became gradually seen as a symbol of Islam in general. **Since the era of crusades crescent was clearly perceived as a symbol of Islam.** Star is a popular symbol in many cultures. The star has long served as a symbol of eternity, but later - a symbol of high aspirations and ideals. Star – is an emblem of happiness. The figure '8' in the East had a sacred value, with an image of the Turkic goddess Umai always placed in the ring with eight spokes (17, c.140). On the vast expanse from Mesopotamia to the Australia the eight-pointed star was seen as a symbol of the planet Venus. In Islam, the crescent moon is seen as an important symbol of divinity and supreme power. According to Islamic tradition, the eighth stage of the paradise ('Jannet-ul-Ali') was created by Almighty God from light (18, c.9).

The history of the crescent and eight-pointed star dates back to the ancient past in Azerbaijan. Thus, on a number of clay vessels from the Bronze Age there are depictions of animals (deer, bull, goat), the horns of which have a crescent shape. According to researchers, these horns were considered a symbol of the moon (19, c.83-84). In The National Museum of Azerbaijani History

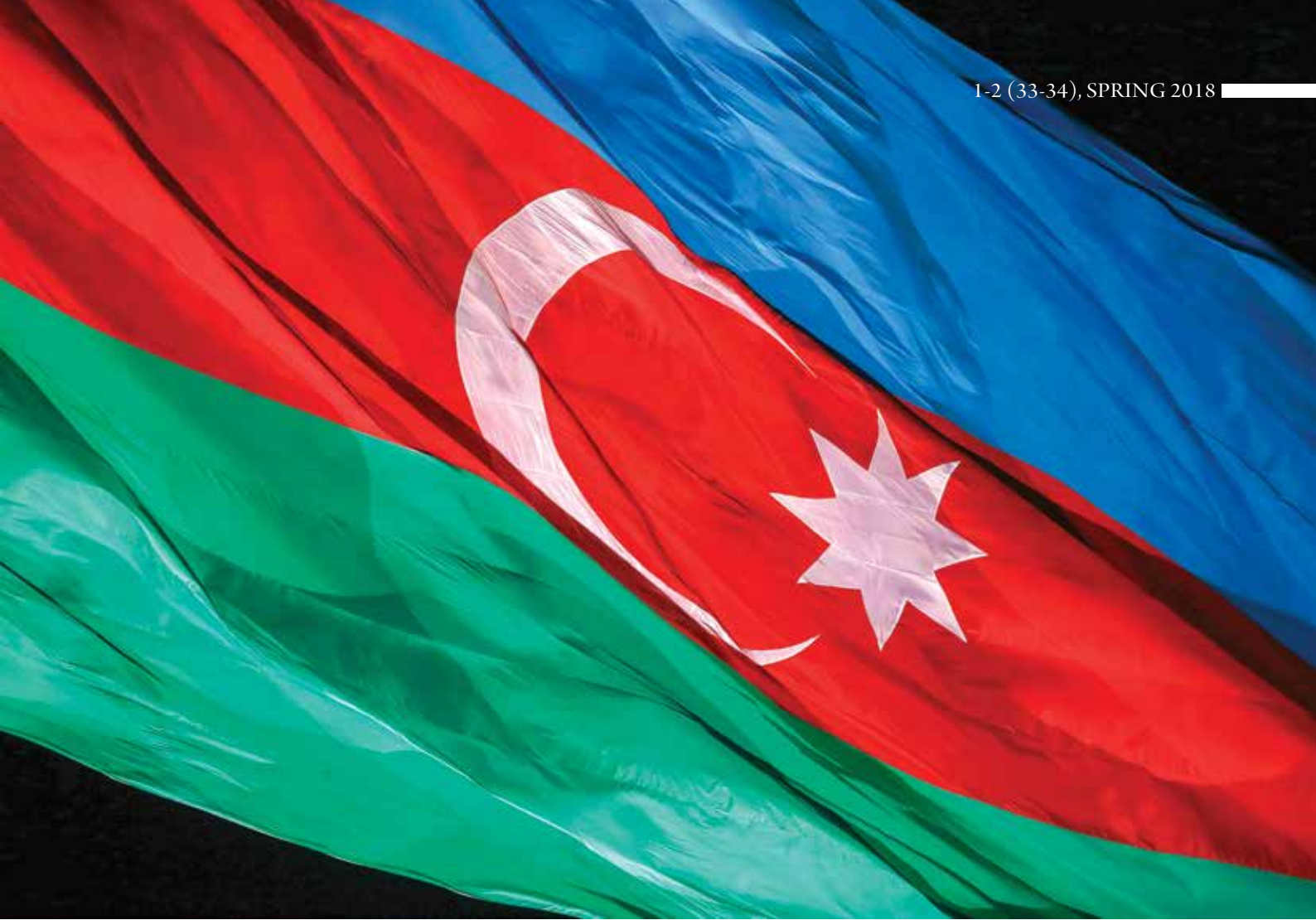
there is a bronze pommel of the Standard with the image of two eight-pointed stars (III-II centuries BC). Images of these stars can also be seen on the noses of ships on rock carvings of Gobustan. There is a curious image of the king of Caucasian Albania Javanshir (629-681) in the form of a bronze censer (VII century; now stored in the State Hermitage). Image of the crescent is clearly visible at the crown of the king. The significance of a crescent and eight-pointed star survived through the Islamic era. Thus, on the wall of the mausoleum of Momin Khatun in Nakhchivan (XII century) there is an image of an eight-pointed star with the word 'Allah' written inside. In the later periods, the image of a crescent and star became widespread and frequently used in subjects of arts and crafts.

ADR fell as a result of the April 1920 occupation and a Soviet regime was established in Azerbaijan. All the attributes of independence and statehood have been eliminated and replaced by Soviet symbols alien to Azerbaijan.

In the late 80-ies of the twentieth century the national liberation movement spread all over the country and a tricolor flag of ADR was restored as a national symbol. **November 17, 1990 at the 1st session of the Supreme Majlis of Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic flag of ADR was adopted as the national flag of autonomy. November 29, 1990 a decree was issued 'to change the name and the national flag of the Azerbaijan SSR', which was ratified later on Feb. 5, 1991 by the Milli Majlis of the Republic.** November 12, 1995 on a nationwide vote - the first Constitution of independent Azerbaijan was adopted, 23<sup>rd</sup> Article of which describes the tricolor flag of the republic.

Promoting the national flag is the subject of a number of official documents. On March 13, 1998 the President of the Republic issued a Decree on strengthening the work 'on the state attributes of the Azerbaijan Republic.' The document states that 'the education of our citizens, especially our youth, in a spirit of deep reverence of public attributes serves to strengthen the patriotic spirit in the society.' Presidential Decree 'On the rules of using the State Flag' dated June 8, 2004 regulates the forms and instances of using the flag.

On November 17, 2009 President issued a decree on the establishment of 'Day of State Flag' of the Azerbaijan Republic. In accordance with the decree Day of State Flag



is celebrated on November 9 of each year. The provisions of the decree indicate the importance of our three-color flag by stating: 'As a memory to the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic this flag demonstrates our commitment to freedom, national values and universal ideals.' 🌟

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