

ISLAMIC ARMY OF THE CAUCASUS AND LIBERATION OF BAKU: 100 YEARS ON

Fragment of the exhibition dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus and liberation of Baku. September 2018, Baku, National History Museum of Azerbaijan



In accordance with the agreement signed on June 4, 1918, Turkey assumed a commitment to provide military assistance to the newly established Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Turkish troops, which arrived in Azerbaijan under the command of Nuru Pasha, a prominent military leader of the Ottoman state, merged with the military units led by Ali Agha Shikhlinski, an Azerbaijani military leader, which laid the foundation of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus. In the first few days the number of Azerbaijani servicemen in the army was not very high, however, the number of conscripts increased as a result of the measures taken by the Azerbaijani government. Enver Pasha, Minister of War of the Ottoman Empire, said at a meeting with Alimardan bey Topchu-

bashov, "I am aware that there have been no serious challenges with the draft and men arrive to join military service willingly. And that's the way it should be. Caucasus Muslim soldiers have not been liable to undergo military service and are unfamiliar with the requirements for being soldiers, however, it is evident that the military spirit is still there, and this is a prerequisite." (1) Studies by Turkish researchers have shown that as early as during the battles in June-July 1918, a total of 6,000 servicemen of the 10,000 people-strong Islamic Army of the Caucasus were Ottoman fighters and 4,000 of them were Azerbaijani Turks (2). Thus, the newly formed Islamic Army of the Caucasus became a reliable shield of the nation for countering the Bolshevik-Dashnak on-

“Majidiye-nishani” Order awarded to an Azerbaijani officer



slaughter. The fraternal Azerbaijani and Ottoman Turkish fighters combatted side by side against the enemy and sealed victories. The independence march of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus from Ganja to Baku that had started in June 1918 resulted in the liberation of Baku on September 15, 1918 following fierce battles. The grateful Azerbaijani people will never forget this and the lasting memory of the martyrs will live on in their hearts.

A solemn military parade dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the liberation of the city of Baku was held on September 15, 2018 on the Azadlig Square in the Azerbaijani capital. The event, held on the occasion of the anniversary of Baku’s liberation from foreign forces, was marked with the participation of Azerbaijani and Turkish servicemen.

Some historical items related to the Islamic Army of the Caucasus, which played a significant role in the fate

Prayer found in the belongings of a Turkish soldier killed in Azerbaijan





Historical reconstruction of Azerbaijani infantry units at the parade marking the 100th anniversary of the liberation of Baku

of Azerbaijan, are safeguarded at the Azerbaijan National Museum of History. One Majidia Badge Order and two "Harbi Madalya" Ottoman medals are kept in the Numismatics Fund of the Museum. The courage of the officers and soldiers of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus, who fought the Bolshevik-Armenian and then the English-Armenian troops, was highly appreciated and many of them were awarded orders and medals. The documents protected in Turkey's military archives allow identifying the conferees.

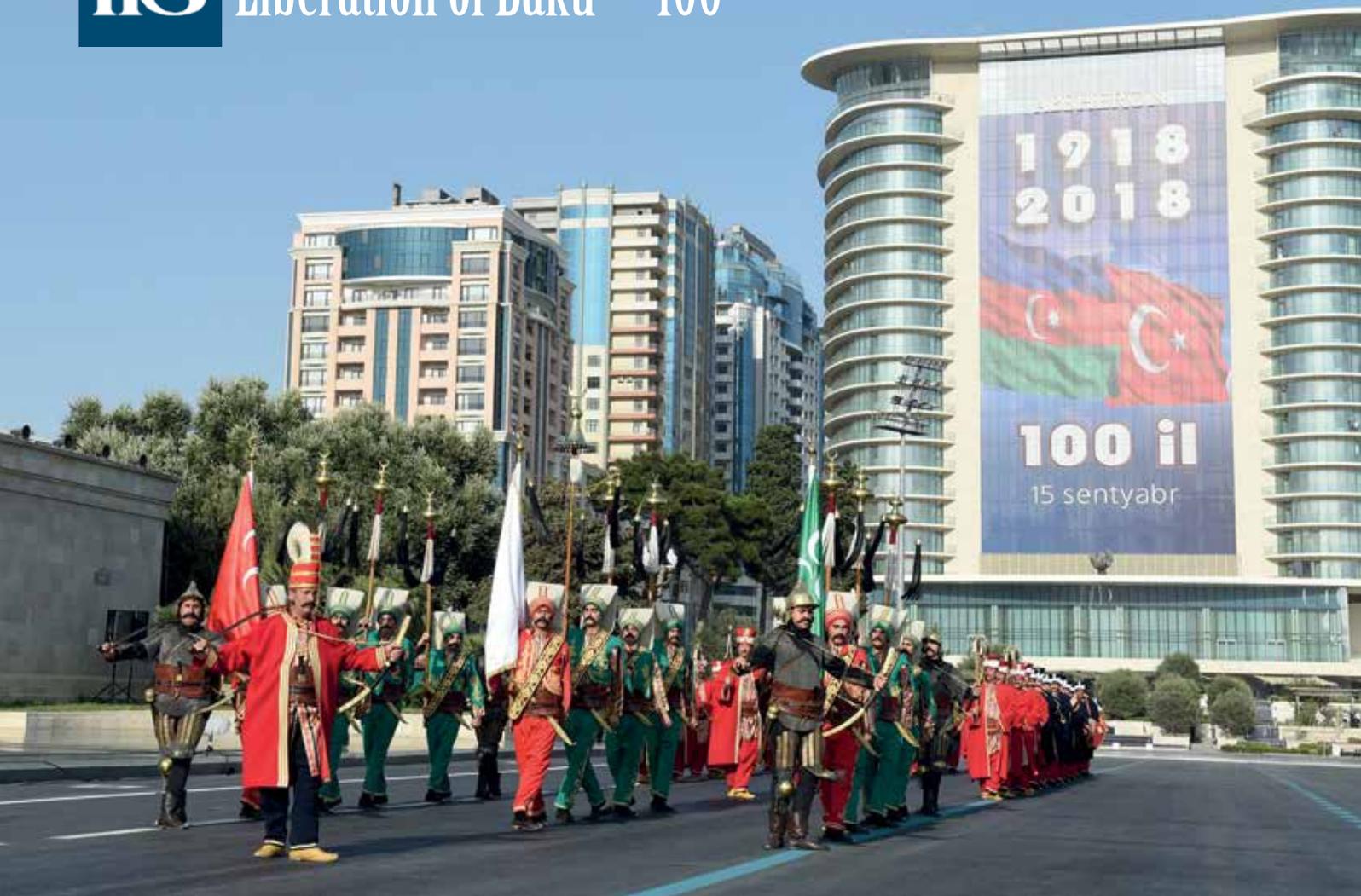
A document on the conferral of the awards, presented on September 3, 1918 to the personnel subordinate to the commanders of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus, is kept in the archives of Turkey's Military History and Strategic Etudes (ATASE) (3). The conferral of high awards to the officers whose names were listed was approved by the Sultan (4). The referenced Ottoman officers received four awards, including the Altun Medal of Merit, the Silver Medal of Privilege, the Majidi Badge's (Majidi Order) 5th "sword degree", and Harbi Medalya (Military Medal). Only one of the officers included in the list, a junior lieutenant, was conferred the "Military Medal". It is known that following the liberation of Baku (September 15, 1918) a large group of Ottoman officers received orders and medals (5).

Azerbaijani servicemen who fought in the Islamic

Army of the Caucasus were also conferred orders and medals of the Ottoman state as Azerbaijan lacked its own awards in that period. According to the list of conferees dated 03.09.1918, a total of 18 Azerbaijani officers received two badges, notably, Majidi Order and the Military Medal. Moreover, 13 Azerbaijani officers whose names had been included in the list received the Military Medal. These included officers of the 1st regiment, cavalry lieutenant-colonel Hamid khan, captain Sultanov, cavalry captain Aliyev, junior lieutenant Aslanbayov, senior lieutenant Aliyev, 2nd regiment officers, junior lieutenant Mehmandarov, junior lieutenant Savkov, cavalry officer Kavzar, captain Sultanov, artillery colonel Javad Shikhlinski, 2nd cavalry regiment officer Garatiklinski, training captains Nasirbayov and Ahmadiyev (7).

It is known that new lists of conferees were compiled after the liberation of Baku, and the distinguished servicemen received orders and medals (8). Undoubtedly, Azerbaijani officers were among those servicemen. In any case, it has been established that a total of 8,000 Ottoman servicemen and over 6,000 Azerbaijani fighters were involved during the latest attack upon Baku (14-15.09.1918) (9).

Let's now refer to the description and history of the Military Medal. The Military Medal was established during World War I in 1917 on the initiative of Enver Pasha



Famous Turkish military orchestra “Mehteran” at the parade marking the 100th anniversary of the liberation of Baku

and was approved by the supreme assembly's decision No. 2886. The medal, which was shaped as a five-pointed star, was worn on the right-hand side of the chest, pinned with a needle. The central disc amidst the red enameled beams had the image of Sultan Mehmet V Reshad's handwritten stamp and the "1333" inscription, placed inside a crescent (11). As its title suggests, the medal was awarded exclusively to military men. In case the awarded serviceman had died, the medal was handed to the serviceman's family members, however, the latter were not allowed to wear it.

The condition of Military Medals kept at the Numismatics Fund is different. Thus, one of the medals (NF No. 3129) is in a good condition. Even its ribbon has been preserved to date. The glazing of another medal has been completely erased (NF No. 11626). A ribbon is not available.

Given that the first and last names of the officers were not fully indicated in the list, it is difficult to identify most of them. Detailed information is available

regarding one of them, namely, artillery Colonel Javad Khan Shikhlinski. Javad Bey Mammadagha oglu Shikhlinski was born in 1875. He graduated from the Tbilisi Cadet Corps and Mikhaylov Artillery School. He took part in World War I. Having returned to Azerbaijan, he fought in the ranks of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus. Afterwards, he served as the commander of the first infantry division in the Azerbaijani army. In 1919, he received the military rank of major-general. In 1920, he was one of the leaders of the Ganja revolt. That same year, he emigrated to Iran. Afterwards, he joined the Iranian military. He served as Ardabil's military commandant. After resigning, he moved to Turkey and died there in 1959 (12).

Weapons of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus kept at the museum's Weaponry and Flags Fund may be divided into two groups. The first group includes the weapons discovered as a result of the excavations carried out near Gurd Gapisi. It is known that fierce battles occurred there on 02-05.08.1918 and 14-15.09.1918. These battles

Military machinery demonstrates modern development of Azerbaijan's armed forces



resulted in the victory of the military units of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus (13). Certainly, only parts of the weapons found in the vicinity of Gurd Gapısı remained and they are rusty. These arms include two rifle cartridge cases (SBF No. 2715, 2716), a canon shell fuse (SBF No. 2724), canon shell shrapnel (SBF No. 2712) and a cavalry rider that is in a relatively good condition (SBF No. 2922).

The weapons of the second group had been used by the fighters of the Azerbaijani army in 1918. These weapons were impounded by Soviet military units in 1920 and handed over to the Azerbaijan Museum of History in 1924. These items include rifles, bayonets, cavalry swords, pistols and shells. All of the weapons are in good condition.

Historical reconstruction of Azerbaijani equestrian units at the parade marking the 100th anniversary of the liberation of Baku





The Ottoman rifle of the M1903 type was the main weapon of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus infantry. These weapons were based on the Belgian-made Mauser dispenser-type rifle. However, the rifles used in the Ottoman army were manufactured on the basis of the German army's Mauser 98 model. The rifle, which was one of the most advanced shotguns of that period, had a caliber of 7.65 mm and it was 1,240 cm long (1,750 cm together with the bayonet), weighing 3.9 kg (4.4 kg with the bayonet). The cartridge case could hold up to five bullets (14). Two rifles of this type are kept in the museum (SBF No. 2064, 2066). These rifles were fitted with bayonets of the M1903 type (with the blade length of 527 mm) (15).

The cavalry sword, found with its scabbard, was 83 cm long (SBF No. 318). Symbols of war (such as laurel garlands, arrows and bows) were engraved and the manufacturer (the Zolingen military plant in Germany) was indicated on the sword blade.

The Model 08 Parabellum pistol (SBF No. 1916) is attributed to the modification of the weapon manufactured in Germany in 1914-1917 (16). The pistol had a caliber of 9 mm, was 217 mm long and weighed 890 grams. Its cartridge-case could hold up to eight bullets.

Though the Mauser pistol of Model 1896 (SBF No. 1913) was not formally endorsed by any country, it was used by servicemen of numerous countries involved in World War I. The German-made pistol had a caliber of 7.63 mm, was 276 mm long and weighed 1.1 kg. Its cartridge-case could hold up to ten bullets (17).

Two Ottoman cannon balls are kept in the museum as well. The shell slated for a 75 mm cannon (SBF No. 2493) is in a relatively good condition (the length is 33 cm). This is an air-burst shell and its cartridge-case is

made of brass, while its main part is made of cast iron. The length of the other shell (SBF No. 2494) is 13 cm. It is a 30 mm fragmentation and demolition shell and its cartridge-case is made of brass.

Yevgeni Pakhomov, a well-known Orientalist and scholar, presented a tip of the Ottoman flag to the museum (SBF No. 2931). The tip is 15 cm long and 11.5 cm wide. It is likely that the flag tip pertains to one of the wings of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus.

A prayer written on a piece of paper (EF No.542) that belonged to a soldier of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus is safeguarded at the Ethnography Fund. The handmade paper (perhaps, made by the soldier himself) is narrow and long (the length is 180 cm). The tube-shaped paper was carried in a folded shape. There are words of prayer written in blue ink, as well as round-shaped symbols drawn in blue and red ink on the paper. The prayer words on the paper, which is in a relatively good condition (only its edges are damaged and some of its glued parts are getting unstuck), are legible. The following sentence is written in the upper part of the paper: "There is no God other than Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger". It is followed by "Damn the devil. Let's be with Allah. In the name of Merciful Allah." Furthermore, it said "There is no one more powerful and sublime than Allah". This was followed by Verse 255 of Surah al-Baqarah of the Holy Quran. In the middle part of the paper, the words written on top were repeated and the following words were added: "There is no God other than Allah. He is almighty, He is great, He is supreme, He is sublime, He is the Creator." In the lower part of the paper, there are verses from various surahs of the Holy Quran. Furthermore, prayers were cited in numerical figures and the words "There is no God other than Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger" were written. Finally, in the bottom, the paper says "The year 1330" according to the Islamic calendar (or 1914) and "Malik Khanahmad Aziz Afnadai", which probably refers to the man saying the prayer (18).

Interestingly, the above-mentioned items were not showcased at the exhibitions of the Azerbaijan National Museum of History in the Soviet period, because the Islamic Army of the Caucasus was portrayed as an invading and ominous force in the Soviet historiography and exhibiting pertinent items was prohibited. However, historic truth began to be revealed after Azerbaijan gained independence in the late 20th century. Currently, items pertaining to the Islamic Army of the Caucasus occupy a worthy place in the museum's permanent exposition. 🌟

Demonstration performance by Azerbaijani pilots at the parade marking the 100th anniversary of the liberation of Baku



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