

IRS

Following tradition



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MIRACLES ON SHOPPING DAY



The market has always been at the heart of any Oriental city. If you want to feel the rhythm of this heart beat, you should enter the rows of shopping outlets, look at goods on the counters and listen to the conversations between salespeople and customers.

A scholar who would undertake writing the history of Azerbaijani markets would soon realize that it is abundant and educational, extensive and full of secrets. And the more one delves into this history, the more amazing are the emerging finds and the more astounding are the discoveries. Azerbaijan, which is located at the crossroads of the caravan routes stretching from

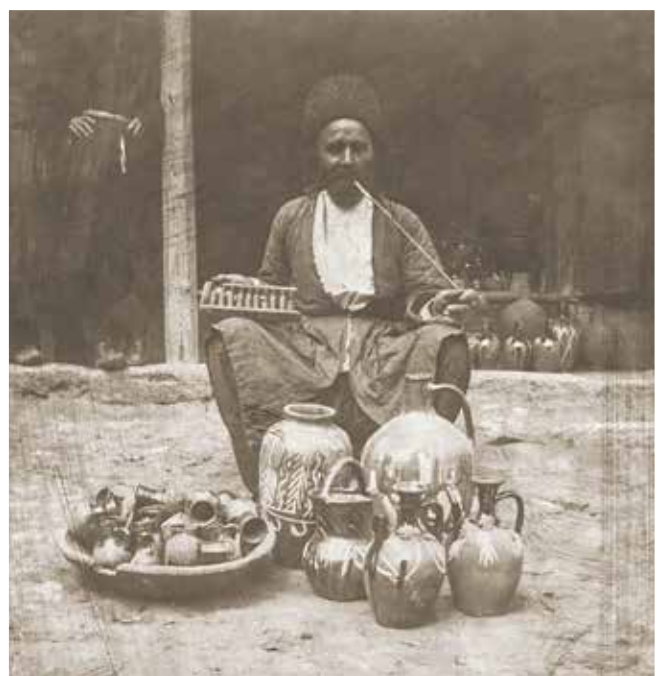
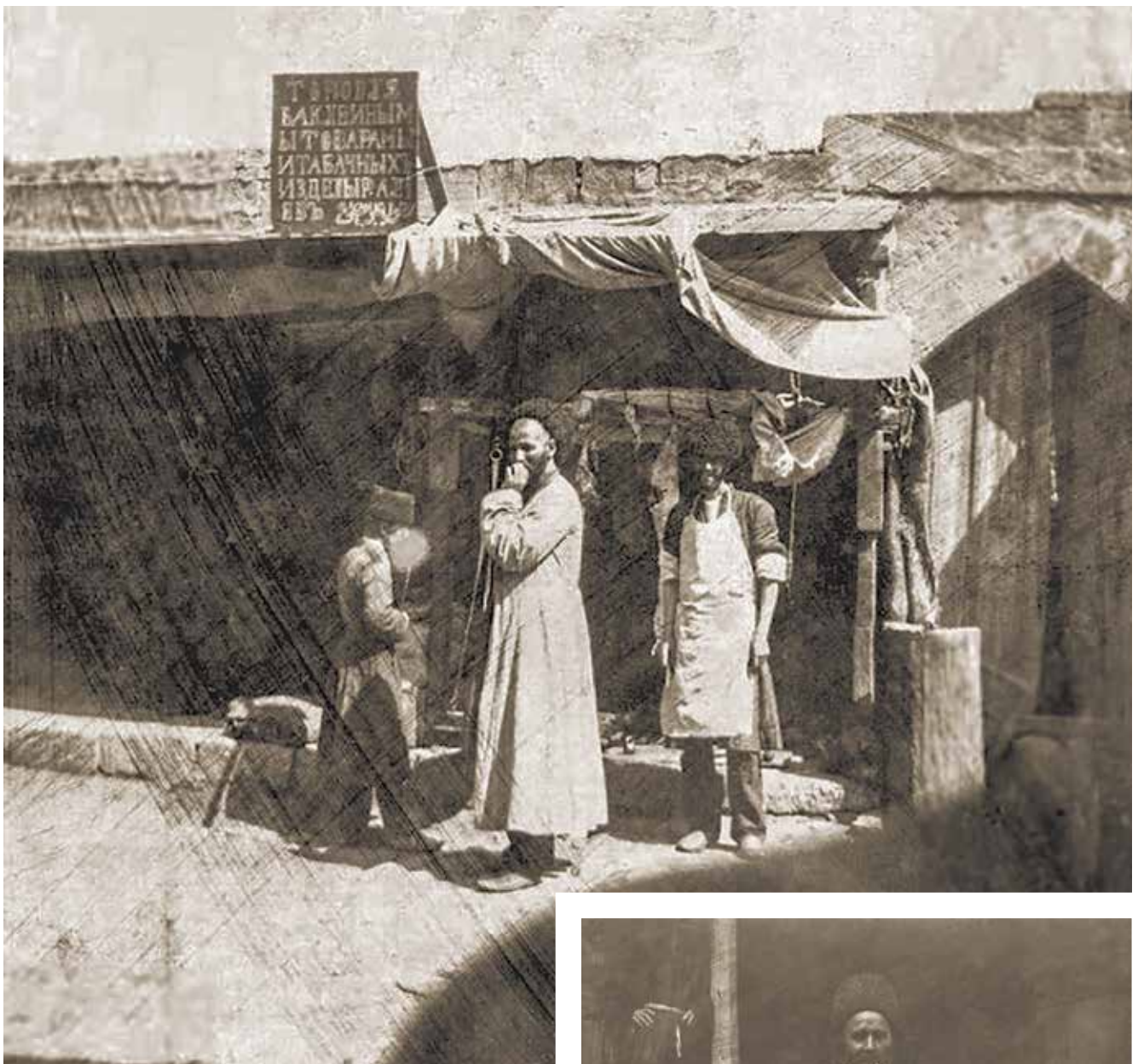




the north to the south and from the West to the East, was destined to play the role of an international trading venue. Azerbaijan assumed this role during the distant millennia when the boundaries of the emerging civilization covered only a narrow strip of land on the Asian and European continents.







Years were passing by and turning into decades, and the latter were becoming centuries. People were accessing new territories, making their way through wild forests, seeking passageways via the mountains, paving paths in deserts, floating down rivers and crossing seas. And, as a rule, a merchant followed the traveler. Roads were improving and becoming safer and the cities where merchant caravans were stopping over for trading were getting rich. And the more routes converged on the market square, the wealthier were the city's residents, the higher the fortification walls and the more luxurious were the palaces of the rulers. Cities were turning into major shopping centers. A great number of



such trading centers, which facilitated transshipment, storage, exchange and redistribution of goods into other transportation arteries, were available in Azerbaijan. After all, none of the caravans at the time covered the entire route, which often stretched for several thousand kilometers. Such a trip would take years and would not be economically viable altogether, given that the faster was the turnover of capital, the more profit it yielded. Therefore, caravan routes consisted of a host of sections, designated for certain groups of merchants, who headed properly thought-out logistical systems. Markets lied at the core of those systems. Azerbaijani markets were



famous for the abundance of goods, including furs, walrus tusks, honey, wax, and amber from northern and Western countries. The East offered customers jewelry, weapons, silk fabrics, glazed ceramic dishes, glassware, spices, fragrances, and cowry shells. There was also a variety of locally made goods, including grain, cotton, Balakan pomegranates, silk and wool fabrics from Ganja and Shirvan, mules from Barda, as well as weapons and jewelry from Tabriz, black brocade, bedspreads and musical instruments from Ardabil, carpets from Guba and Karabakh, flax canvases, saffron and madder from Derbent, oil and dried fish from Baku.







In the cities situated along the Great Silk Road, very comfortable caravanserais were being opened at that time, warehouses and stables were being built, and specialized markets created, with some of these markets spanning several square kilometers. The outlets offering spices, ornaments made of gold, silver and precious stones, carpets and fabrics were considered privileged markets. But the most people came together for fairs that attracted salespeople from Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Khorasan, Khuzestan, Central Asia, India, Khazaria, Volga Bulgaria, Russia, and Scandinavia. The large scale of the transactions is proven by the fact cited by





10th century Arab traveler Ibn Hawqal. According to him, a million sheep were sold at one of such fairs, and the payment was made through a cashless transfer with the use of cheques, which were already used by Arab merchants at the time. Jesuit priest Philippe Avril, who visited Ganja in the late 17th century, was just as amazed over the organization of trade.

"The bazaars or markets located in the city center are the most beautiful and magnificent ones I have seen in the entire East. Not to mention their extraordinary stretch, they are all very well covered with coves, with each type of goods occupying a certain section of the market. Since the location of Ganja is very conducive for trade, you may come across a huge crowd of all kinds of foreigners there at any time," Philippe Avril wrote.

Prior to the capture of Ganja by Russian troops in the early 19th century, several bazaars operated in the city. The importance that the authorities attached to prosperous trade is illustrated by very strict rules, and their observance was overseen by a special official called amir marufa. For example, trading outside the marketplace was prohibited. Moreover, visiting merchants were allowed to sell wholesale wheat only in the late afternoon and evening. Only those who purchased the rights for



trading in tobacco and soap could sell these goods. A system of imposing taxes and fines, which significantly replenished the Khan's treasury, had been developed. Special guards were responsible for the safety of warehouses and stores. Weight-checking scales placed in the center of the market and "the pedestal of shame", slated for punishing dishonest traders, completed the picture.

Nowadays, city markets are no longer of such great importance. Wholesale grain, vegetables and fruits are available through electronic trading, while retail goods are mainly delivered via stores. Nevertheless, there are still magnificent markets in Azerbaijan. The counters are rich in colors and shades surpassing the paintings of impressionist artists. They are full of unmatched fragrances that no restaurant in the world can produce. Regardless of the time of year, these markets offer a plethora of the gifts of nature, and this abundance would just feast one's eyes.

Any Azerbaijani market is a tourist attraction, which is no less important than a city museum or an art gallery. Missing it would mean remaining ignorant regarding the riches of this land and people's way of life here. It is also an amusement ride. It is fun, fascinating, exciting and also very nutritious. How can you stay away from trying a piece of a fragrant apple, a handful of ruby-red pomegranate seeds or a piece of spicy motal cheese? And if you happen to be in a row of pancake counters, with a strong smell of hot baked bread all around, you just cannot walk away. No less appealing are the huge piles of various greens (almost 300 of its cultivated and wild species are used in the Azerbaijani cuisine)! Wouldn't it also be interesting to look at the counters with spices? If you start writing them down right here, you'll have a list twice as long as Mendeleev's periodic table. And vegetables! They cannot be overlooked.



These include huge Absheron tomatoes, thin-skinned cucumbers, shiny purple eggplants, orange carrots, white and blue cabbage, cauliflower, yellow pumpkins, striped zucchini squash...

All this is just a tiny part of the market. This is followed by long rows of popular Azerbaijani fruits: apples, grapes, pomegranates, peaches, apricots, pears, persimmon, figs, cherries, black cherries, and piles of melons and watermelons. Afterwards, you can see all kinds of cheese, made of sheep, cow, buffalo and goat milk. You can also ask the seller if there is any cheese made of bird milk. He will hurry up to bring you some of it immediately. Thick sour cream, butter, sour milk and kaymak are sold nearby. Furthermore, there is honey of all kinds and clear, freshly squeezed olive oil, as well as sacks of flour and rice. Meat and poultry is sold in a separate area. Behind it, you can see shimmering silvery fish scales on the counters. These are complete still-life pictures. You can either paint them on a canvas or take photos.

But this is not the end of our tour yet. A market would not be the same without craftsmen's goods. There are hand-made carpets of all types and sizes, and each of them has its own unique patterns and purpose. Copper dishes, knives, kelagayi kerchiefs, embroidery, footwear,





fur hats and warm cloaks, which would save you from cold even during fierce snowstorms, are available here. You may come to the market early in the morning and leave late in the evening, especially since resting and getting food there is not a problem at all. They serve such delicious chorba and kebab that the next morning you even regret not having eaten enough of all this. But this is not a problem either. The markets are open every day. Welcome! 🌟

