

KARABAKH GUNSMITHS

THE CENTRAL STATE HISTORICAL ARCHIVE OF THE AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC KEEPS DOCUMENTS OF THE TREASURY CHAMBER AND ASSAY OFFICE OF BAKU, THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF WHICH INCLUDED THE REGISTRATION OF WEAPONS WORKSHOPS IN WHICH PRECIOUS METALS WERE USED TO DECORATE WEAPONS. THE DOCUMENTS OF THESE CHAMBERS CONTAIN THE NAMES OF GUNSMITHS, WHO WORKED IN DIFFERENT REGIONS OF AZERBAIJAN, INCLUDING IN KARABAKH IN THE LATE 19TH - EARLY 20TH CENTURIES (CSHA AR, FUND 43).



Daggers made by Azerbaijani craftsmen were often decorated with gold plates. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Weapons and Banners Fund

Silver and gold were widely used for decorating Azerbaijani weapons - daggers, sabers, rifles and pistols. Silversmiths and goldsmiths made solid bands (chargers) - wide and narrow, solid or slotted, ones that tightly fastened the barrel to the gun stock, different straps (plates) on the bolt, around the lock sheet, around the trigger, screws, slots for belts, straps for the shank and the apple (ball) of the handle – for pistols and rifles from silver and gold. All silver items decorated with floral and geometric ornamentation were made with niello and engraving technology, and sometimes were

gilded. Some samples of knives are so densely covered with plates of precious metals that they represent not only samples of weapons and arms, but also masterpieces of jewelry. It should be noted that the craftsmen who made the main parts of weapons confined themselves only to the reproduction of their names (initials), date and name of the owner, which made it difficult to determine the place of production of weapons and pistols. However, the data of the Treasury Chamber and Assay Office allow us to identify the whereabouts of the workshops.

In the Caucasus, the branding

of products started in 1804 when a mint was opened in Tiflis and all silver products made by craftsmen had to be released for sale after branding. In 1832, the State Council decided to set up an Assay Office in Tiflis, which was to open in 1834 and be subordinate to the Georgian-Imereti Treasury Chamber. But the Chamber did not open, and the position of assayer was listed at the Treasury Chamber. On 1 January 1843, the Tiflis District Assay Office opened. The head of the Assay Office, E. I. Blyumberg, began work to determine the quality of metals and established the registration of craftsmen throughout the

A dagger from the collection of Karabakh khans. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Weapons and Banners Fund



Transcaucasus. Books were opened, which annually included the names of craftsmen, the addresses of their workshops and homes, and the brand which a craftsman had to put on his products was shown in front of his name. Blyumberg sent all police chiefs in Transcaucasian cities annual requests on the number of working silversmiths, and the police chiefs sent lists of craftsmen who had been given certificates for production and paid receipts. The Tiflis District Assay Office collected information about the craftsmen of Azerbaijani cities. On 1 July 1885, the Tiflis District Assay Office was closed and on that same day, the Tiflis Assay Office opened, which existed until 1896, when under the new assay statute, it was transformed into the Transcaucasian district assay department, which operated until 1917. Information about the workshops in cities of Azerbaijan,

which sent their documents to the Transcaucasian department, is kept at the Central State Historical Archives of the Azerbaijan Republic, Fund 23.

For a long time Tiflis remained the only city in the Caucasus, where the branding of gold and silver products was carried out. In other cities, craftsmen paid a fee of one ruble according to the craftsmen's statute and received from the police a certificate to engage in this business; the police sent out the certificate to the Tiflis District Assay Office. The products of craftsmen from other cities were tested and branded only when they arrived at the Assay Office through Tiflis craftsmen. In 1843 the question of establishing assay offices in other cities was raised. Finally, on 1 April 1863, an assay establishment was opened in Baku, but information about Baku craftsmen was still sent to the Tiflis District Assay Office, as there was no Assay Office. In 1885,

an Assay Office was opened in Baku, but it launched operations from the mid-1890s. Gradually, the Office covered more and more areas where gold and silver products were made, encouraging craftsmen to register and brand their products, since the number of registered products in 1891-1898 tripled. The intensification of work was related to the activities of Vitold Konstantinovich Zglenitski, who began to work in the Office in 1892 and headed it from 1895. Constantly emphasizing the distinctiveness of local artists and the high level of their products, he tried to preserve and develop the silver business in the province, urging them to register and be overseen by the assayer.

He wanted to create a school in which craftsmen had to get a general and vocational education. The school was supposed to have two sections for adult craftsmen and adolescent



Pistols made by Azerbaijani craftsmen were richly decorated with gold and silver elements. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Weapons and Banners Fund



Decorations of the lock of a pistol with the words “Made by Ali Guli of Karabakh”. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Weapons and Banners Fund

students. Zglenitskiy paid special attention to preparing craftsmen for national and international exhibitions. In the run-up to the Paris Exhibition of 1900, craftsmen who did not have their own money were given loans for the purchase of silver. At exhibitions in the late 1890s and early 1900s, no other city presented such an amount of magnificent and varied silverware as Baku. Zglenitskiy compiled an album featuring all kinds of products manufactured for exhibitions: weapons, women's jewelry, belts, candlesticks and so on. This album was supposed to serve as a textbook for the school. He repeatedly made presentations

on the status and development of the silver business in the Baku district at meetings of the Handicrafts Committee. The Baku Assay Office worked from 1885 to 1896. It used the following hallmarks: an image of the coat of arms of the Baku province (three flames), the initials of the assayer and the date were placed separately or in the general frame with the number of the standard.

The study of the documents of the Tiflis District Chamber and the Treasury Chamber and the Assay Office of Baku makes it possible to establish the names of a number of Karabakh silversmiths, who decorated weapons and were registered

as manufacturers of high quality products. The following craftsmen worked in the towns of Shusha and Khankandi of Shusha district: 1. Karbalai Aslan oglu Mashadi Kazim. Registration by the Treasury Chamber (RTC) 1879; 2. Allahverdi Berugov. RTC 1879; 3. Aslan Bagdiyev. RTC 1877; 4. Jamal Javadov. RTC 1879; 5. Aslan bay Jafarbayov. RTC 1877; 6. Marjan Rustamov. RTC 1877; 7. Mirzajan Rustamov. RTC 1876. In 1885-1886; 8. Abdin Haji oglu Karbalai Salman. In 1876 and 1877, the workshop was checked by the assayer; 9. Ali Musa oglu. The workshop was checked by RTC, 1879; 10. Ali oglu Mustafa Huseyn, aka Mustafa Bakilu, gold

*The brand on a gun with the inscription “Made by Ali Guli of Karabakh”.
National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, Weapons and Banners Fund*

and silversmith. In 1844-1877 he took a certificate for craftsmanship; 11. Rustam Aliyev. In 1912-1915 he took a certificate for craftsmanship; Allah Verdi oglu Karbalai Ali Zargar. In 1846-1848 he took a certificate for craftsmanship. RTC 1876, 1877, 1879; 12. Haji bay Akhundov. RTC 1877; 13. Mirzajan Khoja Bagirov, gold and silversmith. RTC 1876, 1877, 1879; 14. Musa Badalov, gold and silversmith. In 1844-1846 he took a certificate for craftsmanship; 15. Usta Mustafa Huseyn oglu. In 1853 and 1860, he was listed in the assayer's report; 16. Ayra Jushimudov, gold and silversmith. In 1846, 1847, he took a certificate for craftsmanship. In 1847, he worked in Nukha; 17. Agajan Yegalov, gold and silversmith. RTC 1876; 18. Agajan Yegiyev. In 1915, his workshop was checked by the assayer; 19. Mirza Yegiyev. Label M. Y. In 1907, 1908, 1915 and 1916, his workshop was checked by the assayer; 20. Ziyalo Agajan, goldsmith. In 1876-1877 his workshop was checked by the assayer. In 1851-1854, he worked in Nukha; 21. Karbalai Zulal oglu. According to the Index of the Russian Division of the World Expo (London, 1862, cf. 116) he exhibited a bridle and harness at the London Exhibition in 1862; 22. Emmin Ismayilov, aka Izmail. In 1909, his workshop was checked by the assayer; 23. Khosrov Isayev. RTC 1877. 24. Baba Gahramani Kevhayev. RTC 1879; 25. Ali Kerbalai-oglu, a gold and silversmith. In 1849 he quit the business; 26. Mashadi Karim oglu Mahammadov. RTC 1877; 27. Haji bay Lavandov. RTC 1876; 28. Haji Movrazov. RTC 1877; 29. Guli Karbalai Mukhtar oglu. In 1912, his workshop was checked by the assayer; 30. Aga Najafov. RTC 1879; 31. Abdullah Pasha oglu, gold and silversmith. In the 1844-1846 he took a certificate



for craftsmanship; 32. Abil Karbalai Pasha oglu, a gold and silversmith. In 1847-1851 he took a certificate for craftsmanship. In 1852, 1859, 1860 and 1861 he was listed in the assayer's report; 33. Zeynal Mammad Pasha oglu, gold and silversmith. In 1848 he took a certificate for craftsmanship; 34. Nagi Karbalai Pasha oglu, a gold and silversmith. In 1860, he was listed in the assayer's report; 35. Abil Fatah oglu (Abil Pasha Fagat oglu). In 1861-1862, he took a certificate for craftsmanship. In 1869, he was listed in the assayer's report; 36. Bala Shikhanov, a gold and silversmith. In 1844, 1846 he took a certificate for craftsmanship. In 1847 he stopped working; 37. Babajan Yuzbashov. In 1863, 1865-1867, he was listed in the assayer's report; 38. Mukhtar Karbalai Yusuf oglu. In 1909 and 1910, his workshop was checked by assayer; 39. Abdurahman Soltan oglu. Label A.S. He worked in Khankandi.

In 1928, a descendant of the Karabakh khans Huseyn Javanshir donated to the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan unique samples of weapons of the last Karabakh khans, among which a flintlock gun takes a special place (NMHA Fund of Banners and Weapons Inv. № 634). The gun has an inscription

«Made by Ali Guli of Karabakh». The gun stands out for its excellent design, ease, grace, good accuracy, luxurious exterior finish with a gold notch, which is clear evidence of the excellence of Karabakh gunsmiths. 🌟

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