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KEYS OF THE MEDIIEVAL WALLED CITY OF BAKU

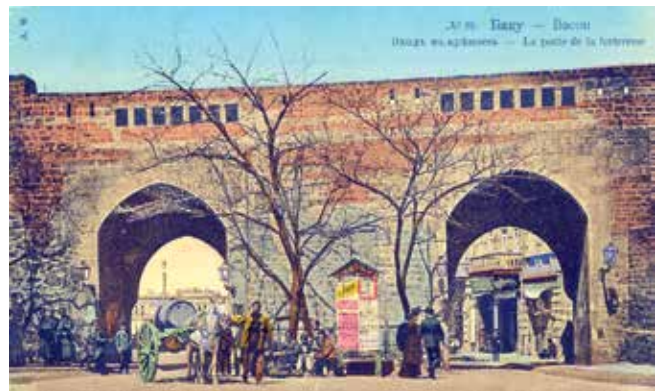
*Northern (Shamakhi) gate of Baku Fortress.
Postcard of the late 19th century*

The territory of modern Baku has expanded so much that it is hard to imagine that only a few centuries ago the city was small and the fortress gates were closed with real keys at night. According to sources: "From the evening dawn, wooden bridges rose at the gates (meaning Shamakhi and Salyan gates – M. B.), which were locked and the city slid into a dream." (1)

It is believed that the walls of Baku were built in the 12th century. This is evidenced by a stone slab with an Arabic inscription, in kufic script, and with the name of the ruler Manuchehr II on it (1149-1204) found during the collapse of one of the fortress towers built later.

In the Middle Ages, Baku, located inside the fortress, was one of the most impregnable cities of Azerbaijan. This was achieved due to the powerful two-row fortress walls.

A member of the expedition sent by Queen Elizabeth Tudor of England to the Safavid Shah Mohammad Khudabende, Christopher Burrow, who visited here in 1579-1581. noted: "... this city (Baku – M. B.) is surrounded by impregnable walls..." (2).



In 1501, during the siege of Baku by the forces of Shah Ismail, the fortress walls were destroyed. And only in the 17th century, according to the famous Turkish traveller Evliya Celebi, who visited Baku twice - in 1647 and 1666, were they restored in 1656. After retaking Baku from Ottoman Turkey, Baylarbay Zulfugar Khan Garamanlu of Shirvan restored the northern gates of the fortress and named them after Shah Abbas. In hon-

*Travel gate (now gate at metro station
Icheri Sheher) Baku fortress*

our of the completion of the renovation of the fortress walls, artillery volleys were fired to demonstrate the fortifications and illuminate the Baku fortress.

Referring to Baku, Evliya Celebi also reports: "... on the seashore there is... a well-maintained city... There are three gates in the walls that protect it from three sides. The Gilan (Salyan – M. B.) gate opens to the south. To the north, there is the Bab al-Abwab (Derbend – M. B.) gate, and to the east - to the shore of the sea there is the Harbour gate (Port – M. B.)" (3). It should be noted that the northern gate of the Baku fortress in different periods was first called Shah Abbas, then Derbend, and later Shamakhi. The latter has remained with it to this day.

In 1683, the German scientist, naturalist and physician Engelbert Kaempfer visited Azerbaijan as secretary of the Swedish embassy. Describing Baku, he noted; "... it (Baku – M. B.) is surrounded by double walls. The double gate (meaning Shamakhi gate – M. B.) in the northern wall is upholstered with iron sheets. From the harbour side, there are three gates, for a more convenient delivery of goods." (4)

The German researcher who served as a field doctor in the Russian troops, I. J. Lerche, who visited Azerbaijan in 1745-1747, noted that there was a coat of arms carved above the Derbend gate - two lions holding a bull's head (5).

The first of the historians who reported data on Baku in the 17th century is the court chronicler of the Safavids, Iskandar Munshi. According to him, Baku in the 17th century, as in previous centuries, was a fortified city and, in its figurative expression, the fortress walls "ascended to heaven" (6).

On the map of the city dated 1723, the Baku fortress had six gates. Two gates led to the city from the land side – the Shamakhi gate from the north and the Salyan gate from the west. Three gates connected the city with the sea. Two of them led into the city through caravanserais and markets located by the sea. The third gate was not far from the Maiden's Tower and led directly into the city.

The galabayi was responsible for the protection of the castle gates and calm in the city. He was elected from among people of the upper class and persons close to the ruler. A detachment of armed nukers was subordinate to the galabayi.



The duties of city residents included a tax for guarding the castle gates at night. In return for guarding, residents mainly paid taxes into the treasury, which were spent on the maintenance of special detachments, which locked and guarded the gates at night (7).

It should be noted that the locking mechanisms - locks and keys - were known in the third millennium BC. Direct evidence of their appearance is the wooden key to the tomb of Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II. Probably, locks first appeared on the doors of temples, sanctuaries and tombs. These locks were called Egyptian. They were made entirely of wood.

In the 4th century BC, keys made of metal appeared in Greece. They were T or L-shaped and had short protrusions on the working part. Keys were a kind of symbol of power, honour and wealth, belonging to the upper strata of the spiritual and secular nobility (8).

Keys as an emblem are found in religious iconography. In ancient Italy, this attribute is found in the sculptural image of the deity Janus with keys symbolizing his function

Keys are also found in the religious cult of Mithraism, which became widespread both in the Middle East and in European countries in the first century AD. Among



*Coin of the Baku khanate. Copper.
Mid-18th century. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (NMHA)*

the emblems of Mithraism there is a key. The main character of the pantheon, the deity Zurvan, who personified the idea of “infinite time”, holds the key to the heavenly gate (9).

It should be noted that Azerbaijan has long been famous for its craft products. Among various types of craft, a prominent place was occupied by the artistic processing of metal. In this area, the profession of locksmith - the manufacturer of locks and gaflagid keys - stood out (10).

In Azerbaijan, metalworking was put on a par with ancient honorary art of jewellery. Looking at the works of Azerbaijani masters, you forget about the hardness and rigidity of metal.

*Killing of General P. Tsitsianov.
Painting by M. Andreyev*



The Arms and Banners Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan has a unique collection of keys to the medieval fortified cities of Azerbaijan. Among them are five silver keys to the fortress of Baku, made with the same perfection as a ceremonial jewel.

It should be noted that the keys to the city gates, along with battle flags, mace, horsetail and monetary units were considered symbols (attributes) of an independent state, in this case, the Baku Khanate (second half of the 18th - early 19th centuries).

Each key (three large and two small ones) is a thin plate with a curly extension at the top. The head is shaped as a stylized bud with a drop-shaped (almond-shaped) slot. The barb is flat and oval in shape, with rectangular (on the sides) cutouts, and is a continuation of the lower part of the plate, bent at right angle.

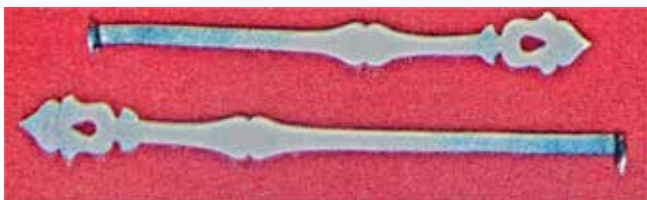
Size of a large key: total length - 23 cm, barb - 2.5x1.2 cm.

Size of a small key: total length - 19 cm, barb - 2x1 cm.

When you touch these graceful, ancient keys, you feel excited as if you were plunging into the distant past of the city of Baku through the curtain of time that has opened.

The Baku Khanate, as an independent state, was formed in the 1740s. A convenient geographical location, rich natural resources like oil, salt, saffron, and a convenient sea harbour attracted the attention of powerful states such as Russia, Turkey and Iran at the time.

At the end of the 18th - early 19th centuries, the rul-



Two silver keys of Baku Fortress. NMHA

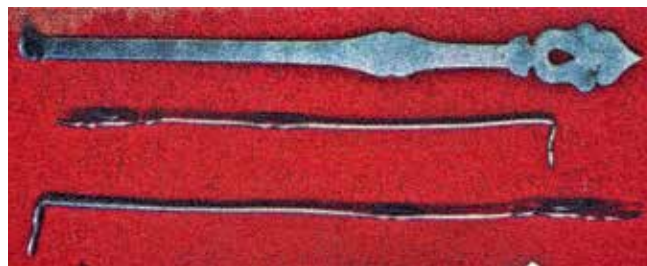
ing circles of the Baku Khanate, seeking to defend their independence, asked Russia for protection. The latter immediately began to implement its far-reaching plans for the conquest of the Azerbaijani khanates, especially Baku. After long negotiations between the commander-in-chief in the Caucasus, Russian Army General Tsitsianov, and Huseyn Gulu Khan of Baku, Tsitsianov, accompanied by two hundred military men, approached Baku on 8 February 1806 to accept the khanate as a subject of Russia. Five hundred metres from the Shamakhi fortress gate, officials of the Baku Khanate came out to meet him with bread and salt and keys to the city gates. Having taken the bread and salt, Tsitsianov did not accept the keys, stating that Huseyn Gulu Khan of Baku himself had to hand them to him. The messengers reported this to the khan. The latter arrived at the meeting place with his retinue and brought the keys to Tsitsianov. At the time of taking the keys, Tsitsianov and one of the persons accompanying him, Eristov, were killed (11). The city keys were returned to the fortress.

But Russia, which attached great importance to the Baku Khanate as an oil-rich region, and Baku as the best port on the Caspian Sea, did not abandon its claims to it.

In the summer of 1806, General Bulgakov sent a proclamation to the residents of Baku proposing that they voluntarily surrender the city and accept Russian citizenship. At Mount Beshbarmag, Bulgakov met with one of the most influential people of the Khanate, Kazimbay, who handed him the banners and keys to the fortress gates. On 3 October 1806, Bulgakov approached Baku. Huseyn Gulu Khan of Baku and his family were forced to retire to Iran due to retaliation from the Russians. The residents opened the fortress gates and the city was taken by the Russians (12).

Such is the brief history of the keys to the medieval fortified city of Baku.

Today, when the city of Baku has symbolic keys, the keys described above, along with many other valuable relics of our past, are displayed at the museum in a section that reflects the history of Azerbaijan from the Middle Ages. ❀



Three silver keys of Baku Fortress. NMHA

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