



*Momine Khatun Mausoleum in Nakhchivan. 12th century*

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# CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SELJUK PERIOD IN AZERBAIJAN

**T**he extraordinary rise of religious architecture in Azerbaijan in the 11-12th centuries was the result of the flourishing of Islam in the territory of the Seljuk Empire. The spread of a special type of temples, described in scientific literature as Seljuk mosques, over the vast territory of the Muslim world, including Azerbaijan, reflects the fundamental process of planning and constructive solution of religious buildings. The most peculiar feature of the "Seljuk mosque" is the formation of a mehrab section, i.e. a domed altar. The architectural core of the mosques is best preserved in them. Therefore, the mosques of the Seljuk era are referred to in scientific literature as the "Seljuk keshk" (i.e. castle).

During the campaigns of conquest, the Seljuks successively captured Khorasan, Iran, Iraq, Asia Minor and other countries of the Middle East, and under Alp Arslan and Melik Shah they invaded Azerbaijan. However,

a number of regions of the country, primarily Shirvan in the north, managed to maintain their independence. The development of the culture of this period is characterized by trends of common cultural traditions. Political stability, improvement of economic life and the emergence of conditions for cultural activities served as an impetus for the development of architectural and artistic creativity in the country (1). The social and ideological development of the Seljuk era was reflected in the artistic trends that arose in line with the general Azerbaijani architecture. The favorable cultural environment of that time enabled the artistic and technical experience and traditions of previous centuries to be passed down in the form of local architectural and artistic schools.

The building culture manifested in the 12th century architecture of Azerbaijan combines the boldness of compositional solutions with the originality of architec-

*Gulistan Mausoleum in Julfa district. 12th century*



*Yusif Ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum in Nakhchivan. 12th century*

tural forms. This indicates that these sites crown a long stage of consistent development and improvement. However, it is difficult to trace the path of development of architecture over the previous centuries on specific examples. The characteristics of individual architectural sites and scarce information about the cities of Azerbaijan make it possible to make only some assumptions about their planning structure and compositional solution. In the 11th century, extensive construction was carried out on the Absheron peninsula, where many architectural sites of a defensive, public and religious nature have been preserved: mosques, towers, castles, caravanserais, dwellings, ovdans (2).

Due to a common history and culture, the architectural sites of Azerbaijan have similarities with those of Central Asia, Georgia and Iran not only in terms of architecture and planning, but also in terms of construction equipment, building materials and structure. Masters of Azerbaijan, Central Asia and Iran used creative techniques of ceramic cladding in architecture, synthesizing in it the traditions of decorative and applied art of their countries. The birth of patterns is a whole mystery which is invisible at first sight. It is said that patterns do not have an independent life, serve art as if in the background because they serve as a means of decoration. And one can agree with that. But if a pattern is truly alive and full-blooded, and if also it carries some high symbolism, then somewhat breathes a new life into a work of art (3).

*Garabaglar tomb complex in Nakhchivan. 12th century*



In the 11-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Seljuk tribes descending from the Oghuz united the eastern Muslim countries, Mashrik, into a huge empire. According to Seljuk historian Ravandi, during this period, "the Turks are in command in the lands of the Arabs, Persians, Byzantines and Russ, and the fear of their swords lives firmly in their hearts." This important historical period, which researchers actually refer to as Seljuk, is characterized by a new growth of Turkic influence in the Islamic world not only in the political and military spheres, but also in

the field of science and art. It is recognized in world oriental studies as a turning point, or a period of transformation. This period is characterized by the increasing role of mosques in the architectural appearance of Azerbaijani cities. Social and ideological development in the era of the Seljuks was reflected in various trends that emerged in line with Azerbaijani architecture. Thus, the technique of "corrugating" the wall surface, which was widespread in the architecture of the Middle East, was manifested in Azerbaijan on the example of the mausoleum of the village of Garabaglar 30 km northwest of the city of Nakhchivan (4). This initially constructive technique gradually acquired a purely decorative nature as new building materials appeared and spread. In the Garabaglar mausoleum, the total thickness of the wall together with protruding semi-cylinders is 1.25 m, and without them 75 cm. Naturally, such a thin wall could not perform a load-bearing function in the presence of a significant thrust from the dome, especially since the mausoleum is covered with a double dome. Consequently, semi-cylinder corrugations in



*Khanegah on the Pirsaat river. 12-14th centuries*

the Garabaglar mausoleum served as a very important element of construction. The mausoleum with minarets in the village of Garabaglar, partially destroyed now, is a cylinder with 12 semicircular faces. The 30-meter tower has a round shape inside. Entrance openings along the axes and oriented to the cardinal points divide the mausoleum into four equal parts. All walls are lined with smooth glazed green tiles, and the entire surface of the tower is divided into large squares obliquely, similar to

Sheikh Babi Yagub Mausoleum in  
Fuzuli district. 13th century



rhombuses. The words “Allah bismillah” are laid out in each square of large green tiles.

The decoration of entrance doors with rectangular frames and inserts of colored glazed tiles is reminiscent of the mausoleum in Barda. The tower of the mausoleum rises on an octagonal pedestal made of local white stone. On the inside, it is divided by 20 shallow niches. In the lower part of the mausoleum, there was a crypt with a peculiar design – four cross-shaped semi-vaults with shallow niches made of well-hewn large stones. At a distance of 30 meters to the west of the mausoleum, there are two minarets, each of which has a small octagonal prism at the base, with a cylindrical and round turret at the base with drawings lined with small green tiles. The height of the minarets is over 20 meters. Each minaret has a spiral staircase inside. The minarets are connected by a wall 3.4 m long, which has an entrance in the form of a rectangular portal with inscriptions. The minarets are built of reddish and grayish bricks.

The study of Azerbaijan’s architectural monuments shows the high level of art of local architects, who harmoniously solved functional, constructive and artistic tasks. Azerbaijani architects have developed their own designs and building techniques that best met the challenges of implementing complex architectural projects. During that period, Azerbaijani masters achieved perfection in artistic stone carving. The architectural monu-

ments of Baku are among the remarkable examples of stone-made architectural decoration in the history of world architecture.

An important part in the architecture of medieval Azerbaijan was played by burnt bricks, which were of high quality. Strong and, importantly, earthquake-resistant structures were built from bricks without the use of scaffolding. The art of Azerbaijani craftsmen in achieving harmony of structures and decor, the colorful expression of architectural motifs can be clearly seen in various types of shebeke, which were used in stone and wooden versions.

Developing and improving, the architectural and construction art of Azerbaijan was distinguished by the sustainability of traditions, some of which have survived to this day. 🌟

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