

By Sabuhi AHMADOV,
PhD in History

WEAPONS AND ARMAMENT OF KARABAKH WARRIORS OF THE 18TH CENTURY

*Steel helmet. 18th century. National Museum of the
History of Azerbaijan (NMHA)*

The history of the Karabakh Khanate is replete with military conflicts. The military-political events and the structure of the armed forces of the Azerbaijani khanates of the late 18th and early 19th centuries are examined in a number of monographs, but the issue of individual armament of soldiers has been studied superficially.

The collection of 18th century Karabakh weapons kept in the Fund of Arms and Banners (FAB) of the National Museum of the History of Azerbaijan makes it possible to fill this gap.



In 1928, the Museum of the History of Azerbaijan purchased a set of weapons from a descendant of Karabakh khans, Huseyn Javanshirov: two flintlock pistols, a flintlock gun, two daggers, two powder flasks, a scimitar, a sword, a saber (1, No. 16, p. 14-20, 1928). According to the owner, the entire collection was the family property of the Javanshir clan and was inherited. Inscriptions of the names of the khans on some of the weapons confirmed this. Most of the items were attributed by experts to the 18th and early 19th centuries. One of the powder flasks and a saber was attributed to the middle of the 19th century and belonged to the last Karabakh khan, Mustafa, which is why they cannot be used in the reconstruction of weapons and armament of Karabakh warriors of the 18th and early 19th centuries. The scimitar belongs to the 18th century, but was presented to the Karabakh khan as a gift from one of the delegations of the Ottoman sultan, therefore, it cannot be used in the reconstruction either.

In 1940, the Museum of the History of Azerbaijan purchased a set of weapons from a resident of the city of Shusha, Mirish-aga Agamirov. The set included a helmet, three sets of chain mail and two protective plates of one armor, one shield, and one battle ax. According to M. Agamirov, recorded in the Museum's book of receipts, this set was inherited from his father, the famous Karabakh poet, artist and educator Mir Mohsun Navvab, who had acquired it from one of the fighters of the Karabakh khan (1, receipt No. 5574, 2/11-1940).

Let's examine the armament of a warrior of the Karabakh khanate.

The helmet (FAB inv. No. 1457) represents a classical example of a sphero-conical oriental helmet. This type of helmets, characterized by a low crown, a low conical pommel and a streamlined surface, ideally combined reliability, low price, wearing comfort, and the possibility of improvement (due to the installation of additional elements, it was possible to protect the face, neck and throat), which enabled its long use. In the period of the early Middle Ages, the helmet was known in the sources under the name "tark" ("tork") (2, vol. 1, p. 64). According to researchers, the name of the helmet comes from the word "Turk" because it became widespread in the Eastern European steppes and the Middle East thanks to the Turkic peoples. In the medieval Oghuz epic "Kitabi Dada Gorgud", the helmet is designated as "ashik", "yishyk" (3, p. 43, 70, 124, 174). This name is largely due to the fact that the helmet was polished to a shine.

Armor plates. 18th century. NMHA



Chainmail. 18th century. NMHA



The helmet has a nosepiece fastening detail in the front part – a holder and a screw for adjusting the nosepiece height. In the upper front part of the helmet, almost at the very pommel, there is a decorative tube for a feather – a symbol of nobility and high position. The upper part of the helmet is reinforced with a round spherical-conical plate, to which, in turn, the pommel itself is attached. Along the lower edge of the helmet, there are holes for attaching a ringed mesh that protected the warrior's neck. The helmet is decorated with a notch. The masters of notching first cut out the pattern with a small chisel and then hammered gold wires into the recesses.

The chain mail from the weapon set are of the same type, although there are differences in details. In particular, all three chain mail (FAB inv. No. 1450, 1451, 1452) are made of iron rings and have a cut of a shirt with short sleeves. The first coat of mail has a dense collar made up of nine rows of rings, through which dense cloth straps are threaded. The front part of the collar is not attached to the chain mail and allowed the warrior to reliably protect the throat. The chain mail has cuts in front and behind on the hem – such cuts facilitated the movement of the warrior in the saddle. The chain mail is woven from steel rings (approximately 16,500 pieces) 9 mm in diameter, and these are joined together by a “pinch” method. With a weight of 5.5 kg, chain mail provided a reliable protection. The second chain mail has a slit from the top to the middle of the chest, fastened with hooks. The third coat of mail is woven from steel rings (19,700 pieces) 7 mm in diameter, joined together by the “nail” method. The neckline is semi-circular, with a slit at the back of the hem.

Chain mail was intended to protect against piercing and cutting weapons. In Azerbaijan, chain mail was used from the end of the 1st millennium BC (a find in the village of Rustov in Guba District) until the beginning of the 19th century. In the period under review, chain mail was designated by the term “zireh” in Azerbaijan.

An important place in the set belongs to two protective plates (FAB inv. No. 1454, 1455). Rectangular iron plates have a convex shape. On the reverse side, each plate is reinforced with additional strips of sheet iron. On the front side of the plates, six loops are attached with rivets. Leather shoulder straps have been preserved in two loops of one of the plates. The surface of the plates is covered with gold engraving – along the edge in the form of a piping with an ornament, while in the central part there are large floral ornaments. These plates belong to the “chaharayna” (“mirror”) type of armor. Four plates of such armor were polished to a mirror shine, which is why the name arose, meaning “four mirrors”. Large plates protected the chest and back, while two small plates with underarm cutouts protected the sides. In the armor described above, only two plates have been preserved – chest and dorsal.

The iron round shield (FAB inv. No. 1456) is flat at the edges and convex in the middle. On the outer surface of the shield, there are six decorative convex overlays with scalloped edges. Of these, four hide the junction of the rings for belts, while the other two are decorative. At the time in question, the shield was designated by the term “galkhan” (from Turkic “kalkan”) in Azerbaijan.

The battle ax (FAB inv. No. 1453) consists of a wooden handle, on which a combat part cast from steel is mounted. The handle has a cone-shaped pommel and two round plates – probably for the stability of the hand grip. The warhead has a wide blade and a square peg. The surface of the combat part of the ax is covered with an engraved copper ornament. The battle ax, referred to in the sources as “tabarzin”, or “saddle ax”, was mostly used by horsemen. Such an ax made it easy to split the helmet and armor and inflict a deep wound. The hammer (peg) part allows you to deliver deafening blows, although its main function is to play the role of a counterweight and thereby reduce the inertial recoil that occurs upon impact. Even if you do not have special skills and experience, it was possible to split the shield, break through the armor or inflict heavy wounds on the enemy using such an ax.

The saber (FAB inv. No. 646) consists of a blade and a hilt. The scabbard has not been preserved. The blade is steel and strongly curved. E. Lenz, a prominent specialist in weapons of the early 20th century, said this about the art of Eastern craftsmen: “The art of blacksmiths is amazing. Using primitive handicraft techniques, they essentially managed to achieve perfection in metal work that was inaccessible for the West, despite all the improvements in its mechanical production” (4, p. 83). The hilt consists of white horn cheeks put on the blade handle, as well as an iron crosshair with an engraved gold ornament.



Fragment of the painting in the Palace of the Sheki Khans. Mid-18th century. Sheki city



The saber, designated in Azerbaijan by the term “gilinj” (Turkic “kilinch”), is a modified form of the saber of the late Middle Ages of the “shamshir” type. The characteristic bend of the hilt brought this type of saber a rather poetic name - “durnabelli gilinj” (“saber with a crane’s neck”). The Karabakh authors of the early 19th century, Mirza Adigozal and Mirza Yusif Garabaghi, mention the widespread use of the saber by soldiers of the Karabakh Khanate (5, p. 32; 6, p. 23,25, 41). Interestingly, another Karabakh author, Rzagulu Mirza Jamal-oglu, gives examples of a saber being presented as a reward or an expensive gift (7, p. 227).

Of the two daggers (FAB inv. No. 639, 640) available in the collection and belonging to the period no later than the 1830s, one has a straight blade and the other a curved one. The dagger with a straight blade is a cutting and piercing weapon with a double-edged massive blade, slightly curved at the tip. The working part of the blade is formed by two parallel blades smoothly turning into a point. A stiffening rib runs along the center of the blade from the heel to the tip on both sides. According

to experts, the forging of such a rib is the result of the gunsmith’s desire to increase the blade’s resistance to bending (4, p. 85). The tang of the blade is fitted with a painted ivory handle. The manufacture of ivory handles of cold weapons is traditional for the countries of the East and is mainly used on expensive samples. The handle is one-piece, consists of a base with shoulders (put on the heel of the blade), a handle and a head (top). The handle is attached to the shank with three rivets. The transitions from the base to the handle and from the handle to the head are very smooth. The head of the hilt is of an arched type with notches, the shape of which is traditional for Caucasian daggers. This type of dagger was designated in Azerbaijan by the term “khanjar”.

A dagger with a curved blade (one might even say a beak-shaped blade) was designated as “behubud” (in Russian sources “bebut”). The massive ivory handle is covered with carvings.

Edged weapons played a major role in social life in Azerbaijan. The weapon acted as a talisman in family rituals. It was believed that the soul of a warrior was

in the blade, and therefore, in some rituals, the weapon could symbolically replace the absent owner. Thus, the weapon was an object in which a whole complex of intricate ideas is concentrated. As a weapon for hand-to-hand combat, the dagger was used in cases where other types of weapons were not effective enough: in single combat in close quarters, it was useful in sudden and silent attacks. For professional warriors, the dagger was an additional weapon; for militia it often acted as the main cutting and stabbing weapon. Due to the convenience of wearing and ease of handling, as well as versatility (suitable for use in war, hunting, in case of emergency in everyday life), the dagger has played the role of an auxiliary weapon for many centuries and even became an accessory for men's clothing.

The flintlock gun (FAB inv. No. 638) belongs to the Caucasian type and consists of a barrel and a stock. The barrel is a round steel tube immersed in the stock, has a front sight and a simple sighting bar with a hole. In the breech, the barrel is connected to the stock by an overhead plate with holes for belts, and also by iron plates in two places. The stock is made of beautiful and durable walnut wood, which is varnished and polished. The butt of the Caucasian type has an ivory addition at the heel. Such a gun fired round (spherical) lead bullets.

A flintlock gun in Azerbaijan was designated by the term "chahmagli tufeng", but there was another, somewhat humorous name among the people – "dayan-doldurum". This expression (literally translated as "wait while I load") reflected the specifics of this muzzle-loading weapon, which required a lot of time and effort to load (8, p. 34).

A flintlock pistol of the Caucasian type (FAB inv. No. 634; total length 45.5 cm, barrel length 31.5 cm, caliber 15 mm) is distinguished by its perfect design, lightness, elegance and luxurious finish. The barrel is made of high-quality steel, round and thickened towards, decorated with a sharp convex arch ending with a palmette and a leaf-shaped top, and a floral ornament engraved with thin lines in gold. On the surface of the arch, a round mark is stamped. The flintlock is of the Caucasian type, with a double cocking, short and wide trigger lips, and a short stem. There is a fire starter, key board, escapement in the form of a faceted button, screws decorated with gold notches, floral ornament. On the underside, there is an inscription: "Worked by Ali Gulu from Karabakh". The stock is wooden, completely pasted over with black shagreen leather. The handle is slightly curved and thin.

A pistol in Azerbaijan was designated by the term "tapancha", which is still used today.

The set contains two powder flasks (FAB Inv. No. 641, 642) – an obligatory accessory for flintlock firearms. Powder flasks in the shape of a horn ("buynuz baritlig") have a large hole for

Azerbaijani rider. Artist M. Tilke. 19th century



Metal shield. 18th century. NMHA

picking up gunpowder and a small one for loading a gun or pistol.

Using illustrative sources, it is possible to establish the armament set of the Karabakh Khanate of the 18th and early 19th centuries. In particular, it follows from the battle scenes of the murals in the Palace of the Sheki Khans that the cavalymen of Azerbaijani khanates of the period under consideration were equipped with a saber (on the belt on the left), a gun (hung behind their back), a baldric with cartridges or a powder flask (passes through the left shoulder), a pistol, a dagger, occasional chain mail, a helmet, a shield, bracers, and a spear. The samples of weapons depicted on the murals are completely similar to the museum exhibits described above. We should also note the drawings of the owner of one of the collections – Karabakh poet, artist and educator Mir Mohsun Navvab (1833-1918). The weapons on his battle drawings are also quite consistent with historical materials, and, unlike palace paintings, Navvab also depicts the Chahar-Ayna armor. A very accurate image of a saber and a dagger can be seen in the drawing of Prince G. Gagarin (1810-1893) called “Tatar (Azerbaijani) Bek from Karabakh” (9). An Azerbaijani warrior armed with a saber, dagger and shield and wearing a chakhar-ayna over chain mail can be seen on the canvas that once adorned the Sardar palace in Iravan and is now kept in the Museum of Arts of Georgia (10, p. 223). Artist F.Tishel depicted an Azerbaijani horseman armed with a gun, saber and dagger in his “Tatar of the Transcaucasian Territory” (11, p. 93).

Thus, the available museum materials, written and illustrative sources make it possible to reconstruct the weaponry of Karabakh warriors of the 18th and early 19th centuries. 🌟

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Warrior. Painting on canvas on the wall of the Sardar Palace in Irevan. 18th century. National Museum of Georgia

