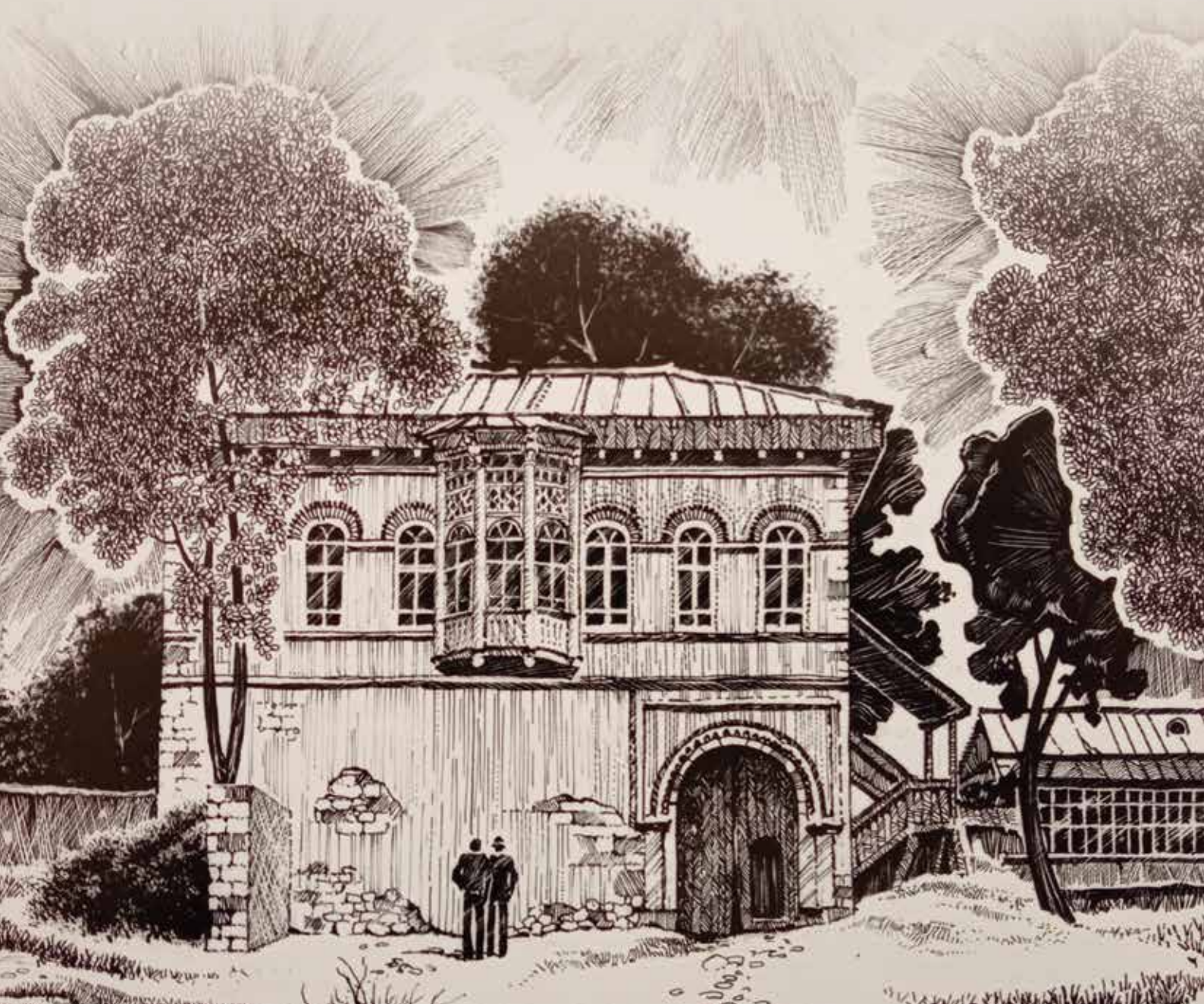
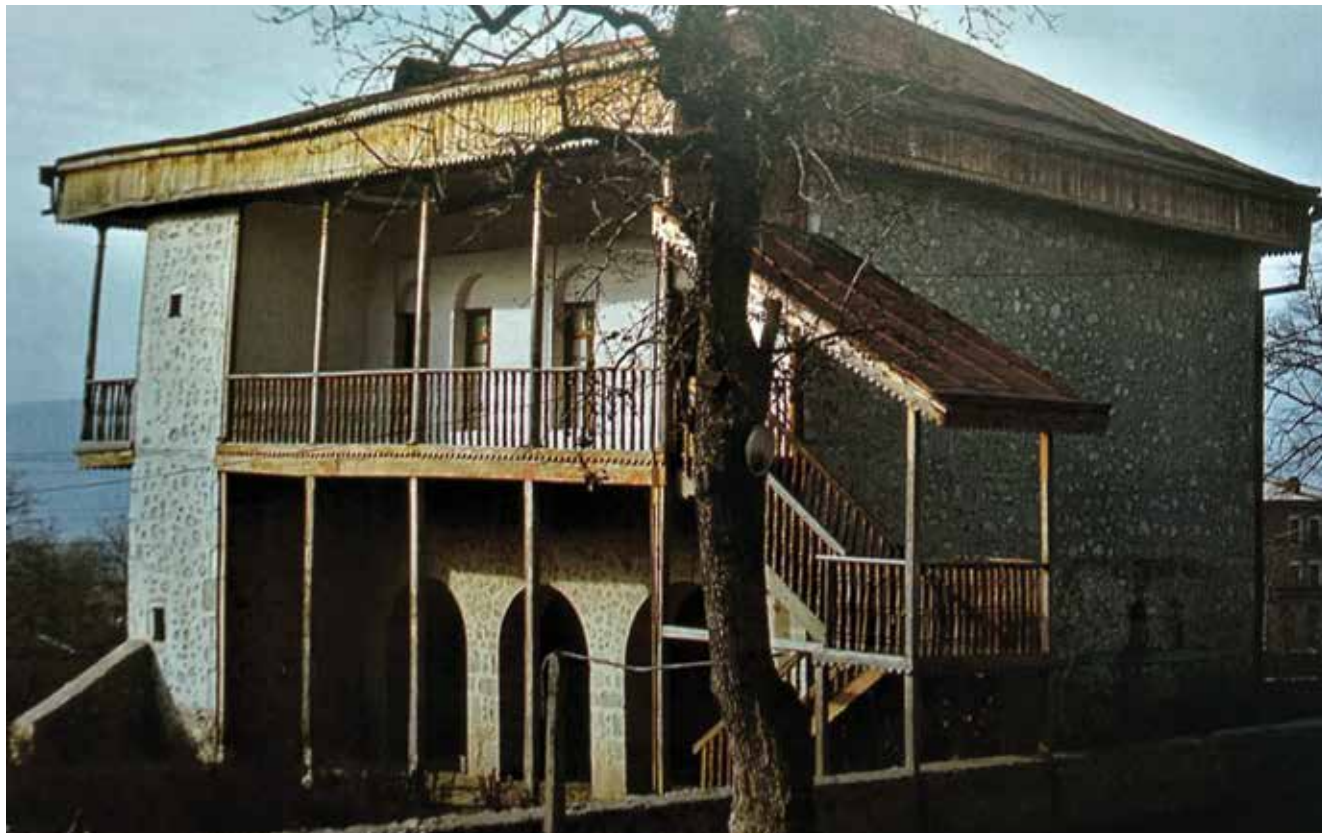


Mehmandarovs' estate in Shusha

House of the Mehmandarovs. Drawing by Elturan Avalov. 1970s



House of the Mehmandarovs. 1982

The first-ever residential homes in the city of Shusha, which was founded by Karabakh ruler Panah Ali Khan Javanshir (1693-1763) in 1752, were called the «Lower Neighborhood». Following the demise of Panah Ali Khan, his son, Ibrahim Khalil Khan (1732-1806), took the helm in Karabakh Khanate.

The second such residential area, which was built in Shusha during the reign of Ibrahim Khalil Khan Javanshir and was called the «Upper Neighborhood», included eight new neighborhoods, namely, Khanliq, Saatli, Kocharli, Mamayi, Khoja Marjanli, Damirchi, Hamam Gabaghi and Teze. Each of those neighborhoods was a one-of-the-kind “micro-district” with a mosque, a bath-house, as well as rows of trade outlets and a central part that included a fountain and stores.

The population of Shusha exceeded 10,000, according to sources traced back as early as 1795. Such agricultural facilities as pastures, fields, vineyards, fruit and mulberry gardens were located outside the city limits and a village titled “Khankandi” emerged in the area.

In accordance with the Treaty of Turkmenchay signed by Russia and the Qajar Iranian state in 1828, the territory of Karabakh was declared a part of the Russian Empire, just like the entire northern Azerbaijan.

Shusha, which was announced the center of the Shusha region, became a part of the newly established Kaspian province.

Most of the Karabakh landowners preferred to reside in the city by that time. “Shusha is an abode of the Karabakh bays,” ethnographer Ivan Seqal wrote.

The generation of Mehmandarovs, who hailed from Shusha, dates back to the period of Karabakh Khanate. Local and foreign visitors were welcomed at the ruler’s palace as early as during the Safavid state. Moreover, a government official called “mehmandar” was serving in this cabinet. He was in charge of handling all matters related to visitors. Such a position existed in the government of Nadir Shah Afshar (1736-1747) and furthermore in khanates, including Karabakh Khanate.

A man called Mirza Ali Bay served as the “mehmandar” of the Karabakh ruler, Ibrahim Khalil Khan, and later Mehdiqulu Khan, his son. Since he was publicly known as “Mehmandar Mirza Ali Bay”, his children were referred to as “the mehmandar’s children”. Mirza Ali Bay built his mansion in the Teze (New) neighborhood.

The **Mehmandarovs’ spring**. The Mehmandarovs made their noble contribution to the efforts aimed at supplying the city with drinking water. Members of this

Restoration of the Mehmandarovs' house after the liberation of Shusha. 2022


family built a branch from the main water line in front of their residence, along with a water spring. The cube-shaped "Mehmandarovs' spring" or Teze Neighborhood Spring had a pond inside and water was filled from three sources.

The facade of the spring was decorated with simple geometric patterns. The names of its builders were written in a decorative frame in the upper part. "The flow of this water spring and the repair of this water reservoir are the legacy of Mashadi Mirza Mustafa Bay and Mr. Gasim Bay Mehmandarzagada: 1317 (1899)," the inscription said.

Mustafa Bay Mehmandarov (1825-?), a son of Mirza Ali Bay, who worked at the Shusha regional department, was subsequently promoted to the civilian position of a "collegiate assessor". He was also a member of Shusha Bays Commission. Mirza Ali Bay's grandson and Mustafa Bay's fraternal nephew, Gasim Bay Mehmandarov (1835-1903), was a state servant, holding the position of a court investigator. Having headed a notary public office, he was appointed the court counselor, a high civic post.

The Mehmandarovs' estate was surrounded by a wall and a gate was placed in its part overlooking the

square. Traditionally, all the structures required to meet the needs of the Mehmandarov family were built in the courtyard of their Shusha estate. The peculiarity of the courtyard was underscored by a multitude of facilities designated for various purposes, including a horse stable, a structure slated for keeping phaetons and wagons and a tandir oven. These also included a small garden with flowers, a gazebo in the garden, a stable for a couple of cattle heads and a hen-coop in some cases, as well as a little cabin slated for a guard, servant or gardener.

The Mehmandarovs' mansion area was comprised of a large courtyard, a family mosque, as well as two buildings (a large and a small residence) built deep inside the courtyard, along with nearby residential and economic structures.

The Mehmandarovs' Mosque. The mosque, built in 1885 at the expense of funding from the Mehmandarov family on their land plot, was also known as New Neighborhood Mosque. It was open to the broad public. The shrine had a structure of similar mosques inherent to Shusha. The main building, which had a quadrangular shape, was made of stones and had a platform. The facade of the building faced the inner courtyard,

while the posterior side faced the street. Having gone upstairs from the inner courtyard, the visitor entered the section with columns and three arches and proceeded onward to the main hall of the mosque.

Four columns supported the ceiling with large arches in the central part of the hall. A dome was built in the center of the ceiling. The minaret of the mosque was shaped as a small quadrangular tower (“bouquet”) set up to the right of the roof’s dome.

The mosque was used in accordance with its designated purpose until the early 20th century, serving not just as a place of worship for families but also as a district facility.

A pharmacy was set up at the mosque owing to Abdul Karim Bay Mehmandarov’s efforts during the Soviet bans imposed on religion, widespread shutdowns and even destruction of mosques. The facility, which was known as “the green pharmacy”, mainly offered medicine made from natural plants. Thus, the initiative both allowed providing assistance to local residents and facilitated preservation of this rare architectural monument. Furthermore, Medicinal Plants Museum was launched within the mosque on July 29, 1984. The museum featured over 50 medicinal plants, ancient pharmacy equipment, books on medical science, as well as portraits of doctors who worked in Karabakh, including A. Mehmandarov, Mirza Sadiq, Mirza Mammadqulu Garabaghi, Mirza Javad and Mirza Huseyn.

The museum exhibits were looted and the available equipment damaged during the invasion of Shusha by Armenian armed forces in 1992.

The Mehmandarovs’ large estate. Although the precise date of the construction of the Mehmandarovs’ mansion is unknown, some researchers trace the building back to 1849. The two-storied building had a platform and two entrances. The first such door had a ceremonial appearance with two marble-made columns with a round cross-section upon the edges of a wide square. The columns supported the porch on the second floor. Windows were decorated and had stone-made alcoves with a semi-circular shape in their upper parts.

Glassed galleries were set up on the three sides of the building’s second floor overlooking the internal courtyard.

The large estate was mostly known among Shusha residents as the “Mehmandarov hospital”, which was due to the medical activity of Abdul Karim Bay, an outstanding member of the Mehmandarov family. Abdul

Restoration of the ceiling and its paintings in the Mehmandarovs’ house. 2022



Karim Bay made medicine using plants in one of the rooms, while receiving patients in another room. Amid a shortage of qualified medical personnel, Mehmandarov was treating patients at home, in addition to medical institutions. Mehmandarov did not decline medical aid sought by both people from urban areas and remote villages, sparing no effort to lend a helping hand.

During the clashes that occurred in 1905-1906, the heavy fighting in 1918 and in the course of the battles of March-April 1920, Mehmandarov arranged beds for those wounded and patients in his home, while relocating to the small mansion together with his family members.

Mehmandarov permanently designated his large mansion as the city hospital after major buildings of the city sustained damage in the aftermath of the 1920 crisis. Mehmandarov’s property was subsequently used as a hospital for many years. In particular, it played a tremendous role in the city’s medical system in the 1920-40s. Following the construction of modern hospitals and ambulatory care facilities in the city, Mehmandarov’s house continued to be used as a medical institution although it was no longer absolutely necessary.

On March 11, 1965, the Shusha central hospital was named after Abdul Karim Bay Mehmandarov.

House of the Mehmandarovs after restoration. 2023



The Mehmandarovs' large estate, which had served as a hospital, was completely destroyed following the occupation of Shusha by Armenian troops in 1992.

The small mansion on the Mehmandarovs' property was built in the 18th century and initially served as the Mehmandarovs' main residence. Furthermore, the mansion was used as a guest house in the second half of the 19th century. The mansion, which was used as the family's residence again during the Soviet rule, is a unique pearl of Azerbaijani architecture.

The two-storied building was designed as a square-shaped facility. The hallway opening into the entry gate on the first floor was comprised of two quadrangular parts adjoining it at a 90-degree angle. A timber-made staircase consisting of two little squares rose to the second floor from the open part. The staircase opened into the porch on the second floor. The latter, in turn, was adjoined by three rooms. One of the doors in each room opened into the porch. There was also a spacious hall across from the porch. Moreover, each of the rooms had a door opening into the hall. There was a steam oven in the hall's main part. A wooden bay window with decorative composition was attached to the hall's wall facing the courtyard (the building's facade wall).

A bay window ("arkora" in Latin) is a polygonal glassed gallery protruding beyond the building facade. Such a window provides better lighting in the room and improves its ventilation, expanding its internal space.

The door built at the hall's footing side opened into the second, lateral porch of the building. Windows were built from the hall and the rooms into the porch. Thus, windows and the bay window were important for illuminating the hall properly.

The building was constructed with the use of river rocks, while its corners and doorway were plaited with hewn stones. A horizontal board was placed following each row of several horizontally laid stones to ensure sustainability of the layout. Little steam ovens and recesses were built in the rooms. Wood-made floors were laid over the wooden logs. The building had a slanting roof cover. The ceilings of the lobby and the rooms were made of beams attached to the roof's internal logs.

Paintings upon the mansion's wall and ceiling. Art experts agree that the paintings on the ceiling and the wall of the Mehmandarovs' estate were created by Usta Gambar Garabaghi (1830s-1905). The Azerbaijani artist, who was a creator of decorative paintings and ornaments, made various decorative panels and composi-



House of the Mehmandarovs after restoration. 2023

tions that adorned the interiors of numerous residential homes in Azerbaijan in the 19th century.

Natalya Miklashevskaya (1909-1981), an art critic and scholar, comprehensively researched the artworks. She described the wall paintings in detail in an article titled "Mural Paintings of Azerbaijan", which was published in 1952. Scholars arrived at a conclusion suggesting that the lobby and rooms had a simple layout during the construction of buildings in the 18th century. Furthermore, artistic design was applied after Usta Gambar Garabaghi was asked to contribute to construction projects.

The artworks in the large hall were applied to the walls and ceiling. The big medallions of the compositions were made of the small medallions found inside them. Patterns featuring shamrock, "buta" ("bud") and

little flowers were applied inside these medallions.

"Small white birds drawn with a gray-blue circle are depicted symmetrically on the edges of the medallions between the flowers," Miklashevskaya wrote.

"The birds disappear amidst the flowers, but if we take a closer look, the composition is completed with their lively, subtle image... The overall composition and hues of the paintings resemble a Karabakh carpet both in terms of their main colors and design," the art critic concluded.

Although the ceiling decoration in the large room is reminiscent of the decorated ceilings of the Palace of Shaki Khans and the House of Shakikhanovs, its patterns are rather similar to the style of carpet-weaving from the viewpoint of the colors used and the overall composition.

Large hall in the Mehmandarovs' house after restoration. 2023



Miklashevskaya commented on the wall paintings in the small room as well.

“The plot of the murals is composed of inter-linked white and blue medallions lined up in a row, as if they create a lattice pattern,” Miklashevskaya said. “The circles of the medallions are stylized plant branches. Flower garlands in vases are the main wall paintings created in the spaces seen in between...The flower compositions were depicted in white color against the backdrop of a somewhat blackened wall... A stylized vegetational ornament featuring white and pink flowers and leaves was applied throughout the blue-colored background of the frieze. In its background, four different medallions alternate, in compliance with relevant shapes and colors.... The interchanging colors of the medallions’ background are green, red, light yellow and white. A big blue flower separated by bronze-colored branches and leaves was depicted in the center...The plots of the compositions are diverse. In addition to the most ordinary still-life paintings, the artist depicts the characteristic movements of birds and animals expressively... The “Deers and Pomegranate Tree” panel’s composition occupies the entire area of the medallion... “Bouquets in flower bowls” framed by a thin half-column arched gate

were depicted in two equal spaces on the sides of the central recess.”

The compositions featured pigeons, parrots, peacocks, pheasants and ducks, as well as deers. The images also included the still-life painting titled “Pear on a plate” as well as other items. A part of these images was displayed in the panels of the Palace of Shaki Khans and the House of Shakikhanovs, which Usta Gambar worked on thereafter.

The carpet museum in the Mehmandarovs’ small mansion. Since the large estate of the Mehmandarovs was used to provide medical aid to residents, the family lived in the small residence instead. This dwelling space was considered sufficient given that Abdul Karim Bay’s children had grown up and owned their own properties. However, as a result of Abdul Karim Bay’s death and the fact that several members of his family were subjected to repressions by Stalin’s government, the small residence lacked proper maintenance and gradually became unsuitable for dwelling.

According to a decision passed by the USSR Cabinet of Ministers on August 10, 1977, the historical part of the city of Shusha was declared Historical-Architectural Reserve. The decision was a great success for Heydar

Aliyev, who led the republic at the time. The measure allowed for compiling the passports of historical buildings in Shusha and allocating funds for their overhaul and restoration.

Extensive efforts have been made to establish the Shusha branch of the Baku-based State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpet and People's Applied Art, which was aimed at promoting Karabakh carpets. Once relevant exhibits were collected, an initiative was put forward to set up the museum branch in the Mehmandarovs' small mansion.

As mentioned above, the passport for the Mehmandarovs' complex was issued for the first time by the Azerbaijan SSR's Ministry of Culture during Heydar Aliyev's tenure in 1977-78. Thus, repair and restoration work was tackled in the Mehmandarovs' mansion.

Finally, the Azerbaijan SSR's Ministry of Culture issued an order No.502 dated September 26, 1985, which envisaged establishing a branch of the State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpet and People's Applied Art at the

Mehmandarovs' house located on F. Kocharli St., 17 in Shusha. The museum, known among the city's residents as "Shusha Carpet Museum", started operating on May 19, 1987. The displayed exhibits included carpets with and without naps, artistic embroidery, samples of national clothing, jewelry and artistic metal items. The museum, which showcased over 200 exhibits, became publicly known as a facility featuring marvelous samples of Karabakh decorative and applied art.

The Mehmandarovs' estate during the Armenian occupation of Shusha. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which broke out in the late 1980s and Armenia's groundless territorial claims against Azerbaijan disrupted the planned initiatives regarding museums. Shusha, which was preventing the Armenians from materializing their plans, became one of the enemy's main targets. Amid chaos that started and an ongoing power struggle in the country, Shusha was relying on its own self-defense. On May 8, 1992, Armenian armed forces invaded the impregnable fortress town of Shusha



Restored spring of the Mehmandarovs. 2023

Restored mosque of the Mehmandarovs. 2023

as a result of treason. Its occupation facilitated a further invasion of Karabakh and the surrounding territories. Furthermore, Karabakh and seven surrounding districts were invaded in 1992-1993.

Nevertheless, most of the exhibits displayed at the Shusha branch of the State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpet and People's Applied Art, which was located at the Mehmandarovs' house, were successfully removed shortly before Shusha's invasion. 183 of the 246 exhibits, including 80 carpets with naps, 35 carpets without naps, 39 jewelry items, 29 artistic embroidery and national clothing samples were delivered to Baku in 1992.

The Armenians, who had invaded 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory, deliberately destroyed historical and cultural sites in a bid to eliminate the traces of the Azerbaijani people in the area. Numerous monuments were falsified and geographic names altered. Comprehensive damage and destruction of the historical and cultural monuments inflicted during the occupation of Azerbaijani territory ran counter to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the

Event of Armed Conflict, the 1972 UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 1992 European Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage.

Nevertheless, the Armenian destructive actions continued amid the indifference and even pro-Armenian policy of world powers and influential international organizations. Thus, falsification activities were launched at the Mehmandarovs' mansion. Moreover, the Armenians set up Geology Museum at the family mosque of the Mehmandarovs' estate during the occupation period.

In keeping with the Armenian traditions of forgery, "a stone displaying an ancient Armenian cross" was initially placed near the mosque. Afterwards, the Armenians brought an alleged 146 million year-old rock to the area in an effort to draw public attention and make a sensation out of their actions. Furthermore, the Armenian communities in 48 countries around the world as well as 20 regions of the Russian Federation followed suit, sending various rocks to the area.

The Mehmandarovs' small residence was also subjected to falsifications. First, it was reported that the house was allegedly owned by Tadevos Tamiryants, an Armenian millionaire, and the property's "reconstruction" was launched. Afterwards, a fake facility called "Shushi Museum of History" was set up in the city. Having collected items from the homes of the Azerbaijanis evicted from Shusha, organizers started exhibiting them as "ancient Armenian things". A section dedicated to the so-called "invincible Armenian army" was set up in one of the rooms as well.

The Mehmandarovs' large residence was completely destroyed. The enemy sought to wipe out entirely the hospital named after Abdul Karim Bay Mehmandarov and even erase it from people's memories.

Falsifications, indifferent and insulting handling of historical buildings took a toll on the condition of all structures located in the Mehmandarovs' estate. This predicament persisted until September 2020.

Azerbaijani armed forces waged a 44-day war, inflicting a crushing defeat upon the enemy, under the leadership of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev. The Azerbaijani army liberated Karabakh, including Shusha, which lies at the heart of the region.

Overhaul and reconstruction operations. Following Azerbaijan's glorious victory, an objective was further set forth to revitalize Karabakh and carry out reconstruction work in the region. Therefore, reconstruction of the Mehmandarovs' estate, which is a significant historical, cultural and architectural monument, was launched by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva viewed progress of the restoration work at Mehmandarovs' Estate Complex in Shusha on November 7, 2021, on May 10, 2022 and September 28, 2022. All the structures in the Mehmandarovs' estate area as well as the water spring located across from the property were overhauled. Both local and foreign experts contributed to the restoration project.

On May 9, 2023, President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva attended the inaugural ceremony of Mehmandarovs' Estate Complex following the restoration operations, which were carried out by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, in Shusha.

The "Karabakh nobleman's house" museum exposition. The interior of a Karabakh nobleman's home in the late 19th and the early 20th century and peculiarities of an intellectual's lifestyle were taken as a basis

Interior of the Mehmandarovs' mosque after restoration. 2023



while arranging the "Karabakh nobleman's house" museum exposition at the estate. The most modern interior elements were used in the parlor as it manifested the overall image of a nobleman's residence. There were also features displaying national traits in this room.

In addition to national items, the mansion's rooms were decorated by European-style domestic samples.

The rooms and exhibits were designed in compliance with the standards set for the interiors dating back to the late 19th-early 20th century. Visitors feel as if they ended up in the home of an Azerbaijani nobleman who lived in this historical period. More than 150 antique items were used while the exposition was being set up.

The restored historical phaeton seen outside the residence, which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, complies with the technology of that period.

Overall, the Mehmandarovs' estate, which is one of the outstanding Azerbaijani historical monuments, was declared open to host numerous visitors arriving in Shusha. 🌱