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Rahiba Aliyeva
Dc.Sc. (Architecture)
Institute of Architecture and Art of ANAS
(Azerbaijan)

rahibe_eliyeva@mail.ru

WITNESS OF EIGHT CENTURIES: THE MAGNIFICENCE OF AJAMI ART

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Abstract. The article deals with architect Ajami Abubakir oglu Nakhchivani's work, whose 900th anniversary is celebrated, who brought the architecture of Nakhchivan to the peak of medieval architecture. His work was associated with the city of Nakhchivan, the capital of the powerful Atabegs State, which occupies a special place in the history of Azerbaijani statehood and was one of the centers of culture, science, trade and art of the Middle East. Ajami Nakhchivani's work was a striking manifestation of the rise of Azerbaijani cultural and social thought in the 12th century. The mausoleums of Yusif ibn Kuseyir and Momina Khatun, which are among the magnificent monuments that have survived to our time in the city of Nakhchivan and the product of Ajami's genius, occupy a worthy place among the masterpieces of the Islamic world. The architect was also the author of the Atabegs' Palace complex, the Juma Mosque and the complex's entrance portal with a twin minaret. Ajami's brilliant legacy served as a model and had a strong influence on the architecture of Azerbaijan and the Middle East countries in the following centuries.

Key words: Ajami Nakhchivani, mausoleum architecture, Yusif ibn Kuseyir, Momina Khatun, Juma Mosque, Twin Minaret Entrance Portal, Nakhchivan

Introduction. Architect Ajami Nakhchivani's legacy, whose 900th anniversary we are celebrating, can be regarded as the pinnacle of medieval architecture. Ajami Nakhchivani was a great master who set a new direction

for Azerbaijani architecture and brought elegance and dynamism to the architectural style of the period. His work were associated with the city of Nakhchivan, the capital of the powerful Atabegs State, which held a special place in the history of Azerbaijani statehood and was one of the centers of culture, science, trade and art of the Middle East. Ajami Nakhchivani's work was a striking manifestation of the rise of the Azerbaijani cultural and social thought in the 12th century. The mausoleums of Yusif ibn Kuseyir and Momina Khatun, which are among the magnificent monuments that have survived to our time in the city of Nakhchivan and the product of Ajami's genius, occupy a worthy place among the masterpieces of the Islamic world. These monumental buildings are immortal pearls of art of unparalleled beauty, distinguished by their elegant composition and aesthetic perfection. Ajami's remarkable legacy played the role of a school, and it had a strong influence on the architecture of Azerbaijan and the Middle East countries in the following centuries (Fig. 1).

The interpretation of the main material. Since the monumental examples of Islamic architecture mainly date from the 11th to the 14th centuries, this period is called the Renaissance of architecture, as well as art. The works of art created by the architects led to the formation of the Nakhchivan-Maragha architectural schools, which emerged from the combination of socio-economic, local natural conditions, as well as construction materials typical of the feudal period. Nakhchivan architects developed unique, distinctive methods in the volume-composition structure of architectural buildings in Eastern architecture. Geometric ornamentation, mathematical divisions and the use of highly effective construction methods are also characteristic features of this school's architecture [2].

Nakhchivan was also a center of high applied and decorative arts in the 12th century. Brick masonry, brick-built construction devices, skillful use of bricks of various shapes and the addition of shades of tile and alabaster to the monotony of bricks enriched further the architectural decoration for the Nakhchivan school of architecture.

Ajami Abubakr oglu Nakhchivani, the creator behind these great achievements, the one who ensured its prosperity, the classic of architectural manifestation and the one who brought the Nakhchivan architectural school to the wide international stage, was born in Nakhchivan in 1126, lived and worked here. This architectural heritage, revived in our time, gives reason to say with confidence that Ajami Nakhchivani was an incomparable architect

of his time – the 12th century. Ajami's legacy attracts attention with a number of unique peculiarities and has fulfilled the function of preserving heritage.

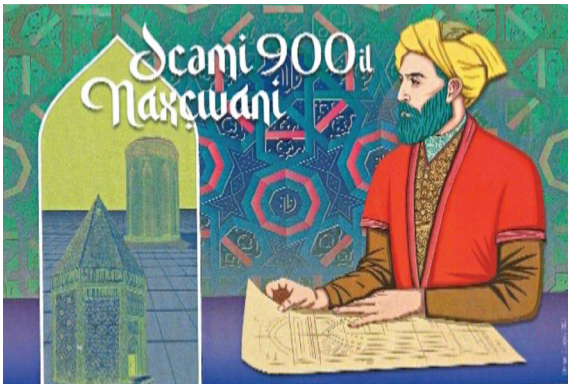


Fig. 1. Ajami Seyrangah in Nakhchivan and an anniversary stamp dedicated to Ajami's 900th anniversary

Ajami Nakhchivani was a palace architect. He created a number of buildings of the Atabegs State. Although the Atabegs' "Darul-mulk" palace complex, the adjacent Juma Mosque, the entrance portal to the complex, etc. have not survived to the present day, written sources confirm its existence. The information provided by B.A.Engelgard in the 19th century is of great interest. "The Turkish mosque is a large building with arches made of hewn stone, and inside which traces of various highly artistic stucco (probably alabaster) patterns can be seen. Part of the building has already collapsed, and the rest is in danger of collapsing at any moment. 50 sazhens (about 107 m) away from it is a gate with twin minarets, each 10 sazhens high, which once belonged to this mosque. The space between the mosque and the gate was previously occupied by buildings belonging to the mosque, but now that these buildings are no longer there, it seems that the gate belongs to a special tower (the Momina Khatun Mausoleum) situated very close to it" [2].

It is quite clear that the mosque in question belongs to the Nakhchivan Juma Mosque. It is obvious from the written material that the main arch (portal) with a twin minaret was connected to the Juma Mosque with various buildings, probably with madrasah cells and porticoed galleries, and it can be assumed that this portal opened onto the mosque's courtyard (Fig.2).

Fig. 2. General view of the architectural complex at the late 19th century. From left to right: portal with twin minarets, the Momuna Khatun Mausoleum and the mosque. Drawing by Eduard Jacobstahl

Historical records indicate that there was once a madrasah within the Atabegs complex. There is no doubt that this madrasah was directly connected to the Juma Mosque. It is more likely that the main arch with twin minaret served as a gateway to a large courtyard where religious and memorial buildings (mosque, mausoleum, madrasah) of the Atabegs complex were concentrated. If the first buildings of the Atabegs complex were the palace and a house of the state, then the later structures were the mosque and the entrance arch, the only images of which have been preserved to this day [2].

One of the distinctive features of Ajami's work is the prevalence of features typical of memorial buildings in his architectural style and compositions. This was the result of specific historical circumstances. One of the striking features of the period before the 12th century was the strengthening of local rulers alongside the weakening of the Arab Caliphate. This process was also observed in a number of Middle Eastern countries. Rulers governed by preferring secular principles over religious dogmas, trying to demonstrate their greatness and wealth. These tendencies were especially weakened in the 12th century, and besides displays of power, they used art to widely promote their dynasty among the masses.

Yusif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum. A magnificent architectural structure, known locally as the "Atababa Dome" ("Ancestral Dome") and as the Yusif

ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum in academic literature, is located in the center of Nakhchivan and is the earliest surviving example of Ajami's architecture. This unique monument, with a history of over 900 years, still occupies a special place in the visual appearance of the city today thanks to its structural strength. The mausoleum, which had suffered the effects of centuries, was given a new lease of life in the 1950s and 1960s following the restoration of its destroyed parts and the strengthening of its structures [1].

The constructive structure and engineering design of the memorial buildings created by the architect are concentrated in the underground serdab and the above-ground section of the buildings, which resembles a tower.

The monument was built of baked bricks in 1162. The octagonal layout of the serdab is repeated inside and outside the above-ground part of the building. The serdab is covered with a flat dome according to the layout. The above-ground chamber of the memorial building is completed with a pyramidal roof structure, the interior is simple, and all the facades of the exterior are decorated with various geometric patterns. The architect's name is written in Kufic script on the left side of the entrance door: "Əməli Əcəmi bin Əbubəkr, əlbənnai ən Naxçıvani" ("Author Ajami bin Abubakr, master in Nakhchivan").

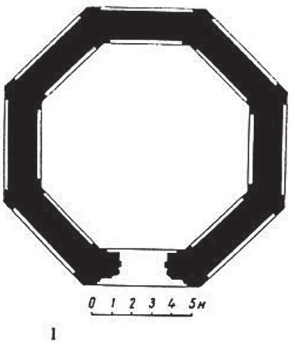


Fig. 3. Yusif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum – facade, layout and section

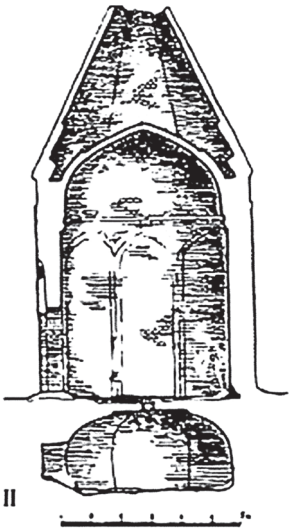


Fig. 4. Yusif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum

Fig. 5. Entrance to the Yusif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum

Momina Khatun Mausoleum. This building, which stands as one of the outstanding artistic examples of the mausoleum architecture of the Seljuk period, a masterpiece of medieval Azerbaijani architecture, as well as Ajami's work, is distinguished by the genuine monumentality instilled in its overall appearance and the characteristic elegance of its individual units. The information that the memorial mausoleum was built by the ruler Atabeg Eldiguz is reflected in the strip-frieze between the prismatic body of the building and the tent-like roof: "... the educated just ruler of the world, the great conqueror and the honor of Muslims Shamsaddin Nusrat al-Islam ordered to build this mausoleum in memory of Momina Khatun! ..." If the mathematical codes of the complex geometric patterns, which do not repeat each other across the ten sides of the mausoleum, are a manifestation of Ajami's mathematical and astronomical knowledge, then the words on the frieze above the mausoleum:

We go, but the world remains,

We die, the work remains a legacy! – these words are an expression of Ajami's philosophy in the architectural language [6].

The Momina Khatun Mausoleum was built 26 years after the Yusif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum by the master architect. This is reflected in the monumentality of the work of art, the individuality of the composition, the principles and elements of decorative ornaments – in short, in the development of the architect's thinking and work. The Momina Khatun Mausoleum reflects a more fluent development of the already established compositional principles in terms of art and architecture. Like the Yusif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum, the Momina Khatun Mausoleum consists of two chambers: an underground serdab and an above-ground tower-like structure. The serdab is circular in the layout. The layout of the serdab is designed in an interesting way. An arch was built from the capital of the mushroom-shaped, decagonal support column in the center towards each corner of the decagon. The interior space of the underground part was defined by the construction scheme adopted for the roof structure. This structure ensured the static stability of the building. The sides of the serdab are roofed with a vaulted ceiling supported by a solid column in the center. All the decoration of the Momina Khatun Mausoleum is concentrated on its exterior surface. Ajami, who presented himself as "al-Banna" ("Stone-master") in his architectural works, held the title of "sheikh al-engineer" (chief engineer), as mentioned in one manuscript [2]. This is explained by the fusion of mathematical, astronomical and other scientific knowledge with artistic skill among various craftsmen from a professional perspective.

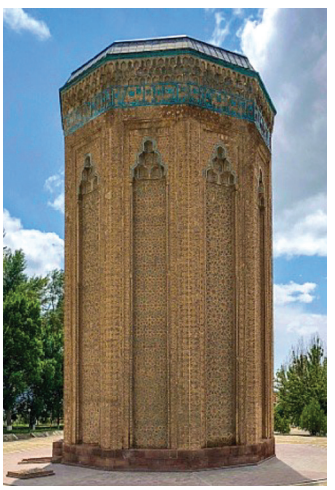
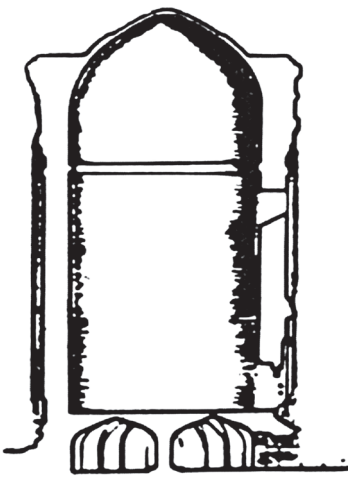
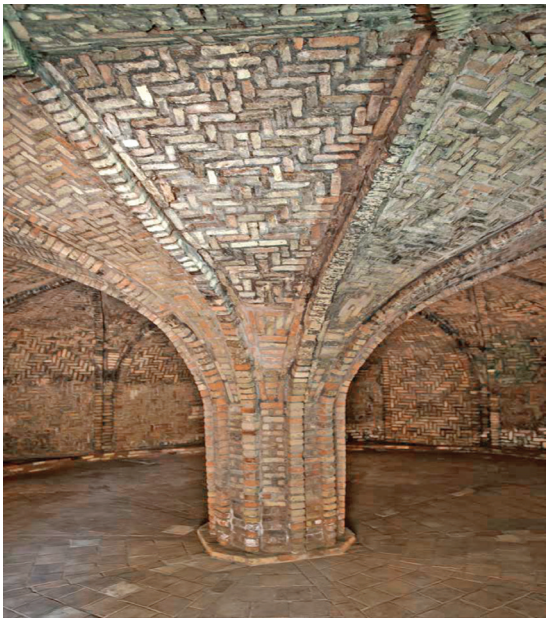


Fig. 6.Momuna Khatun Mausoleum, section and layout





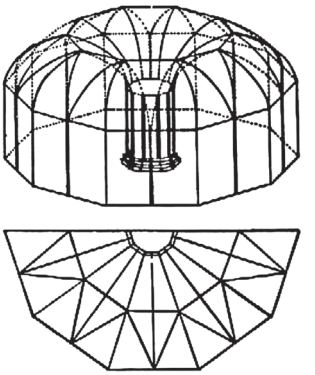


Fig. 7. Support structure of Momina Khatun Mausoleum

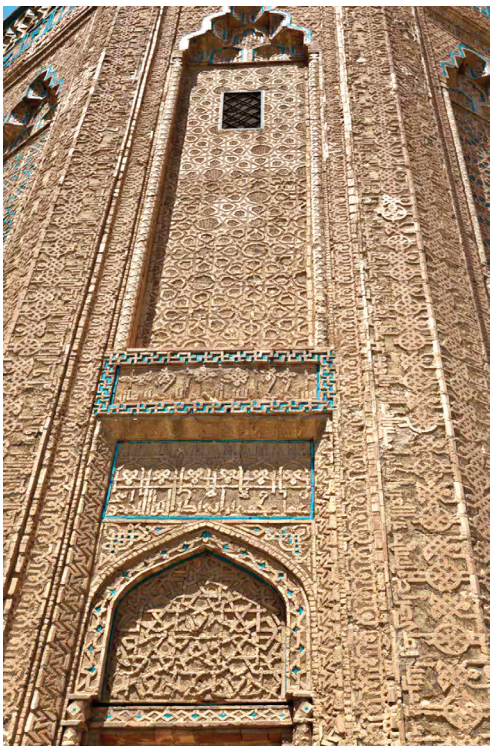


Fig. 8. Exterior ornaments of the Momina Khatun Mausoleum

Such mausoleums, reaching heights of up to 30 meters, immortalized the memory of the buried person through their external divisions and grandeur, and evoked respect for his/her personality. Ornamental decorations, decorative portals and inscriptions mentioning the architect and the customer's names on the monuments also serve this purpose. If the memory of the ruler was immortalized through statues in Western Europe in the Middle Ages, it was realized through these mausoleums in the East. The monuments of Nakhchivan created by Ajami have served as architectural examples worthy of imitation not only in Azerbaijan, but also far beyond its borders for centuries. The architectural techniques characteristic of Ajami are also evident in one form or another in a number of monuments created in Nakhchivan and neighboring areas. This influence extends across a wide territory, from Barda in the north to Hamadan and Zanjan in the south, as well as to Iran, Turkey and the countries of Central Asia [4].

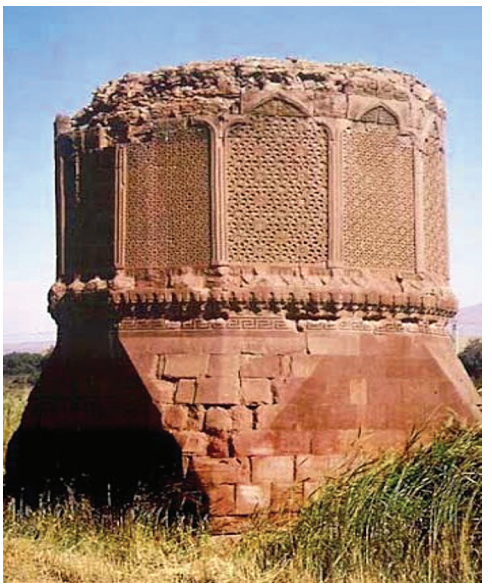


Fig. 9. Gulustan and the Karabakhlar mausoleums

Conclusion. The abovementioned buildings are not just architecture structures, but a living monument of 12th century Azerbaijani science, geometry and philosophy. Monuments are innovations brought not only to Azerbaijan, but also to Islamic Eastern architecture as a whole. Ajami's legacy is a great school for modern architects that still needs to be learned.

The inclusion of the 900th anniversary of the Great Architect in the list of anniversaries to be celebrated within the framework of UNESCO in 2026 represents an important step towards promoting the rich, centuries-old culture of the Azerbaijani people on an international scale.

The 900th anniversary of Ajami Abubakir oglu Nakhchivani's birth was celebrated at UNESCO Headquarters on December 15, 2025, in accordance with the decision adopted at the 42nd session of the UNESCO General Conference as part of UNESCO's program of activities for 2024-2025.

The event-exhibition was organized with the support of the National Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan for UNESCO, the joint organization of the Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, the Union of Architects of Azerbaijan and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation and in partnership with UNESCO. The event featured photo examples reflecting the master architect's architectural legacy, as well as stamps issued by the Union of Architects of Azerbaijan in his honor. The presentation of the book "Ajami Abubakir oglu Nakhchivani – 900, the genius of Azerbaijani architecture" was also held in the event. The author of the book is Rahiba Aliyeva, Doctor of Architecture, Associate Professor.

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Rahibə Əliyeva *(Azərbaycan)*

SƏKKİZ ƏSRİN ŞAHİDİ: ƏCƏMİ SƏNƏTİNİN ƏZƏMƏTİ

Məqalədə orta əsr memarlığını zirvəyə yüksəldən, 900 illik yubileyi qeyd olunan memar Əcəmi Əbubəkr oğlu Naxçıvaninin yaradıcılığından bəhs edilir.

Onun fəaliyyəti Azərbaycan dövlətçilik tarixində xüsusi yer tutan qüdrətli Atabəylər dövlətinin paytaxtı olmuş, Yaxın Şərqin mədəniyyət, elm, ticarət və incəsənət mərkəzlərindən biri sayılan Naxçıvan şəhəri ilə bağlı olmuşdur. Əcəmi Naxçıvaninin yaradıcılığı XII əsrdə Azərbaycan mədəni və ictimai fikrinin yüksəlişinin parlaq təzahürü idi. Naxçıvan şəhərində günümüzədək qorunub saxlanılmış möhtəşəm abidələrdən olan və Əcəmi dühasının məhsulu sayılan Yusif ibn Küseyir və Möminə xatun türbələri İslam dünyasının şah əsərləri sırasında layiqli yer tutur. Memar eyni zamanda Atabəylər sarayı kompleksinin, Cümə məscidinin və kompleksin qoşa minarəli baştağının müəllifi olmuşdur. Əcəminin parlaq irsi sonrakı əsrlərdə Azərbaycan və Yaxın Şərq ölkələrinin memarlığı üçün nümunə rolunu oynamış və güclü təsir göstərmişdir.

Açar sözlər: Əcəmi Naxçıvani, türbə memarlığı, Yusif ibn Küseyir, Möminə xatun, Cümə məscidi.

Рахиба Алиева ***(Азербайджан)***

СВИДЕТЕЛЬ ВОСЬМИ ВЕКОВ: ВЕЛИЧИЕ ИСКУССТВА АДЖАМИ

В статье рассматривается творчество архитектора Аджами Абу-Бакр оглы Нахчывани, 900-летний юбилей которого отмечается в настоящее время и который возвёл нахчыванскую архитектуру на вершину средневекового зодчества. Его деятельность была связана с городом Нахчыван – столицей могущественного государства Атабеков, занимающего особое место в истории азербайджанской государственности и являвшегося одним из центров культуры, науки, торговли и искусства Ближнего Востока. Творчество Аджами Нахчывани стало ярким проявлением расцвета азербайджанской культурной и общественной мысли XII века. Мавзолеи Юсифа ибн Кусейира и Момине-хатун, являющиеся выдающимися памятниками, сохранившимися до наших дней в городе Нахчыван и созданными гением Аджами, занимают достойное место среди шедевров исламского мира. Архитектор также был автором комплекса дворца Атабеков, Джума-мечети и входного портала комплекса с двойным минаретом. Блестящее наследие Аджами в последующие века служило образцом и оказало сильное влияние на архитектуру Азербайджана и стран Ближнего Востока.

Ключевые слова: Аджами Нахчывани, архитектура мавзолеев, Юсиф ибн Кусейир, Момине-хатун, Джума-мечеть.