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ARTISTIC FEATURES OF AZERBAIJANI RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IN THE PERIOD OF INDEPENDENCE

https://doi.org/10.59849/2310-5399.2026.2.102

Abstract. In the period of independence, the artistic style and symbolic expressions reflected in the architectural language of religious temples engage in a dialogue with both local and global architectural trends, thereby contributing to the formation of national identity and the enrichment of culture. At the same time, these buildings also play an important role in terms of tourism and economic development. This article aims to present new perspectives for the preservation of cultural heritage at both a theoretical and practical level by scientifically analyzing the complex artistic characteristics of Azerbaijani religious buildings and their ways of expression in the modern socio-cultural context. The comprehensive analysis of the artistic style of various religious monuments such as mosques, mausoleums, churches, and synagogues provides a broader and more integrated perspective compared to studies in the existing literature that focus on individual structures separately.

Key words: religious monuments, mosque, church, synagogue, artistic features.

Introduction. In the period of independence, the comprehensive study of religious monuments restored and newly constructed in Azerbaijan, as well as the analysis of their artistic design, is considered one of the leading issues in art history. Before any intervention in a historical monument, it is essential to study and examine its structure and the current condition of its artistic elements. For this purpose, modern technologies are used; for example, 3D laser scanning and photogrammetry ensure the monitoring and digital documentation of monuments. X-ray fluorescence (XRF) and Fourier transform infrared

spectroscopy (FTIR) analyses play a decisive role in accurately determining the chemical composition of pigments, mortars, and binding components, and in selecting appropriate restoration materials. Microbiological analyses evaluate the presence of biological agents such as algae, lichens, and fungi and their level of impact on the monument. The methods applied in the restoration process must be based on the principle of using materials that are chemically and mechanically compatible with the original materials and do not create contradictions with them.

The interpretation of the main material. During the period of independence, important steps have been taken in the development of religious architectural monuments in the Baku and Absheron region of Azerbaijan, which is distinguished by the richness and diversity of its architectural heritage. The "Heydar" Mosque, the most magnificent and majestic religious center in the Caucasus, with three balconies and four elegant minarets, was constructed in 2012–2014 by order of President Ilham Aliyev. The building, created through the synthesis of local artistic traditions and modern architecture, has a façade clad with special stones in the Shirvan-Absheron architectural style, while the richness of vegetal and geometric ornaments in the interior gives the monument a special architectural harmony. Built according to the design of Honored Architect Adalat Mammadov, this monumental structure located in the Binagadi district of Baku is decorated inside with exquisite examples of Azerbaijani stone carving art.

Located in the Shuvelan settlement of Absheron and built in 1994, the religious monument – the "Mir Movsum Agha" shrine complex – attracts both local residents and tourists with its mysterious monumentality and delicate decorative design. Constructed from stone and brick, which are considered local architectural ele-

Fig. 1. "Mir Movsum Agha" Shrine Complex. 1992–1994. Absheron.

ments, both domes of the monument are covered with majolica (colored ceramics) characteristic of Central Asian (Bukhara, Samarkand) architecture (Fig. 1). Unlike other religious monuments in the Baku and Absheron area, the mosque's dome covering, resembling an Eastern carpet laid over it, is decorated with blue tiles, while the entrance portal is adorned with vegetal and geometric ornaments and exquisite examples of Arabic calligraphy. The monument, in whose construction architects from Isfahan participated, features a single-balcony minaret decorated with blue and green tiles, muqarnas (stalactites), arch-like elements, and Qur'anic verses written in the Nastaliq script.

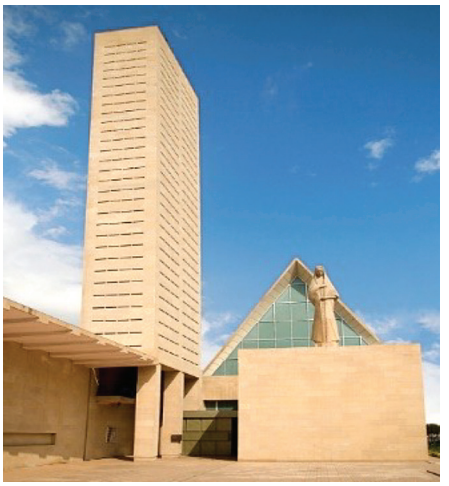

Fig. 2. "Saint Mary" Church. Baku. 2007.

The "Saint Mary" Church (Fig. 2), the only Catholic church in Azerbaijan, was built in Baku in 2007 in the modern Neo-Gothic style. "The mosaics placed on the churchyard wall feature motifs characteristic of Christianity; one of them depicts Jesus Christ carrying the cross. The windows are decorated with stained glass. The large rose window located in the center of the façade, between the two bell towers, plays an important role in illuminating the monument and creates a mystical atmosphere in the temple. A statue of the Virgin Mary is placed on the façade. One of the most remarkable points of the interior space is the view of religious-themed artistic sculptures in the altar section" [7].

During the years of independence, two new synagogues have been built in Azerbaijan, both located in the capital city of Baku: the synagogue of the Ashkenazi Jews (2003) and the synagogue of the Mountain Jews (2011). The three-story religious monument characteristic of the Ashkenazi Jews, who have settled in Baku since the early nineteenth century, has a simple and functional structure. The synagogue, built in the Jerusalem architectural style, was designed by architect Alexander Herbert. Both monuments were constructed from white stone. In the interior of the synagogue belonging to the Mountain Jews, carved wooden elements and ornaments composed of the symbolic Star of David attract attention. In addition, this synagogue preserves the menorah

(seven-branched candelabrum) and the Torah, which are characteristic of the Jewish religious community.

In Azerbaijan, there are religious monuments that bear the traces of classical Ottoman architecture ("Martyrs" Mosque, Mehdiabad "Juma" Mosque, "Theology" Mosque, the minaret of the Quba "Juma" Mosque), which were built after the country gained independence, in 1993–1997, by the "Gintash" Joint-Stock Company of the Turkish Diyanet Foundation. The completion of the minarets with conical coverings, the use of natural stone materials, symmetry and balance, stalactite mihrabs, the use of wood carving in the creation of the delicately crafted minbar, and the harmonious placement of domes are characteristic features of these monuments. One of the majestic monuments that underwent large-scale restoration is the "Tazapir" Mosque in Baku, whose history dates back to the 14th–15th centuries. During the restoration carried out in 2005–2009 under the instruction of President Ilham Aliyev, the architect Adalat Mammadov, who led the project for the restoration and redevelopment of the surrounding areas, preserved the features of the Shirvan-Absheron architectural school. The stars affixed to the interior of the monument during the Soviet period were removed during restoration and replaced with exquisite ornamental painting (Fig. 3). "Carpet artist Eldar Mikayilzade played a major role in this work" [1]. The surfaces of both minarets and the inscription bands of the dome were decorated with the highest-quality gold plates brought from Germany.

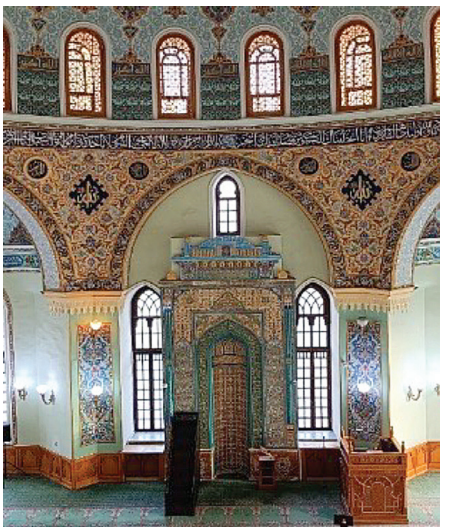

Fig. 3. Interior of the Tazapir Mosque. Baku. 2009.

The "Holy Myrrhbearers" Church, built in the early twentieth century by architect Fyodor Mikhailovich Verzhbitsky in the style of new Russian architecture, is currently the main cathedral church of the capital. After Azerbaijan gained independence, the monument was restored to its previous status and underwent major state restoration in 2003 and 2013. During the restoration, the original design plan of the church was preserved, stained glass windows were renewed, delicate stone carvings were executed, and a carved stone

iconostasis was erected in the interior. In addition, the church area was transformed into a complex, and a special building was constructed for the rest of priests and deacons.

Another monument belonging to the Christian religious community that underwent large-scale restoration during the period of independence is the "Archangel Michael" Church (19th century). In 2006, a passage dedicated to the Apostle Bartholomew was created in the lower part of the monument. The restoration project of the Archangel Michael Church, which underwent major restoration in 2020–2021, was led by Azerbaijani architect Sabir Maharramov. Within the framework of the restoration of the monument, built in the Orthodox "cross-in-square" style, a gilded dome and a central bell tower were installed, and the interior icons were renewed by leading artists of the Moscow State Academy of Art and Design.

The "Shah Abbas" Mosque (early 17th century), located in the Nizami district of Baku and built during the reign of Safavid ruler Shah Abbas I, was comprehensively restored in 2022–2023 by order of President Ilham Aliyev. Considered one of the prominent examples of the Shirvan-Absheron architectural school, the restoration of this square-shaped monument included several key innovations: the demolition and reconstruction of the ruined administrative building in the courtyard, the construction of a new single-balcony minaret in the same style, the renovation of the mihrab, and the replacement of the dome covering. After restoration, the façade cladding stones of the monument were also renewed (Fig. 4).

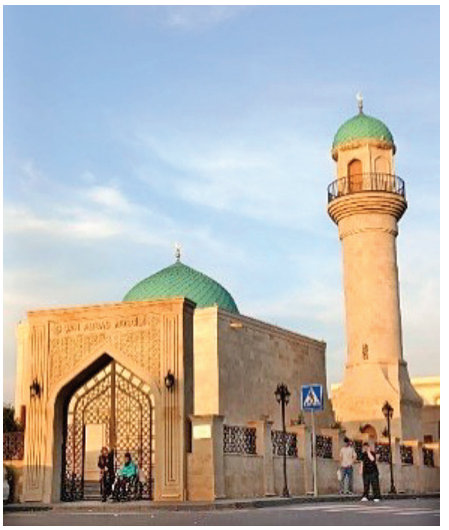

Fig. 4. "Shah Abbas" Mosque. Baku. Restoration period: 2022–2023.

One of the important restored religious monuments in the regions of the Republic is the 19th-century "Alexander Nevsky" Church located in the city of Ganja. The monument was repaired in 2017 on the occasion of the 130th anniversary of its construction. Built from fired bricks known as "plinf," the church has a simple and laconic appearance. During its restoration, its original architectural style (Byzantine architecture) was preserved, and the icons and

medallions in the interior were restored. However, on October 8, 2020, during the Armenian rocket attack on Ganja, the Alexander Nevsky Church was damaged. At present, this church is in need of partial restoration.

One of the most valuable religious architectural monuments of the 8th century, the eclectic-style Shamakhi "Juma" Mosque, has been preserved to the present day with great resilience. This outstanding monument was restored in 2010–2013 by the state together with its surrounding area and transformed into a complex. "Iranian specialists were invited for the restoration of the inscriptions on the walls. This time, taking into account that the monument is located in a seismic zone, foundation strengthening and structural stabilization works were carried out" [8].

The "Altigunbaze" synagogue, located in the Red Settlement of the Guba district, was built in the 19th century by the Jewish architect Hilal Bel Haim. The restoration period of the monument, constructed from red fired brick, covers the years 1995–2000. Built in an Eastern architectural style, the synagogue's prayer niche facing Jerusalem is called "Aran-Kadosh," where the Torah belonging to the Jewish religious community is preserved. Decorative wooden partitions in the windows of the temple attract attention. Symbolic ornaments with the Star of David carved on wood inside the synagogue are particularly notable. The domes of the temple have a spiral structure (Fig. 5).

The Garabagh region, an integral part of Azerbaijan, contains monuments belonging to different historical periods. Unfortunately, during the 30-year occupation by Armenians, these monuments were either destroyed or falsified. One of the most prominent religious monuments of Garabagh restored after the Second Karabakh War and returned to its original condition is the "Yukhari Govhar Agha" or Shusha "Juma" Mosque. Dating back to the 18th century, this

Fig. 5. "Altigunbaze" Synagogue. Guba district, Red Settlement. 1995–2000.

monument was first built from reeds by Panah Ali Khan. The surviving structure was later constructed in 1883 by architect Karbalayi Safikhan Karabakhi in the style of the Arran architectural school. The comprehensive restoration, completed in 2023, preserved the original design plan. The three-planned minarets decorated with geometric ornaments were repainted and a protective coating was applied. The roof covering of the building was restored. The restoration also included the madrasa building of the mosque. Samples of mortar, natural stone, brick, wood, and paint taken from the monument were analyzed at the Ahmet Refik Ersen Restoration and Conservation Laboratory of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation University in Türkiye in order to obtain proper conservation methods. The "Aghdara Juma" and "Saatli" mosques in Shusha were also restored according to their original design. Unlike the Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque, the minarets of the Aghdara Govhar Agha Mosque are located on the rear façade rather than the front. The interiors of both monuments feature semi-arches and a delicately ornamented central-axis mihrab with vegetal motifs. Apart from the Saatli Mosque, Karbalayi Safikhan Karabakhi used a structure called "guldasta" instead of minarets in other neighborhood mosques of Shusha. The interior of the Saatli Mosque is distinguished by polychrome wall painting. The monument, whose restoration was completed in 2021, is decorated with ornaments consisting of lotus flowers characteristic of Egyptian art. The entrances of Garabagh mosques begin with arched porticos. During the 2022–2024 restoration of the Aghdam Juma Mosque, the façade was completely renewed with stone cladding. The red brick minarets of the monument were dismantled during restoration and rebuilt in the same style. Prior to the restoration of these structures, assessment work was carried out by experts from Azerbaijan, Italy, Latvia, Austria, and Türkiye, and a restoration project was prepared.

The Gazanchi Church, located on the elevated relief of Shusha, was falsified by Armenians during the occupation period. Thus, the church's bell tower was completely altered and appropriated. During its restoration in 2022, the bell tower was returned to its original appearance based on archival materials. The construction of the New Shusha Mosque, a symbol of national pride and victory, has been ongoing since 2021. The design of the monument was carried out jointly by Italian and Azerbaijani architects. The Seyidli, Haji Yusifli, Dordler Qurdu, Jufalar, Hamamgabağı, and Quyuluq neighborhood mosques of Shusha were severely damaged during the occupation by Armenian forces

and are currently in need of large-scale restoration. During the restoration of these monuments, archival materials must be obtained, original design plans analyzed, and local climatic and landscape characteristics taken into account. Based on the monitoring of the Kochari Mosque, another example of the Arran architectural style, it should be noted that this monument is currently in a deplorable condition and requires urgent restoration.

Conclusion. The continuous measures taken in the restoration and preservation of religious architectural monuments during the period of independence serve the development of the country's cultural environment and the strengthening of historical memory. According to overall statistical data, it should be noted that during the years of independence in Azerbaijan, 1 Catholic church, 1 mausoleum, more than 30 mosques, and 2 synagogues have been completely rebuilt. In particular, the restoration of religious monuments in the Garabagh region, which were damaged due to long-term neglect and destruction, has become not only a material renewal but also a symbol of the cultural and spiritual revival of the region. The continuation of this process and the transmission of religious and cultural heritage to future generations are identified as important tasks in the study, and a list of monuments in need of restoration is provided.

There are several important aspects to be considered in the restoration of architectural monuments, and these principles are established in international documents such as the Venice Charter (1964) and the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994). Examples of preventive measures necessary for the long-term preservation of stained glass, frescoes, mosaics, carvings, and calligraphic works in religious buildings include the installation of strong ventilation systems regulating temperature and humidity, the use of protective glass for stained and latticed windows, and digital monitoring. In order to strengthen national identity and ensure that future generations respect cultural and spiritual values, educational programs and awareness-raising activities on the historical and artistic features of religious monuments should be expanded alongside their restoration.

Despite technological progress in the modern era, several problems remain in the restoration process: the loss of original materials limits authentic restoration; the absence of archival documentation for some monuments forces reliance on comparative studies based on similar regional examples; and every intervention on a historical monument must be reversible, distinguishable from the original, and properly documented.

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Nərmin İmanova ***(Azərbaycan)***

MÜSTƏQİLLİK DÖVRÜNDƏ AZƏRBAYCAN DİNİ TİKİLİLƏRİNİN BƏDİİ XÜSUSİYYƏTLƏRİ

Müstəqillik dövründə dini məbədlərin memarlıq dilində əks olunan bədii üslub və simvolik ifadələr həm yerli, həm də qlobal memarlıq tendensiyaları ilə dialoqa girərək milli identitetin formalaşmasına və mədəniyyətin zənginləşməsinə öz təsirini göstərir. Eyni zamanda, bu tikililərin turizm və iqtisadi inkişaf baxımından da əhəmiyyətli rolu vardır. Məqalə Azərbaycan dini tikililərinin kompleks halda bədii xüsusiyyətlərini və onların müasir sosial-mədəni konteksdə ifadə olunma yollarını elmi cəhətdən təhlil edərək həm nəzəri, həm də praktiki səviyyədə mədəni irsin qorunması üçün yeni perspektivlər təqdim etməyi hədəfləyir. Məscid, türbə, kilsə və sinaqoqlar kimi müxtəlif dini abidələrin bədii üslubunun kompleks təhlili mövcud ədəbiyyatda ayrı-ayrı tikililər üzərində fokuslanmış araşdırmalara nisbətən, daha geniş və inteqrə olunmuş perspektiv təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: dini abidələr, məscid, kilsə, sinaqoq, bədii xüsusiyyətlər.

Нармин Иманова ***(Азербайджан)***

ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫХ ЗДАНИЙ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА В ПЕРИОД НЕЗАВИСИМОСТИ

В период независимости художественный стиль и символические выражения, отражённые в архитектурном языке религиозных храмов, вступают в диалог как с местными, так и с глобальными архитектурными тенденциями, оказывая влияние на формирование национальной идентичности и обогащение культуры. В то же время эти здания играют важную роль в сфере туризма и экономического развития. Цель научной статьи – представить новые перспективы сохранения культурного наследия как на теоретическом, так и на практическом уровнях путем научного анализа сложных художественных особенностей азербайджанских религиозных сооружений и способов их выражения в современном социокультурном контексте. Комплексный анализ художественного стиля различных религиозных памятников, таких как мечети, гробницы, церкви и синагоги, предлагает более широкую и целостную перспективу, чем исследования, сосредоточенные на отдельных зданиях, представленные в существующей литературе.

Ключевые слова: религиозные памятники, мечеть, церковь, синагога, художественные особенности.