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ARTISTIC DESIGN OF MOSQUES OF THE 11TH-18TH CENTURIES OF AZERBAIJAN

Abstract. The article focuses on the formation of new types of architectural monuments in the territory of Azerbaijan that came with the emergence and widespread expansion of the Islamic religion. The role of these architectural monuments in the Muslim community is reflected in the paper. The characteristic features of the 11th–18th century mosques that are the object of the study are interpreted within the framework of the historical and political events of the period.

Key words: medieval period, architecture, mosques, islamic culture, religious monuments.

Introduction. In medieval architecture, religious and commemorative monuments held a significant place. With the advent and widespread adoption of Islam, religious structures, including places of worship, began to be constructed in Azerbaijan. These included mosques, madrasas, temples, memorial monuments such as mausoleums, khanegahs, and imamzadehs. The spread of Islam influenced all aspects of Azerbaijani society's material and cultural life, contributing to the formation of a unified Azerbaijani culture.

In the construction of religious buildings, certain architectural elements were commonly used, such as pointed arches, vaulted ceilings, domed roofs, arched portals, and lattice windows [5, p. 73]. Notably, elements of pre-Islamic beliefs were often preserved in the architectural monuments

of this period. Instances of old religious temples being converted into mosques or new structures being built upon their foundations were also observed [4, p. 59].

The interpretation of the main material. From the early days of Islam, rural, neighborhood, palace, and congregational mosques began to emerge in Azerbaijan. Neighborhood mosques were small and simple in structure, typically located in the center of neighborhoods or public squares. Congregational mosques were grand in architectural form and situated in cities and towns [13, p. 146]. In larger cities, there were often multiple congregational mosques [2, p. 431].

Mosques served not only as places of worship but also as social spaces for discussing and political matters. They were gathering places where people could find refuge and receive education. Initially, congregational mosques were built adjacent to the ruler's residence, where state governance issues were discussed, and decisions made were announced to the public. These buildings also served as locations for treasury storage and legal proceedings [4, p. 59].

Over time, mosques lost their political functions and were used solely as places of worship. Mosques reflected the economic, social-political life, and cultural level of the period, serving as valuable sources of information about the artistic fields of that era. In this regard, discussing mosques requires an understanding of the historical-political events during which they were built.

Among the oldest mosques in Azerbaijan that have survived to this day are the Juma Mosques of Derbent, Shamakhi, and Ardabil. These mosques are simple in appearance, constructed in a rectangular shape. The Shamakhi Juma Mosque, built in the 8th century, has undergone numerous restorations but has preserved its original form. The mosque features a rectangular plan and is internally divided into three square prayer rooms. Research has shown that the mosque had two minarets, spaced 7 meters apart. The separation of the minarets from the main building and the portal distinguishes it from other mosques of its time [5, p. 76].

The construction of religious monuments during the Seljuk era introduced new architectural elements. In mosques built during this period, the mihrab area often featured a domed kiosk or maqsurah design. It is no coincidence

that Seljuk-era mosques are referred to in scholarly literature as «Seljuk kiosks» or «Seljuk maqsurahs» [8, p. 41].

Due to geographical factors and socio-economic processes, four architectural schools, each with distinctive characteristics, developed in Azerbaijan during this period. These schools were based in major cities and included the Shirvan-Absheron, Aran, Maragha-Nakhchivan, and Qazvin-Hamadan schools [14, p. 16].

One of the best examples of the Shirvan-Absheron architectural school is the Sınıq Qala (Muhammad Mosque), located in the Icherisheher area of Baku. Although the mosque dates back to the 12th century, its name «Sınıq Qala» («Broken Tower») emerged in later periods. In the 18th century, during Peter I's military campaigns along the Caspian coast, artillery fire damaged the mosque's minaret, giving rise to its popular name. While the original name of the mosque is not definitively known, an inscription on the building indicates it was constructed by the order of Muhammad ibn Abubakr, leading scholars to refer to it as the Muhammad Mosque [8, p. 43].

The mosque was built in a square plan and consists of two floors, with a single minaret. The lower floor features an arched ceiling, a room with a door opening to the southern facade, and two small windows. The upper floor houses a 40-square-meter prayer hall, which mirrors the layout of the lower floor [7, p. 14]. Relative to the size of the building, the minaret is disproportionately large. The cylindrical minaret tapers as it rises [15, p. 89]. Minarets, as principal symbols of religion, were typically constructed with grandeur. However, some researchers associate the oversized minaret of the Sınıq Qala Mosque with the possibility that it was built earlier than the mosque itself [8, p. 44].

The mosque reflects the characteristic principle of the Shirvan architectural school, which emphasizes harmony between the interior and exterior volumes of the building [8, p. 43].

One of the 12th-century mosques in Icherisheher is the Ashur Mosque. This monument features an elongated, prismatic structure composed of two parts: a small basement and a prayer hall above it. The basement is vaulted and opens outward through two semicircular arches. The prayer hall contains two richly decorated mihrabs. On the walls, there are two niches,

and above the mihrab, there is a small window. The entrance door to the mosque is located in a corner. Observing the masonry of the mosque's walls, it becomes evident that the upper part was constructed at a later period [3, p. 46; 8, p. 49].

When discussing 12th-century mosques, the monumental Juma Mosque of Nakhchivan, a significant example of the Nakhchivan architectural school, deserves special mention. Unfortunately, the mosque has not survived to the present day, and information about its construction type and architectural features comes solely from the records of medieval authors. The mosque had a cubic structure with two pointed openings on all sides except the southern facade. The roof was domed, and its style bore similarities to the mosques in Marand and Urmia [8, p. 48].

The rise of the Ilkhanids in Azerbaijan, particularly Sultan Ghazan Khan's declaration of Islam as the state religion, spurred cultural development and the construction of architectural monuments. The state's chief vizier, Fazlullah Rashidaddin, played a significant role in the creation of many architectural structures [16, p. 129]. Mosques built during the Ilkhanid period differed significantly from those of the 11th–12th centuries. While Seljuk-era mosques were characterized by small and simple structures, Ilkhanid mosques were more spacious and architecturally complex. This period saw extensive use of multicolored ornaments and cut tiles. The use of inscriptions as decorative elements was also a hallmark of the era [14, p. 31]. In addition to square architectural styles, hexagonal, octagonal, and dodecagonal elements were incorporated into mosque designs [9, p. 88].

Examples of Ilkhanid-period mosques include the Khidir Mosque, the Chin Mosque, and the Mirza Ahmad Mosque, all located in Icherisheher. The Chin Mosque is situated near the Shirvanshahs' Palace complex. According to the epigraphic information on its entrance, the mosque was built in the 14th century upon the bequest of Fazlullah Imam ibn Osman Shirvani. The main facade of the mosque is asymmetrical, with a classic portal entrance. The portal features a rectangular frame with a pointed niche and epigraphic inscriptions. Inside, the most striking feature is the five-tiered stalactite mihrab, set within a rectangular frame [1, p. 30].

In the 15th century, significant advancements were observed in the construction of religious buildings. This can be seen in the examples of

the Goy Mosque and Uzun Hasan Mosque, located in Tabriz, the capital city and cultural center of the period, which are considered masterpieces of Islamic architecture. The Goy Mosque was originally part of a larger complex, including a madrasa, library, and other structures, but only the mosque building has survived to the present day. The mosque, consisting of a large and small hall and several surrounding rooms, belongs to the central domed mosque type. It was constructed using baked bricks and gypsum mortar. Its artistic decorations feature carvings, marble, and tile ornamentation [2, p. 434].

This period was marked by the consolidation of the Shirvanshahs in northern Azerbaijan and ongoing power struggles in the south, resulting in the dominance of the Qaraqoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu states. In architecture, the Shirvan-Absheron school in the north and the Tabriz school in the south held leading positions. The political stability of the Shirvanshahs had a significant influence on the Shirvan-Absheron architectural school. Researchers often regard the 15th century as the peak of development for the Shirvan-Absheron school [14, p. 41].

Examining the cultures and architectural styles of these states, it becomes evident that the north exhibited greater stability compared to the south. Examples of mosques from the Shirvan-Absheron school include the Sheikh Ibrahim Mosque, Shah Mosque (Khan Mosque), and Tuba Shahi Mosque, all located in the Baku region. The Sheikh Ibrahim Mosque is rectangular and covered with a pointed stone dome. An inscription on the facade reveals that it was built at the order of Haji Amirshah Yagub oglu. Unusually, the mosque's mihrab is located along the longitudinal wall of the prayer hall [17].

The Shah Mosque is simple in form and rectangular in plan, standing 22 meters tall. It has three entrances, with the main entrance featuring a portal on the northern side, while the eastern and western entrances are simpler in style. The mosque consists of two prayer halls (for men and women), both covered by domes. In the southern wall of the central hall, a mihrab, modestly decorated and topped with a ribbed semi-dome, is situated. The minaret is adorned with carvings and crowned by a ribbed dome. Stone railings encircle the minaret. An inscription below the stalactite cornice of the minaret states that it was built by order of Sultan Khalilullah I [1, p. 6; 3, p. 44].

The Tuba Shahi Mosque is similar in overall layout to the Shah Mosque. It has a parallelepiped form with a dome covering its structure. The prayer hall is square and surrounded on all four sides by auxiliary rooms. The windows in these rooms are adorned with stone grilles. Two of these grilles have identical patterns, while the others feature unique designs. The entrance to the mosque is located on the eastern facade, with the portal projecting significantly from the wall surface. The portal is intricately decorated and features a star-shaped ceiling. Overall, the mosque has a simple layout [14, p. 54].

In the 16th–17th centuries, the unification of Azerbaijani lands under a single state, the strengthening of Islam's position, and its establishment as a foundation of governance positively influenced the development of architecture, as it did other cultural fields. Architectural styles of the 16th–17th centuries saw noticeable changes. While earlier periods predominantly used linear pointed arches, this era witnessed the widespread adoption of complex pointed arches. Significant changes also occurred in artistic decoration. In the 17th century, geometric ornaments were replaced by floral motifs, while tile art continued to play a significant role in architecture. Construction materials and techniques largely remained consistent [14, p. 57].

Among the religious monuments of this period, the Shah Abbas Juma Mosque (Ganja Juma Mosque) stands out for its architectural composition and artistic-decorative features. The mosque has a square layout, consisting of a large hall connected to niches (cells) and small rooms located at the four corners. The niches can be accessed directly from the courtyard or through the main entrance. The rooms are interconnected through doors embedded within the walls, as well as linked to the central hall. The main entrance is on the northern side, while the mihrab is located on the southern wall. Windows are positioned above all the doors. The Juma Mosque was constructed with bricks and gypsum mortar. The central hall is covered by a dome, while the rooms are topped with arches. Minarets rise on either side of the main entrance portal, each 22 meters tall [3, p. 165].

One of the architectural monuments from the Safavid period is the Haji Qiyasaddin Mosque, located in the village of Gargabazar in the Fuzuli district. The mosque was entirely constructed from stone and consists of a single hall covered with a vaulted ceiling. Except for the entrance door, wooden

materials were almost entirely absent in its construction. An inscription above the entrance door states that the mosque was built by Haji Qiyasaddin. The mosque is situated near the Shah Abbas caravanserai, on a high rock. Researchers analyzing the architectural plans of both the caravanserai and the mosque have concluded that they were constructed by the same individual [12, p. 29].

The 18th century was characterized by the absence of a unified centralized state, external interventions, and numerous internal uprisings, during which about 20 khanates existed in the north and south of Azerbaijan, leading to economic decline. The major cities, which were the primary centers of development, suffered significant damage due to economic and political turmoil. However, during the second half of the 18th century, some progress in architecture was observed in cities like Shusha, Quba, and Sheki. These cities were not only strong khanate centers but also major trade hubs of the period. Local mosques and Juma mosques were among the primary architectural structures of this time.

Local mosques in Shusha were generally rectangular in plan, resembling residential houses in their external appearance, but their interiors were constructed in accordance with religious architectural elements. Among the Juma mosques of the period, the most monumental example is the Shusha Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque. Its initial construction was commissioned by Panah Ali Khan in 1751. The mosque underwent reconstruction four times, with the last completed in 1883. Each reconstruction involved different construction techniques and plans. During the initial construction, reeds were used as building material. In the second reconstruction, stone and lime were utilized to ensure the mosque's durability. In later reconstructions, two minarets were added to the structure [6, p. 7].

Currently, the mosque has a rectangular plan, with six columns dividing the prayer hall into three naves. These columns support pointed arches, which, in turn, hold the domed ceilings. The minarets are built with tiled bricks and divided into three sections with raised bands on their surfaces, adorned with colorful stones. Verses from the Quran are inscribed on the frieze at the top of the minarets. Inside the minarets, 85 spiral steps are illuminated by small, slit-like windows [6, p. 9].

The Quba Juma Mosque, one of the architectural gems of the Khanates period, stands out with its unique architectural style, distinguishing it from other religious structures of its time. Construction of the mosque began in 1792 and was completed over 10 years with intervals. The mosque is octagonal in shape, covered with a dome-shaped roof, and built using baked bricks, sand, and lime mortar. The mosque building is 28 meters tall and features a 43-meter-high minaret. The minaret reflects Ottoman architectural style, with a crescent symbol at its peak. It comprises 248 steps [3, p. 115].

The Sheki Khan Mosque was constructed in the 18th century following the Shirvan-Absheron architectural school traditions. The monument is located in the “Yukhari-Bash” National History and Architecture Reserve in Sheki. It is oriented east-west, rectangular in shape, and built from bricks. Over multiple restoration periods, rubble stones, baked, and unbaked bricks were also incorporated into the structure. The mosque measures 46 meters in length, 10.80 meters in width, and 4.50 meters in height. A minaret, 18 meters high, is located at the northwest corner of the mosque. The mosque is bordered on the south by the «Khan Cemetery,» dating back to the 18th century, and on the northwest by residential buildings.

Conclusion. In 2021, as part of the «Sheki Archaeological Expedition», archaeological studies were conducted in the mosque complex. These investigations uncovered three distinct layers of flooring within the mosque, belonging to different historical periods. It was revealed that the mosque was built atop an ancient residential site from the antiquity period and medieval water wells. Additionally, beneath the right corner of the mihrab, the grave of Sheki Khan Muhammad Hussein Khan was discovered. It should be noted that the mosque was commissioned by Muhammad Hussein Khan himself [10; 11, p. 385-386].

Thus, while the construction of mosques in Azerbaijan from the 11th to the 18th centuries varied depending on the historical-political events and cultural level of the period, it can be said that there were common stylistic similarities across these structures.

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AZƏRBAYCANIN XI–XVIII ƏSR MƏSCİDLƏRİNİN BƏDİİ TƏRTİBATI

Məqalədə islam dininin meydana gəlməsi və geniş yayılması ilə Azərbaycan ərazisində yeni tip memarlıq abidələrinin formalaşmasına diqqət yetirilmiş, onların müsəlman camiasında rolu əks olunmuşdur. Tədqiqat obyektı olan XI–XVIII əsr məscidlərinin səciyyəvi xüsusiyyətləri mənsub olduqları tarixi-siyasi hadisələr çərçivəsində şərh olunub.

Açar sözlər: orta əsrlər dövrü, memarlıq, məscidlər, islam mədəniyyəti, dini abidələr.

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ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЕ ОФОРМЛЕНИЕ МЕЧЕТЕЙ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА XI–XVIII ВЕКОВ

В статье исследуется формирование новых типов архитектурных памятников на территории Азербайджана, которое происходит с появлением и широким распространением исламской религии. Также отражается роль данных архитектурных памятников в мусульманском сообществе. Характерные черты мечетей XI–XVIII веков интерпретируются в рамках исторических и политических событий исследуемого периода.

Ключевые слова: средневековый период, архитектура, мечети, исламская культура, религиозные памятники.