



*Peter Tase*

**Azerbaijan: Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan Commemorates  
its 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

This year is an important milestone in the history of the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan which is considered by many international scholars and archeologists to be the cradle of human civilization. On April 9th, 2014, together with the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, the leaders of Nakhchivan begun the commemoration ceremonies on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The landlocked region of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic has had a bloody and turbulent history filled with tragic events, since the IV Century B.C.. This area of Azerbaijan has a total surface of 5,500 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 435,400. It is bordered by Armenia, Iran and Turkey. The strip of land that separates the territory of Nakhchivan with the mainland of Azerbaijan has a width of only 44-45 km and extends towards the Araz River. Nakhchivan has been isolated from its mainland due to the illegal actions taken by the Armenian Government which have closed the rail way corridor connecting the region of Nakhchivan with the eastern mainland of Azerbaijan. Another important and unjust historic fact is that the district of Zangazur has been illegally separated from the rest of Azerbaijan and was given to Armenia by the Soviet Union leaders in 1920.

By many historical accounts, Zangazur is one of the territories of Azerbaijan that has been hit by ethnic cleansing campaigns led by Armenian Armed Forces during the early XX century. Additionally, at the same period ( the dashnak brutalities of 1918-1920), the living conditions in the local communities in Shusha and Jabrail became from bad to worst due to the violent actions taken by the Armenian armed forces against the civilian population in these Azerbaijani villages and towns. The regular Armenian army under the command of a bloodthirsty General Andranik Ozanian, conducted campaigns of ethnic cleansing in October 1918, and demanded the local Azerbaijani people to whether be under the Armenian control or leave the area, very similar to what is taking place today in the cities of Iraq that are invaded by the Islamic State militia groups who are killing Christian minority groups across the Middle East. In Jabrail and Shusha many villages had been obliterated and the soil of those villages has been ploughed by Armenians. More than 50 thousand Muslim refugees partially took refuge in the neighboring areas of Jabrail district and a significant number of refugees had died due to the cold weather. In Zangazur District more than 115 villages were burned down and totally destroyed.

In Nakhchivan there are over 1162 historical-cultural monuments, while 58 of them are considered to be of great importance to the world culture and have received protection from UNESCO. The Gazanchi fortress (constructed on the III millennium B.C.), Alinjagala fortress (III century located on the right side of the Alinjachay), “Ashab-e-Kahf”, Noah tomb (VIII-XII century), Gamigaya pictography, Momuna khatun tomb (XII century), Gulustan tomb (XIII century) are some of the most important historical monuments.

The current area of Nakhchivan was part of the Safavi dynasty in the XVI century. In 1828, after the last Russo-Persian War and the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the khanate of Nakhchivan went under the control of Imperial Russian authorities. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, Nakhchivan became part of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the independence of this government lasted only for 23 months.

After the end of WWI, the Armenian aggressors attempted to have maximum territorial advantages, as the leaders of the Russian Bolshevik revolution were favoring the expansionist aspirations of greater Armenia undertaken by the Armenian Armed Forces. Yerevan, took advantage of this opportunity to annex as much land as possible from their neighboring countries, mostly affecting the territories of Azerbaijan.

The Annexation of Nakhchivan was one of the main intentions of Armenian Armed Forces. During the 1918-20, when foreign invaders had control of Nakhchivan, Armenian Armed forces under General Andranik repeatedly tried to get a hold of the land of Nakhchivan. It was only thanks to the brave resistance of the local population and Turkey's tremendous support that prevented the Armenian invaders from taking possession of the territory of Nakhchivan.

Today Nakhchivan is a shining region upon a hill, it is just like any other Western European province, it has a contemporary infrastructure and its modern theater named after Calil Mammadquluizade is perhaps one of the most beautiful buildings with a very special architecture in the Caucasus region and great acoustic features. The name of Calil Mammadquluizade embodies the great values of patriotism and love for the fatherland that all residents of Nakhchivan have in their hearts. Mammadquluizade was a strong activist and a patriot who defended the language unification movement. Mammadquluizadeh was born in Nakhchivan coming from an Iranian Azeri merchant family from Khoy. In 1887, he graduated from the Gori Pedagogical Seminary and for the next ten years was involved in teaching at rural schools in Bash-Norashen, Ulukhanli, Nehram and other towns and villages of the Erivan Governorate. Mammadquluizadeh condemned many of his contemporaries for humiliating the Azeri language replacing its genuine vocabulary with the newly introduced Russian, Persian and Ottoman Turkish words, which were often confusing to many readers. Later he became deeply involved in the process of Romanization of the Azeri alphabet. In 1898, he moved to Erivan; in 1903, he moved to Tiflis where he became a columnist for the local Sharqi-Rus newspaper published in the Azeri language. In 1906, Mammadquluizade founded the Molla Nasraddin satirical magazine. Frequent military conflicts and overall political

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instability in the Caucasus forced him to move to Tabriz, Iran, where he continued his career as the chief-editor and columnist for Molla Nasraddin. In 1921, Calil settled in Baku. During this important commemorative year of Nakhchivan's history, this theater has hosted many cultural events and festivals to demonstrate the rich culture and folklore that Nakhchivan - Azerbaijan's cradle of patriotism - has to offer to the world.

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