



Al-Farabi Kazakh National University
Faculty of Geography and Environmental Sciences
Department of Recreational Geography and Tourism

The Role *of the* Great Silk Road

Discipline: The role of the Great Silk Road
Lecturer: Associate Professor, PhD
Assipova Zhanna

Almaty

Azerbaijan

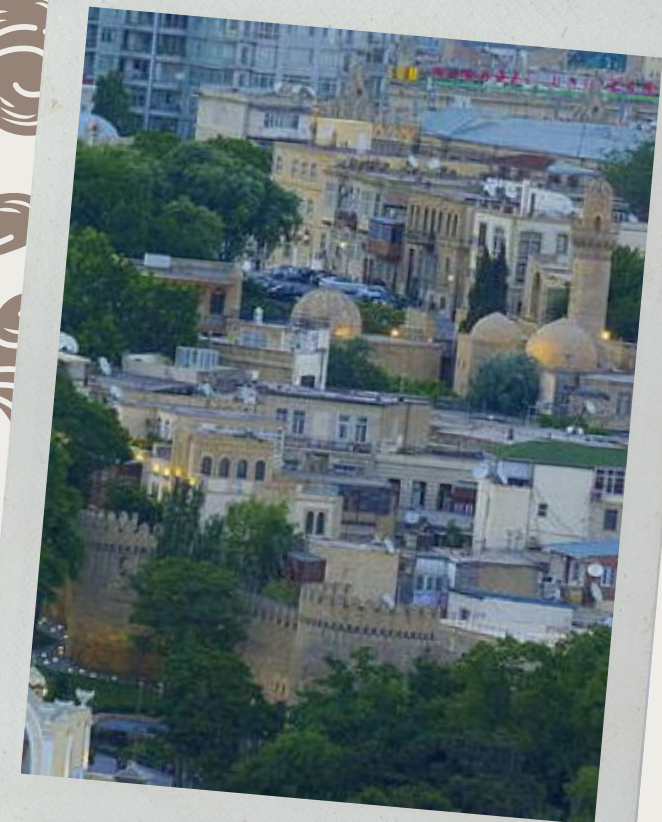
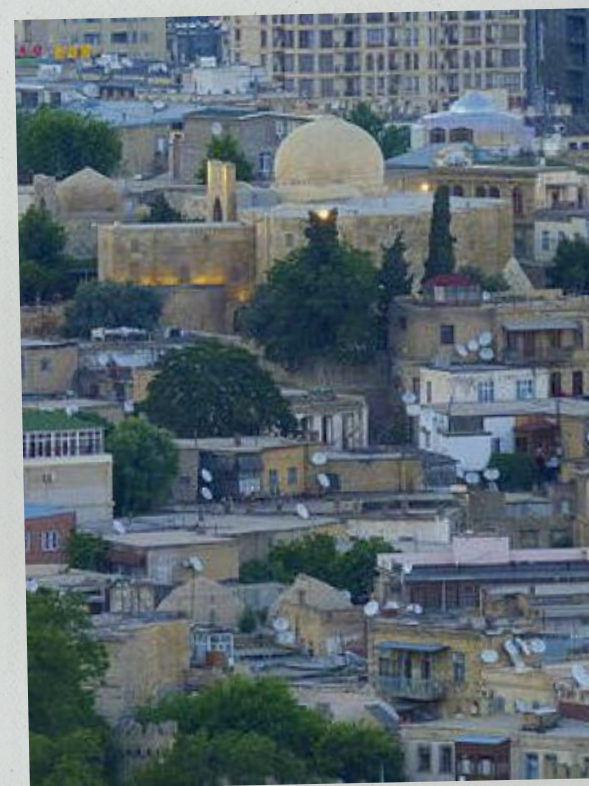
Great Silk Road



Azerbaijan

In bringing together the East and West the Silk Roads left traces in the political, economic, and cultural development of the countries through which it passed. Travelers, merchants and missionaries exchanged cultural, scientific, educational and spiritual values.


Azerbaijan was on the path of the roads and made a significant contribution to the development of this global transit network. The goods and products of Azerbaijani towns and settlements spread along the Silk Roads and its towns had long been known to act as centres of culture, science and education.





Unesco

heritages

Shusha, located in the centre of Karabakh region, is a unique town that has left an enormous cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Situated in the strategic and economic part of Karabakh, it became the capital of the Karabakh Khanate.



The town was surrounded by stone walls with round towers protecting the gates. The khan and his court lived in a rectangular citadel surrounded by bazaars, a Friday Mosque, and residential quarters. Each quarter was centred around a mosque surrounded by small squares containing a source of drinking water. Town estates incorporating a garden and vegetable plot were separated from the street with stone walls. The southern part of Shusha has a very famous plain called "jidir duzu", which used to be the main location for festivities and sporting events, such as Chovqan or Chovken, a traditional Karabakh horse riding game, now inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Shusha was famous for its trade in carpets and silk products.



The city of Sheki, the architectural reserve of the country

is one of the most ancient cities nestled in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains. The citadel and the Khan's Palace built between the 18th and 20th centuries are situated in the historic centre of the city.

The historic centre, with the main shopping street, public buildings, bath houses, shops and workshops, silk production factories, cooperatives, and individual residential houses, has retained a historic townscape of high quality and authenticity.

In the northern part of the city, there are ruins of the once impregnable fortress "Galarsan-gorarsan" ("Come and See") dated to the 15th-18th centuries.

The upper and lower caravanserais were built in the 18th century. Here people travelling along the Silk Roads would trade, as well as stay overnight and rest their pack animals. With the spread of Christianity, early Christian Albanian churches appeared in the city and its surroundings. The best known temple is located in the small mountainous village, of Kish (1st-2nd centuries).

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Other architectural treasures of Azerbaijan include its ancient bridges.

The most famous of which include **"Sinig Korpu"** in Gazakh district, and the Khudaferin bridges across the Aras River in Jabrayil district. These bridges used to serve as the main route for the migration of different peoples and ethnic groups and represent one of the key components of the Silk Roads.

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Since ancient times, Azerbaijan has played an important role as a melting pot of civilizations, serving as a venue and major transfer point of different cultural traditions and customs. The intangible heritage of Azerbaijan, diverse and rich, continues to be transmitted from generation to generation. From a cultural and historic point of view, Azerbaijan has close ties with the history of the Silk Roads and was strongly affected by its development

2

One point of reference for this strong link between the Silk Roads and Azerbaijan is the poem "Seven Beauties" by the great poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209, Ganja, Azerbaijan), in which he allegorically describes the countries lying along these great Roads. Azerbaijan's location on the Silk Roads promoted the growth of the handicraft industry in the country and by 1834 there were more than 400 crafts shops lining the streets and bazaars of Sheki.



Among the products manufactured in Sheki that are unique to the Silk Roads, are ...

“tekelduz” - embroidery featuring coloured thread silk tambour on dark velvet made with a special needle called a “garmach”

This embroidery method is also used across Central Asia and the Middle East, however the “tekelduz” made in Sheki are distinguished by their design and embroidery technique. A variety of crafts were developed in Sheki, like blacksmithing, weapons manufacturing, silk weaving, decorative and artistic shabaka, jewelery items, silk and artistic embroideries.



Another famous handicraft product are ‘mujrus’, small wooden trunk boxes. Mujrus were used by women to store jewellery or embroidery thread. These small boxes are made of local hardwoods, such as chestnut and walnut, and are decorated with hammered copper.



Rooted in traditions found along the Silk Roads, the art of Kelaghayi is concentrated in two places in Azerbaijan – Sheki and Basgal.



“Kelaghayi” is a woman’s headscarf and is made of thin silk threads with specific colours tied to specific social occasions. The art of making Kelaghayi is transmitted exclusively through non-formal apprenticeships and is primarily an intra-family occupation. The traditional practice of making and wearing headscarves is an expression of cultural identity, religious traditions, and serves as a symbol of social cohesion, reinforcing the role of women and strengthening the cultural unity of Azerbaijani society



Carpet-weaving

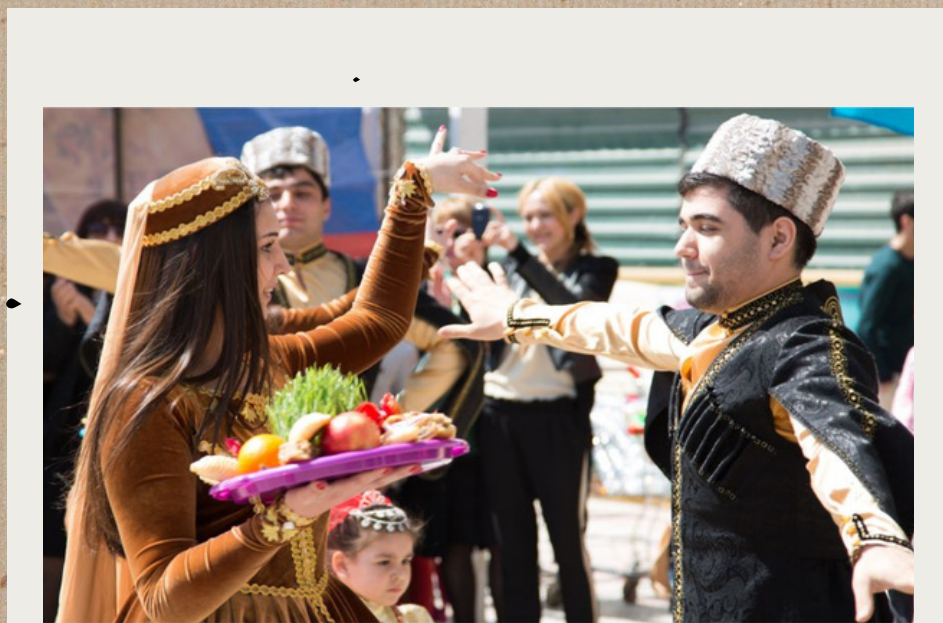
Carpet-weaving is another popular traditional craft in Azerbaijan. The patterns of Azerbaijani carpets are characteristic of the various regions of the country.

There are special carpets woven specifically for medical treatment, wedding ceremonies, the birth of a child, mourning rituals and prayer. The carpets are also used by young girls who sit on them while telling fortunes and singing traditional songs during **Novruz**.



Celebration of Novruz Bayram

Celebration of Novruz Bayram
(the regional New Year) on
the occasion of the 1st day
of spring is a key tradition
that has been transmitted
along the Silk Roads.



The celebration travelled
widely, from Central Asia to
Turkey by passing through, the
Indian sub-continent,
Afghanistan, Iran, Azerbaijan
and other countries.



The main exports of Azerbaijan

- oil
- carpets
- raw silk
- silk fabrics
- cotton
- weapons
- dried fruits
- salt
- precious stones

- jewellery
- alum
- saffron
- natural dyes
- polychrome pottery
- wooden utensils
- non-ferrous metals
- sturgeons
- caviar ironwood





Bilateral land and sea routes linked Azerbaijan with China, Syria, India, Asia Minor, Iran, Egypt, Russia, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and Europe. The British laid their routes to India via Azerbaijan and Indian merchants traded in spices and cashmere fabrics in Baku and Shamakhi. Furthermore, Baku formerly served as a transit point for goods passing from China and India through the Black Sea to Constantinople.



The Silk Roads pass through several cities in the north–western direction.

Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, located at the crossroads of the East and West, has remained the main administrative, political, cultural, ideological, handicraft and trade centre of the region. The city is also a major seaport. A 1375 Catalan map highlights the Caspian Sea as “Sea of Baku”. The 13th century sea fortress “Sabail” in the Bay of Baku guarded the entrance into the port city.

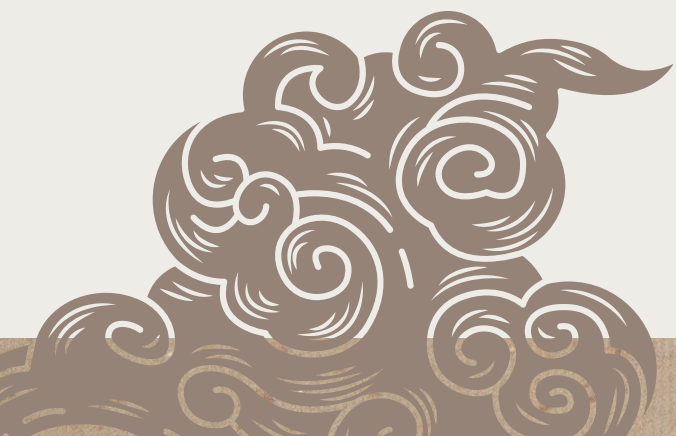
Within the capital and its surroundings numerous buildings from the days of the Great Silk Roads are preserved, for example the “Icherisheher”, the old city, which contains the 15th century Palace of Shirvanshahs, Maiden Tower – a unique monument of the 5th–12th centuries, as well as mosques, caravansaries, baths, mausoleums and madrasa



‘Walled City of Baku’



The ‘Walled City of Baku’ including Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The temple of “Atashgah”, erected by Indian followers of Zoroaster, known as Parsi, is another wonderful example of the intercultural exchanges in the city. Atashgah or “Fire Temple”, a castle-like religious temple in Surakhani, was a site of pilgrimage and a philosophical centre for fire worships. According to the Persian and Indian inscriptions, this temple was used as a Hindu, Sikh and Zoroastrian place of fire worship. The Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, also inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, is a rock art cultural reserve covering areas of a plateau of rocky boulders rising out of the semi-desert of central Azerbaijan, with an outstanding collection of more than 6000 rock engravings bearing testimony to 40 000 years of rock art. The site also possesses remains of inhabited caves and settlements and burials dated from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages.



Azerbaijan – between
mysterious China and
rich Europe.





GREECE

Konstantinople

TURKEY

Smyrna

SYRIA

Tyr

IRAQ

Baghdad

Medina

Mecca

SAUDI ARABIA

Aden

ETHIOPIA

Kaffa

Sarai

Saraichik

KAZAKHSTAN

Altai

Yangikent

Ugench

UZBEKISTAN

Bukhara

TURKMENISTAN

Merv

Baku

PERSIA (IRAN)

Kerman

AFGANISTAN

PAKISTAN

INDIA

Turkestan

Navkent

Tashkent

Termez

Kashgar

Balkh

Gilgit

Delhi

Mathura

TIBET

Himalayas

Lhaza

Alma-Ata

Bishkek

Samarkand

Taklamakan Desert

Turfan

Nami

Gobi Desert

CHINA

Dunhuang

Balkal

Gobi Desert

Altai

Balkhash

Caspian Sea

Caucasus

Tbilisi

Basra

Namadan

Damas

Palmyra

Caucasus

Samarkand

Navkent

Turkestan

Yangikent

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From time immemorial the caravan routes of the Silk Road invariably crossed Azerbaijan. It served as the "gate" between mysterious faraway China and rich Europe.

In the 1st – 2nd centuries BC the busiest way laid across the Country of Lights. The way was usually called "Strabon" (after the great geographer who was the first to mention it). The way started from China and India across Central Asia, crosses the river of Uzbai flowing into the Caspian Sea and went across the territory of Azerbaijan. There it split in two roads: one led upstream the Kura towards Colchis and Iberia, the second made a turn and went along the western coast of the Caspian Sea across Derbent and Caucasian steppes.



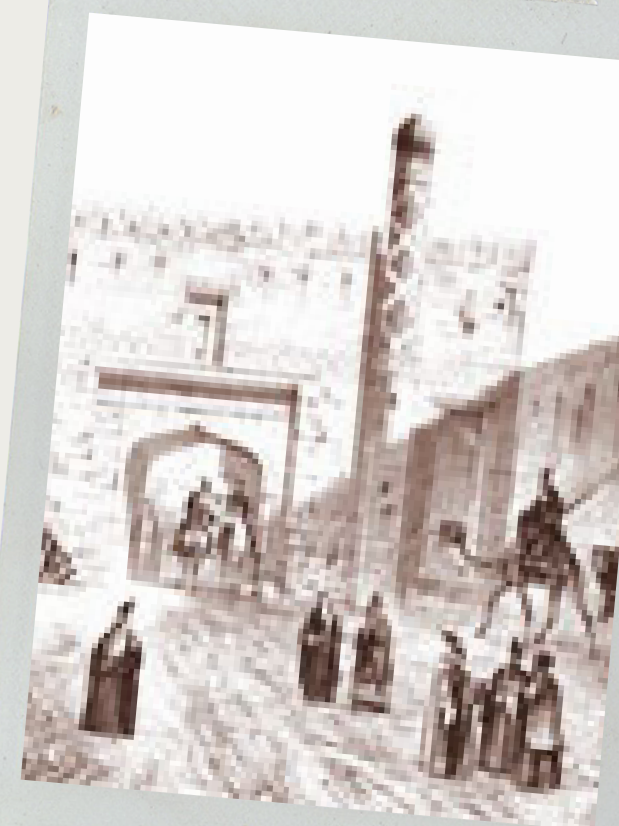
East to West

Merchant's great variety of useful goods



Golden age — sanitation and literature

The 11th and 12th centuries are recorded in history as the 'golden age' of the cities of Azerbaijan, a phenomenal era. These cities were large, with populations of hundreds of thousands. Up to 500,000 people lived in Ganja at a time when cities of 20,000 to 30,000 were considered large in Europe. As the cities developed, so did handicrafts in Azerbaijan, which had some 30-40 different craft professions.



Transits trades of Silk Road

The main trail of Eurasian transit trade criss-crossed Azerbaijani lands, passing through the expanding cities. This in turn seeded the development and prosperity of secular culture. Only this can explain the historical circumstances that produced the great thinkers and poets of the 'golden age', primarily Nizami Ganjavi, Khaqani Shirvani and Mehseti Ganjavi. The cultural environment generated interest in the past.

Kitabi Dada Qorqud (The Book of Dada Qorqud, also written also written Dede Gorgud and Dede Korkut), which was put into written form in the 12th century, is today a principal source of the older history of Azerbaijan; an encyclopaedia of its distant past and medieval life. Just as it is not possible to study the distant past of the modern Greeks without the Iliad and Odyssey, European history without the legends of the Nibelungs and the Song of Roland, so it is impossible to study the origins and history of the Oghuz Turks without Kitabi Dada Qorqud.

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