

Baku (Azerbaijan)

No 958

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshahs' Palace and Maiden Tower
<i>Location</i>	Apsheron Peninsula
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Azerbaijan
<i>Date</i>	15 October 1999

Justification by State Party

There has been human settlement on the site of the Walled City of Baku from the Palaeolithic period up to the present day. The city reveals evidence of Zoroastrian, Sassanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian presence in cultural continuity.

Criteria i, iv, and v

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

Baku is located in the state of Shirvan, which existed from the 9th century CE until 1538, when it was annexed by Safavid Iran. In 1585 the town was captured by the Ottoman Sultan Murat III, and in 1723 it was occupied by the Russian General Matushkin, when it was destroyed by fire. It became part of the Russian Empire in 1783.

- The Inner Walled City (*Icheri Sheher*)

The Inner Walled City, which forms the property proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List, is one of the few surviving medieval towns in Azerbaijan. It retains the characteristic features of a medieval town, such as the labyrinth of narrow streets, congested buildings, and tiny courtyards.

The walls of the old town, which still survive on the western and northern sides, were built by Menutsshochr Shah in the 12th century and were repaired in the 19th century. The narrow streets are lined with houses dating from the late 18th century onwards, but also contain earlier monuments, mostly concentrated in the lower, seaward, site of the town. These include the Mehmet Masjid of 1078–79, two single-cell *medresses* of the 12th century,

the 15th century Haji Gaib Hammam, to the south of which lie two 17th century Zoroastrian fire temples, the larger with a courtyard truncated by the modern road. Next to these is the 16th–17th century two-storeyed Kasumbek Caravanserai for merchants coming by sea, and nearby is the 17th-century Kasumbek Mosque. Further to the east lie the 14th–15th century Multani Caravanserai, used by Indian merchants, and facing it the 15th-century Bukhara Caravanserai, built for merchants from central Asia, behind which there is a small derelict 17th century *hammam*.

- The Maiden Tower (*Giz Galasy*)

Located in the south-east part of Icheri Sheher, this unique monument of Azerbaijan architecture was built in two periods. It is an astonishing cylindrical structure, rising to eight storeys and 29.5m high, with a diameter of 16.5m. Each storey is roofed with a shallow vault with a central aperture. The walls are 5m thick at the base and 3.2–4m at the top. The bottom three storeys are thought to date to as early as the 7th or 6th century BCE and to have been an astronomical observatory or fire temple. Evidence for this comes from the existence of a shaft, visible at the back of niches in the second and third storeys, which it has been established extends 15m below ground level. This appears to have been designed to channel natural gas to provide fuel for an eternal flame.

The main part of the tower is circular in plan, but with a long solid projection to the east which points towards sunrise at the equinoxes. The floors are connected by staircases built in the walls, and are lit by means of narrow windows. The upper part of the tower dates from the 12th century and incorporates a Kufic inscription of Kubey Mesud ibn Da'ud, commemorating a reconstruction in the 12th century. The masonry is quite distinct from the original, as alternate courses of stone were recessed in order to take gypsum plaster, to give a black-and-white striped effect. Some of the original plaster survives on the more protected north-western, side. In addition, the masonry at the end of the beak-like projection is curved, whilst that of the earliest stonework on which it is built has square corners. In the upper, medieval, portion of the tower there is a staircase from the floor built in the thickness of the wall in the area next to the projection.

- The Shirvanshahs' Palace

The Palace was built in the 15th century, when Shamaha was finally abandoned as the capital in favour of Baku. Construction proceeded during the reigns of Shirvanshah Khalilulla I and his son, Faruk, until the latter was killed in battle in 1501. The palace was seriously damaged by a Russian naval bombardment in the 18th century and much of the upper parts were destroyed. Restoration work was carried out in the 18th–20th centuries. Treasures from the palace, initially taken to Tabriz, were subsequently transferred as booty to the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul.

The complex comprises several discrete elements: the residential part, the *Divankhane*, the Shirvanshahs' mausoleum, the Palace Mosque with its minaret, the baths (*hammam*), the Mausoleum of the Court Astrologer Seyid Yahya Bakuvi, the slightly later Eastern Gate, and the mosque of Key-Gubad. The palace is built on the highest point of one of the hills within Icheri Sheher. Extending over three superimposed terraces, it is clearly visible from the sea from and the heights surrounding the city. Entry is

into an open courtyard at the upper level, which provides access both to the Divankhane and the residential part of the palace.

The *Divankhane*, the place of state meetings and receptions, consists of a square courtyard, arcaded on three sides, with the octagonal building of the Divankhane itself occupying the centre. The western facade of the rotunda is embellished by the magnificent portal. The ruler sat on an elevated level, below which there is a basement cell with a communicating grille in the floor. Some of the carving on the capitals of the arcade on the exterior of the building was never completed, possibly because of Faruk's death in 1501. The building is covered with a stone dome.

The two-storey *residential section* of the palace is entered through a high portal into an octagonal, domed, entrance hall, formerly faced with ceramic tiles. The small octagonal vestibule beyond it connects it with other parts of the palace: four entrances lead to different rooms and two to staircases. The slots of the niches of the octahedral hall were intended for communication with the ground floor. The southern and eastern halls are distinct in form and decoration from the ceremonial halls and rooms on the first floor.

This section of the palace is much less complete, as a result of the Russian bombardment, which destroyed both the domes that formerly covered the rooms as well as the upper parts of the walls. The rooms provide different views of the Caspian Sea. Good-quality stone carving is being undertaken to replace missing elements, but it has not been possible to reproduce the fine drilled 15th century work. The inner faces of the walls of the dining room of the palace have been faced with new stone backed on reinforced concrete columns. (It has already been appreciated that the introduction of mild steel into a historic structure is unwise and these columns are to be removed.) The lower stores in the domestic part of the palace open on a garden.

This garden contains the *Mausoleum of Seyid Yahya Bakuvi*, a court astrologer, which was originally entered through a rectangular mosque, only the foundations of which now survive. The tomb is a two-storey domed structure. Stored in the garden are sections of a tall inscription; these were recovered from the sea and originally formed part of the wall of the 12th century Sabail island fortress, destroyed by an earthquake in the 13th century.

The middle courtyard of the palace, at a lower level, contains the *Shirvanshahs' mausoleum*, built in 1434–35 by Shah Khalilulla I for his mother and sons. It is rectangular in plan and covered by a hexagonal dome ornamented with multiradial stars. When excavated in 1945–46, the mausoleum was found to contain seven burials, accompanied by rich grave goods, now in the Museum of History of Azerbaijan.

At right-angles is the *palace mosque* of 1441, the dome of which has simple plaster work of the 19th century. There are two prayer halls, together with some subsidiary rooms. There are three entrances into the mosque, the main (northern) one having a portal, on both sides of which there are semicircular niches intended for shoes. As in a number of other places in the palace, water penetration through the stone roof of the mosque is causing concern.

The lowest part of the palace are the ruins of the Palace *bath-house*, discovered in 1939 during excavations in a vineyard. Its plan consists of two large rectangular structures divided into smaller ones by four columns, with a separate furnace building for producing the steam taken through underfloor channels to the bath. Sections of the original wall tiles survive in some of the rooms.

The Eastern Portal of the Shirvanshahs' Palace was erected later than the other parts of the complex, in the 16th century. Its upper part is decorated with the constructional inscription in Arabic referring to the date of building (1585-86) and the name of the Shah who ordered it to be built. The inscription has rosettes with plant ornaments on either side.

- The Tsarist period city in the Buffer Zone

This lies outside the Inner Walled City, nominated for World Heritage inscription, but constitutes a buffer zone protecting the setting of the latter. During the last two decades of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century, Baku was one of the major centres of oil production in the world. This generated substantial wealth, as can be seen by the high quality of the buildings dating from this period. The main conservation problem with these concerns the balconies, which were formed of stone slabs supported by slender iron girders. Decay of the stone and rusting of the ironwork has led many of them to be replaced in concrete, usually with the concurrent loss of their supporting stones consoles.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Walled City of Baku has an area of some 21.5ha. Out of its 500 buildings, 100 are owned by the State, 300 belong to the Baku Metropolitan Municipality (former Baku Soviet), and 100 are privately owned.

The Walled City of Baku with its monuments and its large buffer zone from the Tsarist period has been inventoried and was listed as a National Monument in 1968 and 1988. The plans for rehabilitation have been approved in 1988. Currently, the preservation is regulated by the new law on the preservation of historic and cultural monuments, dated 10 April 1998 (no. 470), and the presidential decree of 13 June 1998. The Shirvanshahs' Palace and the Maiden Tower are managed as National Museums, under the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The walled city is the responsibility of the Baku Municipality.

Management

At the time of the preparation of the nomination, the administration and management of the State Historical-Architectural Preserve of Icheri Sheher was the responsibility of the National Committee of Restoration and Preservation of the Monuments of History and Culture, reporting to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic. This has now been replaced by the Institute of Restoration of Historical and Cultural Monuments. The committee has several subdivisions responsible for special activities. For its projects, the Committee consults the Institute of Architecture and Art of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences. The Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Azerbaijan Academy

of Sciences is in charge of the archaeological research and excavations.

The protection law of 1998 gives considerable powers to the Ministry of Culture to control development within the city. The law acknowledges the participation of international organizations and institutions in the protection of local monuments. However, the Republic of Azerbaijan is going through a very challenging period in its history. External funding will be crucial for the successful application of the intentions of the law. The government has applied to the World Bank to obtain a loan for this purpose. Currently, the Institute responsible for the conservation and management of the historic monuments is poorly equipped, with few personnel, and has little funding. There is no private funding at present.

There are concerns regarding the construction of new buildings within the old city, resulting from recent concessions for oil near Baku, and this has given rise to the wish to build more office space. It is noted that the Institute has had some success in reaching a compromise about the planning control, and limiting the height of new buildings to three or four storeys, instead of two as in the medieval buildings. There is an urgent need to strengthen the Institute, assuring additional personnel with proper training and equipment. The World Heritage nomination would also further sustain the cause of protection and conservation in the city, and may be crucial for the future.

Visitor facilities include the identification of a pedestrian zone and cultural itineraries with relevant orientation and information panels, displayed with the Walled City and the buffer zone. There are reported to be about 300,000 foreign visitors to the city annually, and about 150,000 visit the museums. The walled city has about 5000 inhabitants, and the buffer zone has some 1500 day-time workers, mainly government employees. The city currently faces some problems related to immigration and the needs of the new inhabitants. There are also problems resulting from speculation by foreign companies who wish to establish their headquarters within Icheri Sheher. The area of Baku is not subject to particular natural hazards, but the salty air of the Caspian Sea does cause decay of stone and metal. This is due to the winds from the desert and arid areas being mixed with the high relative humidity (60%) and sulphur gas in Baku.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The town of Baku has been well preserved in its fabric until the present time. Recently, there have been major works to improve its infrastructures, road paving, park layouts, and public squares. In 1968, the list of architectural monuments of Azerbaijan included 44 historic buildings in the Inner Town, Icheri Sheher. In 1988, a further 495 historic buildings, mostly dwelling houses, were added to the list. According to the law, the Walled City of Baku has been declared a national monument with a zone of strict protection and a buffer zone, consisting mainly of the expansion in the Tsarist period. The principal guidelines of the rehabilitation plan for the Inner Town were approved in 1989.

Authenticity

The Walled City of Baku with its fabric, as well as the 15th century Shirvanshahs' Palace and the 6th–12th century Maiden Tower, have preserved their authenticity in their main parts, although there have been some problems. The Walled City has suffered from some changes at the beginning of the 20th century, although today these changes can be accepted as part of history. In the past five years, there has been a certain amount of new construction within the Walled City as a result of economic pressures.

The city walls of the 12th century have maintained their authenticity on the western and northern sides in particular, although the upper part was rebuilt in the 1960s. The fortifications were restored some years ago and are in a relatively good condition. The Maiden Tower is used as a museum presenting the evolution of the city of Baku. Archaeological research is still under way in the area. The building was restored some years ago, using cement. The purpose is to remove the cement and to replace it with traditional mortar, subject to funding being available. The Shirvanshahs' Palace complex is currently used as a museum. The minor buildings, such as the Divankhane, the family tomb, and the mosque, are in relatively good condition and authentic. The residential parts of the palace have recently been subject to reconstruction, which has raised criticism. Following a UNESCO mission in 1995, the work has now been stopped. The old commercial streets between Shamahy Gate and Salyan Gate have preserved part of their original fabric; this has in part been rebuilt, including the Multany (Hindu) Caravanserai, the Bukhara caravanserai, the Friday Mosque, and the public baths.

Even though the Walled City of Baku has obviously suffered many changes and even destructions, it is an exceptionally important historic site, especially since it is almost the only one of its type left. In an overall judgement, and considering that much of the original historic fabric still remains, the site can be considered to satisfy the test of authenticity.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Walled City of Baku in March 2000.

Qualities

The Inner Walled City is one of the few surviving medieval towns in Azerbaijan. It retains the characteristic features of a medieval town, such as the labyrinth of narrow streets, congested buildings, tiny courtyards, and its 12th century walls. The houses date from the late 18th century onwards, but also contain earlier monuments, mostly in the seaward site of the town, including mosques, schools, baths, Zoroastrian fire temples, and caravanserais.

Comparative analysis

The city of Baku can be compared with other cities in Azerbaijan, such as Shabran, Cuba, and Gevad. These have a similar structure in their urban plan, but they are less well preserved in their fabric. In the neighbouring countries, Baku has been compared with Tbilisi in Georgia, Derbend in Dagestan (Russia), and Tabriz in Iran. The buildings bear some resemblance to architecture in the Near and Middle

East. However, Baku has its own character, where the various influences have merged into a single unity, and it is difficult to compare it with other places. In fact, it remains the best preserved place and is in many aspects a unique historic city.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

It is recommended that the nomination be accepted subject to the State Party giving assurances that it will undertake the necessary measures for a long-term development aiming at guaranteeing the conservation of the historic city. Regular reports on progress should be provided to the World Heritage Committee at two-yearly intervals.

- The whole walled city should be included in the nomination area, but special control should be exercised for the areas with modern constructions.
- Action should be taken to strengthen the management structure in the city with adequate resources, trained personnel, and equipment. The master plan needs to be revised with more detailed guidelines regarding the conservation of the historic fabric. A training strategy should be drawn up to integrate modern conservation methodologies into the management structure.
- A strategic plan needs to be prepared to ensure the implementation of a coherent policy in the conservation of historic structures and their immediate setting, as well as guaranteeing proper guidelines and control for new constructions regarding their volume, materials, and uses.
- A long-term conservation programme is required, including plans for the conservation and restoration of listed buildings, as well as including a short-term plan for the correction of problems caused by past interventions.
- A monitoring structure should be established, including regular reporting on the progress.

Brief description

Built on a site that has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic times, the Walled City of Baku reveals evidence of Zoroastrian, Sassanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian presence in cultural continuity. The Inner City (*Icheri Sheher*) has preserved much of its 12th century defensive walls. The 12th century Maiden Tower (*Giz Galasy*) is built over earlier structures dating from the 7th to 6th centuries BCE, and the 15th century Shirvanshahs' Palace is one of the pearls of Azerbaijan architecture.

Recommendation

That the site be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **critterion iv**, subject to the State Party giving assurances of the further development of the conservation management and monitoring structures for the city:

Criterion vi The Walled City of Baku represents an outstanding and rare example of an historic urban ensemble and architecture with influence from Zoroastrian, Sassanian, Arabic, Persian, Shirvani, Ottoman, and Russian cultures.



ICOMOS, September 2000