

SOCIAL SCIENCES

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW OF WESTERN AZERBAIJAN

Nazarova G.

*Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University, PhD student
Baku, Azerbaijan*

ORCID: 0000-0002-5870-7397

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11390775>

This work was supported by the
Azerbaijan Science Foundation –

Grant № AEF-GAT-7-2023-2(44)-10/09/2-M-09

Abstract

The historical and geographical environment of Western Azerbaijan is investigated in the presented article. On this basis, the historical past of the region is analyzed, and extensive information is provided about the natural-geographical conditions and population. As a result, the cultural aspects of the historical-geographical conditions are mentioned.

Keywords: Western Azerbaijan, history, geography, culture

INTRODUCTION

The lands of Azerbaijan have witnessed many events throughout history. The most important of them were the agreements based on the distribution of our lands:

- 1813 – Gulustan;
- 1828 – Turkmenchay.

With the signing of these agreements, the lands were divided into two parts. Northern Azerbaijan was called Russian or Soviet Azerbaijan, and Southern Azerbaijan was called Iranian Azerbaijan. After that, the Russian Empire began to implement the Armenianization policy in the west part of Northern Azerbaijan. As a result, the Armenian state was founded for the first time in the west region. Thus, a new term – “Western Azerbaijan” has appeared in our history (https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/tarixi.htm).

Western Azerbaijan is a very ancient region. Its natural-geographic conditions and cultural elements are very important. With this in mind, the purpose of the article is to study the cultural aspects of the region based on the historical and geographical overview.

The object of the article is West Azerbaijan, as well as the elements of its historical and geographical environment. The subject is the analysis of the region's historical-geographical conditions in the cultural sphere. During the research, sources such as books, newspapers and internet resources were widely used as a database.

1. HISTORY AND POPULATION OF WESTERN AZERBAIJAN

Historical sources and archeological explorations have proved that the lands of Azerbaijan were one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Caves such as Azikh, Damcili, Taglar, Gazma, Dashsalahli, as well as examples of agriculture, animal husbandry, and handicrafts belonging to the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods have been found in the area. Thus, one of the most ancient areas of the country's lands is Western Azerbaijan, which is considered its western region.

1.1. The history

West Azerbaijan is the oldest Turkish territory. As early as the b.c. II century, Azerbaijani Turks began to settle here. In the past, tribes such as Kimmer, Hun, Gugar, Sak, Gargar, Pecheneg, Shadili, Shirak, Kangar, Jinli, Oguz, Sabunchu, Afghan, Karapag, Mughan, Zangi, Kazakh, Khalaj, Turkmen, Ayrim and others lived in the region. This fact is confirmed by toponyms in the area: Khalaj, Shidli, Afshar, Gumru, etc. (Bayramov, 2015, p.8-12). Turkish tribes left their historical and cultural traces in these areas. In particular, some of the tribes settled around the Goycha lake.

In addition, some of the events in the “Kitabi-Dede Gorgud” heroic epics took place in this land. On the other hand, in the “Kitabi-Diyarbakriya” written by Abu Bakr Tehrani based on the instructions of Uzun Hasan of ruler Aggoyunlu, it is reported that Oghuz Khaga settled around Goycha lake and was buried here. In addition, Bayandur khagan and other Oghuz-Turkic commanders also operated, settled and were buried in the region of Western Azerbaijan. Such historical facts prove the antiquity of the region.

In the Middle Ages, the lands of Western Azerbaijan operated as part of states such as Atabay (Eldeniz), Garagoyunlu, Aggoyunlu, and Safavid.

Some changes were made in the administrative-territorial division of Western Azerbaijan under the rule of the Garagoyunlu, which appeared in the 15th century. Its north-west region is included in Karabakh, and its south-west region is included in Chukhursad province. In 1441, Jahanshah, the ruler of Garagoyunlu, allowed the Armenian-Gregorian church to be moved to Uchikilsa-Etchmiadzin. Thus, it had a significant negative impact on the position of the Albanian church in Iravan. It also directly influenced the religious and cultural thinking of the local population.

During the years of rule of the Aggoyunlu and Safavid states, the position of the administrative-territorial division of Chukhursad was kept as it was. However, according to the contract of Istanbul concluded as

a result of the Safavid-Ottoman wars in the 16th century, Chukhursad was given to the Ottomans. Thus, changes were made in Chukhursad and its territory was divided into Iravan and Nakhchivan provinces. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Safavid state took back the province of Iravan from the Ottomans.

In the 20s of the 18th century, Iravan again became part of the Ottomans. However, through the efforts of Nadir Shah Afshar, the province was recovered and included in his empire. It has been known from historical sources that after the murder of Nadir Shah, independent khanates were formed in the lands of Azerbaijan. One of them was the Iravan Khanate (1747-1828). The khanate included the lands of Agridag, Goycha lake, and the lands to the southwest from the Araz river. The capital of the khanate was the city of Iravan, and it had 15 districts. These include: Zangibasar, Goycha, Sharur, Kirkhbulag, Vedibasar, Talin, Seyidli-Akhsakhli, Surmeli, Sardarabad, Karpi, Garnibasar, Abaran, Derakand, Saatli, Darachichak. The statesmen who ruled the khanate are ranked according to the period of reign as follows:

1. Mehdi Khan
2. Muhammad Huseyn Khan
3. Khalil Khan
4. Huseynali Khan
5. Muhammad Huseyn Khan
6. Aligulu Khan Qajar
7. Hasan Khan Makulu
8. Mehdigulu Khan Qajar
9. Ahmad Khan Maragali
10. Huseyngulu Khan Qajar

At the end of 1827, Russia occupied the city of Iravan. On February 10, 1828, the contract of Turkmenchay was concluded, and Iravan became a part of Russia. It was after this that the process of Armenianization began in the territory of Iravan. First, The Tsarist Russia created the "Armenian province", then abolished it, turned Iravan into a governorate and was included in the Georgian-Imeret governorate. Then, the Iravan governorate was established in the area. The center was the city of Iravan. The Tsarist intended that Armenians should be the majority in the ethnic composition of the population in the governorate. According to the data of 1917, despite the genocide and deportations that took place in the area, the number of Azerbaijanis was 373,582 (33.35%), and the number of Armenians was 669,871 (59.8%).

In 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, ceded approximately 9.5 thousand square kilometers of land around Iravan to the Armenians, and the Republic of Armenia (Ararat) was established there. At the end of 1920, Bolshevik Russia formed the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic on the territory. After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, that republic declared independence in September 1991. As a result, Armenians succeeded in creating their own state in the western lands of Azerbaijan (https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaijan/tarixi.htm).

1.2. The population

Armenian Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their lands as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to the information provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Azerbaijanis currently live in Armenia. Most of them are Azerbaijani women married to Armenians who settled here, people who cannot leave the area due to old age and illness. Also, many of them have changed their names or hide their true identities to avoid being discriminated against. As a result of the policy of "Armenia without Turks" (1828-1989), more than 605 villages in the area no longer have Azerbaijanis living there. More than 1.5 million people were forced to leave their places, and more than 500 thousand Azerbaijanis were killed.

In general, the ethnic composition of the local population was diverse. The research of the Armenian-American historian George Burnutyan revealed that in the 19th century the population of the Iravan Khanate consisted of 100,000 people, and about 80% of them were Muslims (Azerbaijani, Persian, Kurdish), and 20% were Christians (Armenian). After the Khanate became part of Russia, a large number of Muslims were forced to leave and Armenians were moved to the territory.

According to the General Union population registration of 1926, a total of 83,181 Azerbaijanis settled in Armenia. In 1948-1950, another 100,000 Azerbaijanis were forced to leave the territory. In 1988-1991, 200,000 refugees were admitted to Azerbaijan, most of them were displaced Azerbaijanis from 22 districts of the region (https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaijan/azerbaycanlilar.htm).

In general, the process of deportation and resettlement of our compatriots from Western Azerbaijan began in the 18th century. The main deportation process in the 20th century can be divided into three stages:

- ✓ The first stage – 1905-1920 years;
- ✓ The second stage – 1948-1953 years;
- ✓ The third stage – 1988-1992 years

(https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaijan/merheleler.htm).

It is a well-known fact that these events that happened in Western Azerbaijan became an obstacle to the economic, social and cultural development of the region as a whole.

2. NATURAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT OF WESTERN AZERBAIJAN

The nature and geographical conditions of Western Azerbaijan are quite significant. The region is very rich both in terms of climate and the diversity of the bio and zoo world. Although the names of most cities and geographical resources in the region have been changed.

2.1. The administrative-territorial division

The administrative-territorial division of Western Azerbaijan consisted of 10 uezd between 1920 and 1928, and 5 districts including Zangazur, Sevan, Lori, Iravan, Leninakan in 1929, and 36 districts in 1930. The current administrative-district division of the West Azerbaijan region is as follows:

- Shoreyel
- Nagorno Borchali
- Iravan
- Goycha
- Zargibasar
- Zangazur
- Kirkhbulaq
- Karbibasar
- Dilijan
- Daralayaz
- Sardarabad

(https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaijan/inzibati.htm).

During the USSR, “name change operations” were carried out in Western Azerbaijan based on the decrees of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR. According to the information, by August 1988, the names of 521 settlements were changed. The renaming operation in residences was carried out according to the mentioned rules:

- ❖ Names have been completely changed;
- ❖ Literally translated to Armenian;
- ❖ Changed under the cover of “internationalism”;
- ❖ It was replaced with a slight change, but with an Armenian name;

❖ Words before the name are written in Armenian.

At the same time, many Azerbaijani villages were removed from the list under the name of unification of the villages in the area: Ashagi Kilseh (Gufaark), Gamishli (Vardenis), Rahimabad (Masis), Agtala (Kamo).

In the years 1918-1987, 254 settlements were removed from the list by various methods. In the years 1948-1953, the names of more than 60 residences were changed. In 1978, 60 toponyms were changed in 23 districts, and in 1991, 90 localities were renamed (https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaijan/merheleler.htm).

2.2. The climatic conditions

Western Azerbaijan is located in the subtropical zone. Nevertheless, the area has different climate types based on its mountainous terrain. Its climatic conditions are influenced by the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, Iran and the highlands of Asia Minor.

The annual duration of sunlight is 2000-2800 hours. The climate of the plains and the foothills is dry, and the climate is mild in the middle mountains. In the highlands, there is a cold climate and cool summer (Table 1).

Table 1.

Area	Average temperature in July	Average temperature in January	Precipitation	Vegetation period
Plains and foothills	24-26 °C; absolute max 42 °C	-5 °C	200-400 mm	6-7 months
Mountain plateaus and slopes (1400 m)	18-20 °C	-4 °C to -6 °C	500 mm	4-5 months
Mid-mountain parts	18 °C	-8 °C to -2 °C	600-800 mm	
High mountain areas (2000-3000 m)	10 °C-15 °C	-14 °C to -9 °C; absolute max -46 °C		

Western Azerbaijan region is divided into 6 climatic regions:

- The west part of Karabakh plateau;
 - Dry continental zone of Agridag-Arpachay parts;
 - The front mountainous basin of Agridag;
 - The north zone covering Dag Borshali, Pembak and Dilijan parts;
 - Highlands of the central region;
 - Areas higher than 3000 m above those zone
- (<https://westaz.org/az/qerbi-azerbaycan/erazi>; Yunusoglu, 2021, p.17).

2.3. The soil and landscape cover

The soil types of Western Azerbaijan are diverse: complex desert soils, takirs (hilly sandy areas), brown clay soils, brown stony soils, chestnut soils, brown soils, etc.

As an example of the mountains in the area: Alagöz mountain (Aragats), Garniyaryk mountain (Araler), Agchala mountain (Achkar), Ajdaha mountain (Ajdahak), Daveboynu (Ukhtasar), Aghmangan (Gegam), Daralayaz mountain (Vayotsdзор), Kutana (Qutanasar), Aghdag (Spitakasar), Basarkechar mountain range (Vardenis), Gargar (Tskhuk), Tej-Ahmed/Tej (Tej-ler) and others

(<https://westaz.org/az/qerbi-azerbaycan/erazi>; https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaijan/toponimler.html).

2.4. The flora and fauna

At present, only 11% of Western Azerbaijan is forest. More than 250 plant species grow in the forests. 81.3% of the forests are occupied by broad-leaved trees such as oak, hemlock, and beech, and about 8% are occupied by pines. In general, steppes and pastures occupy 18%-30% of the area in the region.

The flora of the region is very diverse: linden, oak, pine, juniper, ash, holly, beech, maple, poplar, fig, grape, pear, wild apple, peach, walnut, apricot, pomegranate, berries, wormwood, astragalus, acantholimon, tragacanth, frigganoid etc.

The fauna of the region includes 450 vertebrates, more than 10 thousand invertebrates, 304 birds, 24 fish, 20 snakes and other species. Examples of these are: Syrian bear, roe deer, Ussuri spotted deer, fox, forest cat, leopard, lynx, viper, arachnid-scorpion, Caucasian viper, jungle cat, wild boar, snake eagle, seagull, jackal, swamp harrier, mountain mole rat, Asia Minor ground squirrel, Asia Minor rat, raccoon dog, woodpecker, partridge, sparrow, woodpecker, vulture, woodcock, khramuli, ilgaba, alpine finch, imperial eagle, Caspian

snow grouse, barbel, koga, bearded eagle etc. (<https://westaz.org/az/qerbi-azerbaycan/erazi>).

2.5. The hydrological network

The hydrological network of the region includes resources such as glaciers, rivers, lakes, underground water basins, and wetlands. A total of 9,500 rivers flow through the territory of Western Azerbaijan. The largest of the rivers is Araz. There are around 100 lakes in the region. Goycha lake (1276.6 sq. km), which is considered the largest lake in the Caucasus, is located on its territory. In general, the hydrological network of Western Azerbaijan can be systematized as follows:

♣ Rivers: Araz (Araks), Garni (Azad), Bazarchai (Vorotan), Aghstafachay (Agstev), Zangi (Hrazdan), Arpachay (Akhuryan), Ayanzur (Aghavnadzor), Garanlig (Martuni), Gorus (Goris), Elayaz (Yegegisi), Bastichay (Tsva), Jalaloglu (Dzoraget), Baligly (Dzknaget), Basarkecher (Vardenis), Tarsachay (Getik), Tona (Debed), Karasu (Sevcur), Okchuchay (Vokchi);

♣ Lakes: Goycha (Sevan), Dibsiz (Achkar Lake), Arpa (Arpi), Aygir (Aygir Lake), Karagol (Kari Lake), Aydın (Parz Lake), Goygol (Gosh Lake), etc. .

Goycha lake fascinates people with its blue waters. Due to its tectonic origin, this lake covers an area of 2776 square kilometers. The lake connects two main parts, Big Goycha and Little Goycha. About 2,000 springs boil in the bed of the lake and mix with the water of the lake and help to clean the water. Since 1923, the water level of the lake has decreased due to the use of water in irrigation agriculture. In the 1960s, plants were planted around the lake with the help of muslim-turkish villagers living in Basarkecher, Chambarak, Pambak and Kavar. With this, this problem has been avoided. In 2004, a religious academy was opened and a church was even built by the reactionary Hay Church on the shore of Goycha lake (https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/toponimler.html; https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/co-grafiya.htm).

The diversity of natural resources in the region indicates the richness of natural culture of Western Azerbaijan. It is clear that nature itself has a special role for the development of the cultural environment and aesthetic encounter.

CONCLUSION

First of all, it should be noted that the cultural phenomenon is related to many sciences. Also, integration with history and geographical sciences is developing.

It is in the first part of the article that the historical periods and geographical environment of Western Azerbaijan were investigated. As it is known from the sources, the fate of the region has been quite difficult. It faced numerous occupations and genocides. Russia's Armenianization policy in the region, the formation of the Republic of Armenia in the region, as well as the

process of deportation of the local population have caused to the cultural decline of the area. This was the economic and moral collapse of Western Azerbaijan.

In the second part of the article, the natural-geographical conditions of Western Azerbaijan are described. In this part, information about its administrative-territorial division, landscape, flora and fauna is provided, toponyms changed after the occupation are presented. Of course, the richness of natural and cultural resources helps the development of culture.

As a result, we looked at the historical and geographical overview of Western Azerbaijan. This, in turn, is one of the factors that play an important role in the development of culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by the Azerbaijan Science Foundation – **Grant № AEF-GAT-7-2023-2(44)-10/09/2-M-09**

References:

1. Qərbi Azərbaycanın tarixi (History of Western Azerbaijan). 27.03.2024. Retrieved from https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/tarixi.htm
2. Bayramov İ. Qərbi Azərbaycan: Tarixi həqiqətlər və ya Ermənistanın etnik təmizləmə siyasəti – Bakı – 2011 – 288 s. (Bayramov İ. (2011) Western Azerbaijan: Historical truths or Armenia's ethnic cleansing policy, Baku)
3. Qərbi azərbaycanlılar (Western azerbaijans) 01.04.2024. Retrieved from https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/azerbaycanlilar.htm
4. Azərbaycanlıların Qərbi Azərbaycandan deportasiyasının tarixi (The history of the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Western Azerbaijan) 03.04.2024. Retrieved from https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/merheleler.htm
5. İnzibati quruluşu (Administrative divisions) 06.04.2024. Retrieved from https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/inzibati.htm
6. Qərbi Azərbaycan ərazisi (The territory of Western Azerbaijan) 12.04.2024. Retrieved from <https://westaz.org/az/qerbi-azerbaycan/erazi>
7. Yunusoglu Q. Qərbi Azərbaycan coğrafiyası silsiləsindən - İqlim şəraiti // Olaylar. - 2021, 10-16 dekabr, №126, - s.17 (Yunusoglu G. (2021). Western Azerbaijan from the geographical range - Climatic conditions Baku // Olaylar. - 2021, December 10-16, No 126, p.17)
8. Qərbi Azərbaycan toponimləri (West Azerbaijan toponyms) 16.04.2024. Retrieved from https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/toponimler.html
9. Qərbi Azərbaycanın coğrafiyası (The geography of Western Azerbaijan) 20.04.2024. Retrieved from https://anl.az/el/emb/Qerbi_Azerbaycan/co-grafiya.htm