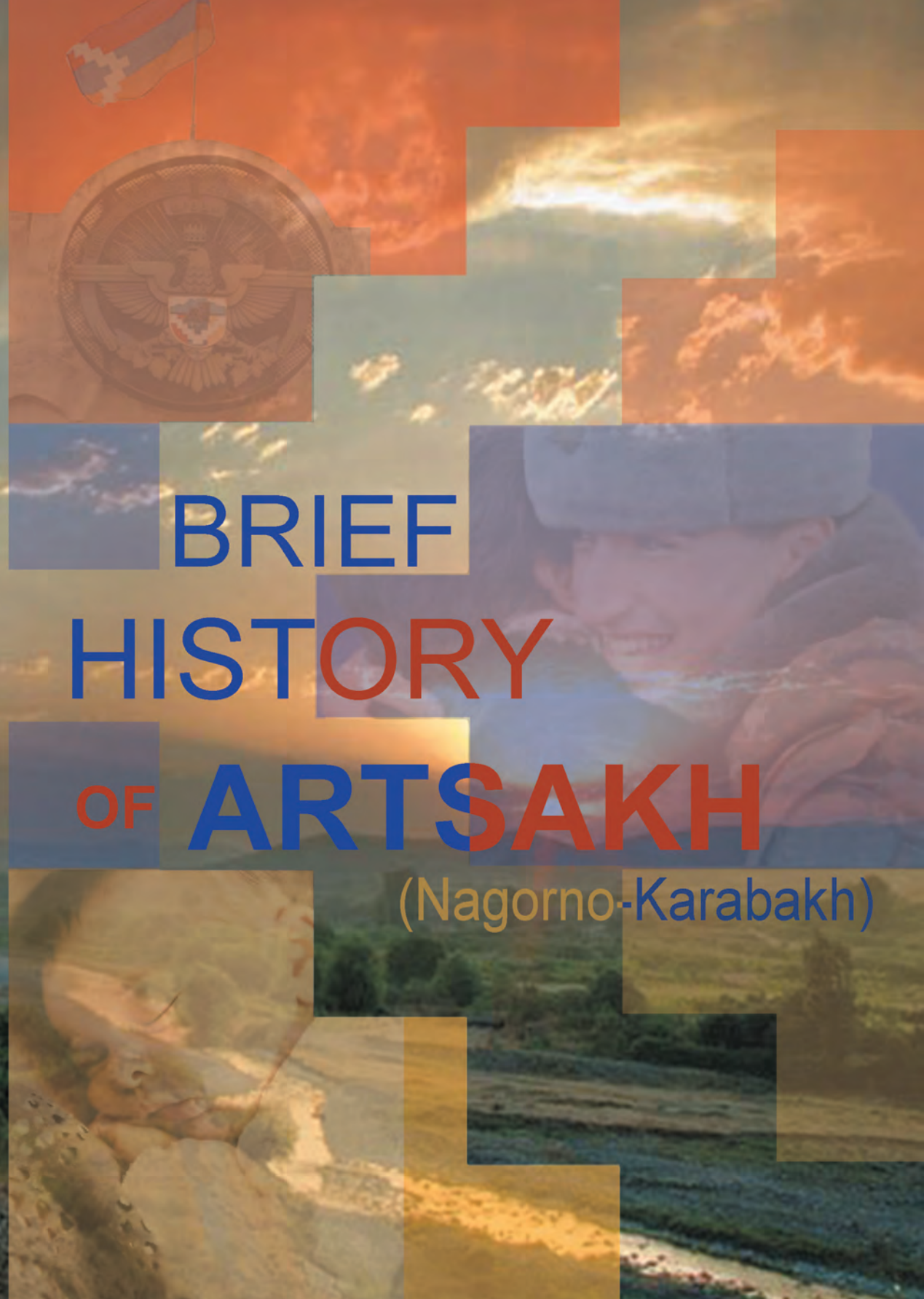




BRIEF HISTORY OF ARTSAKH (Nagorno-Karabakh)



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**BRIEF HISTORY
OF ARTSAKH
(NAGORNO-KARABAKH)**

Artsakh

One of the Armenian Provinces

Artsakh (referred to as Nagorno-Karabakh in Russian) is located on the eastern side of the Armenian Highlands and since ancient times has comprised one of the provinces of successive Armenian kingdoms. Armenia's north-eastern border, according to several ancient sources, was the River Kura, which places Artsakh within the Armenia. In the works of Strabo (64/63 BC – ca. AD 24), Pliny the Elder (23 AD – August 25, 79 AD), Claudius Ptolemy (c. AD 90 – c. AD 168), Plutarch (c. 46 – 120 AD), Dion Cassius (c. AD 150 – 235) and other authors, it is noted that the Kura River formed the border between Armenia and Caucasian Albania.

Recognizing the significance of Artsakh, King Tigran the Great, in the middle of the first century B.C., built one of the four cities that bore his name – Tigranocerta (Tigranakert) there.

The ruins of the town have been preserved, including burial mounds, various monuments, and platforms carved from stone.

At the beginning of the 5th century, after



map 1. 1605 map of South Caucasus by Jodocus Hondius (1563-1612). The source of the map goes back to the book "Geographia" by the famous geographer Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.).

The border between Armenia and Albania passed through the Kura River (Cyrus), which places Artsakh within the Armenian Kingdom.



img 1. An artist's impression of Tigranocerta in its heyday.



the creation of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots, an unprecedented period of cultural development began in Artsakh. The first Armenian school was founded by Mesrop Mashtots at the Amaras Monastery in the south of Artsakh.

When Armenia was divided between the Byzantine Empire and Persia (387 A.D.), the eastern part of Transcaucasia, including Artsakh, fell under Persian rule.

At the end of the 5th century, Artsakh and neighboring Utik were united under the local dynasty of Aranshahiks, led by King Vachagan III (487-510 A.D.), and experienced a period of tangible growth in science and culture. By the words of a witness of those days as many churches and monasteries were being built there as there were “days in a year.”



- A ram's head, 5-6th century AD



- A colored vessel, BC-AD 1st century



- A part of a basilica column

img 2. Artifacts recovered from excavations at Tigranakert

Artsakh's Medieval Cultural Heritage

From the 10th century, the House of Khachen played a crucial role in the country's political and cultural life. Reflecting this influence, the name Khachen was for some time applied to the whole of Artsakh. During the 11-12th centuries Artsakh came under attack from the nomadic Seljuk Turk tribes but managed to retain its autonomy. One of the most conducive periods for Artsakh's development coincided with the end of the 12th century and continued through the first half of the 13th Century. Such architectural treasures as the Hovhannes Mkrtych Church and narthex at Gandzasar (1216-1260), Dadivank's Cathedral Church (1214), and the Gtchavank Monastery (1241-1248) were built in those days and all of them are considered to be Armenian architectural masterpieces of the middle ages. By 1813, the Artsakh Diocese included 1,311 monuments and churches.



img 3. A relief from the tomb of St. Grigoris in the 5th century Chapel beneath the St. Grigoris Church of the Amaras Monastery.



img 4. The 5th century Chapel incorporating the tomb of Grigoris, the first Bishop of the Artsakh Diocese is underneath the Church. Grigoris was the grandson of Gregory the Illuminator, the first Catholicos of All Armenians. The monastery of Amaras served as a teaching center for the Armenian alphabet by its creator Mesrop Mashtots in the 5th century. Later it became the center of the Artsakh Diocese of the Armenian Church, and even served as a stronghold.



Artsakh Miniatures

Almost all eminent monasteries of Artsakh had Scriptoriums. One of the major centers was Gandzasar, the seat of Eastern Armenia's patriarchate. Other eminent Scriptoriums were in the Monasteries of Tarkmanchats (Translators) founded in 989, the Yerits Mankants Monastery, St. Mary Monastery, etc.

Many manuscripts from different parts of Armenia were collected in the churches of Artsakh, but only a small number of illustrated manuscripts have been preserved. A number of Gospels created in Artsakh in 1224-1261, made of well worked up parchments, are similar to the manuscripts illustrated by Ignatios from Ani, the medieval Armenian capital. The most famous manuscripts made in Artsakh are the 1224 Gospel of Khoranashat ordered by Queen Vaneni, and the Gospel of Vaghtang Tangik, father of Prince Hasan Jalalyan, which was illustrated by Toros.

Notably, the famous 1166 Gospel, made in the Hromkla Fortress in Cilicia, was found in Gandzasar. A number of other well-known Gospels were also kept in Artsakh, including the Gospel of 1237, which is now preserved in the library of Chicago University. Finally, one of the best samples of Artsakh miniatures is the 1224 Gospel with the portraits of the Evangelists, which was made for Queen Vaneni.



img 5. "Last Supper," Gospel, 2nd half of 13th century.



✚ *img 6.*

Gandzasar Monastery is one of the masterpieces of Armenian architecture (Gandzasar in Armenian means a Mountain of Treasures). The Monastery was the spiritual center of the Artsakh Diocese up to the 1830s. The construction of the Cathedral Church was completed in 1240. According to Church sources, the head of the John the Baptist is buried underneath the main church of the monastery - the St. Hovhannes Mkrtych Church.



Artsakh's (Karabakh's)

Autonomous Status within Persia



img 7. "A fragment of St. Stepanos Church in Togh, Hadrut region, estimated to be constructed in the 13th century."

In the 1230-40s, Transcaucasia was conquered by the Tatar-Mongols. Due to the efforts of Hasan-Jalal, the famous ruler of Artsakh-Khachen, the territory was partially saved from invasion. However, after his death in 1261, Khachen also fell to the Tatar-Mongols. The situation deteriorated further in the 15th century under the domination of the Ak-Koyunlu and Kara-Koyunlu nomadic tribes. During this period many of the Christian monuments

and churches built in the previous centuries were obliterated. It was during this time that the name Karabakh started to be used for Artsakh (according to the most common explanation Karabakh is a compound of the Turkic word for **black** (kara) and Persian word for **garden** (bakh)).

In the 16th century, a number of unique administrative-political units formed in Karabakh, called Melikdoms ("Melikutyun" in Armenian) since they were led by Meliks. In the days of Persia's Nader Shah (1735), five Armenian Melikdoms



img 8. The twin cross-stones (khachkars) created in the 13th century at Dadivank Monastery.





img 9. The Gulistan fortress, first mentioned in 10th century. The fortress is famous as the venue for signing the 1813 peace treaty between Russia and Persia. The fortress is located in the Shahumyan region, which declared independence together with NKAO. However, nowadays the whole region is under the control of Azerbaijan's forces.

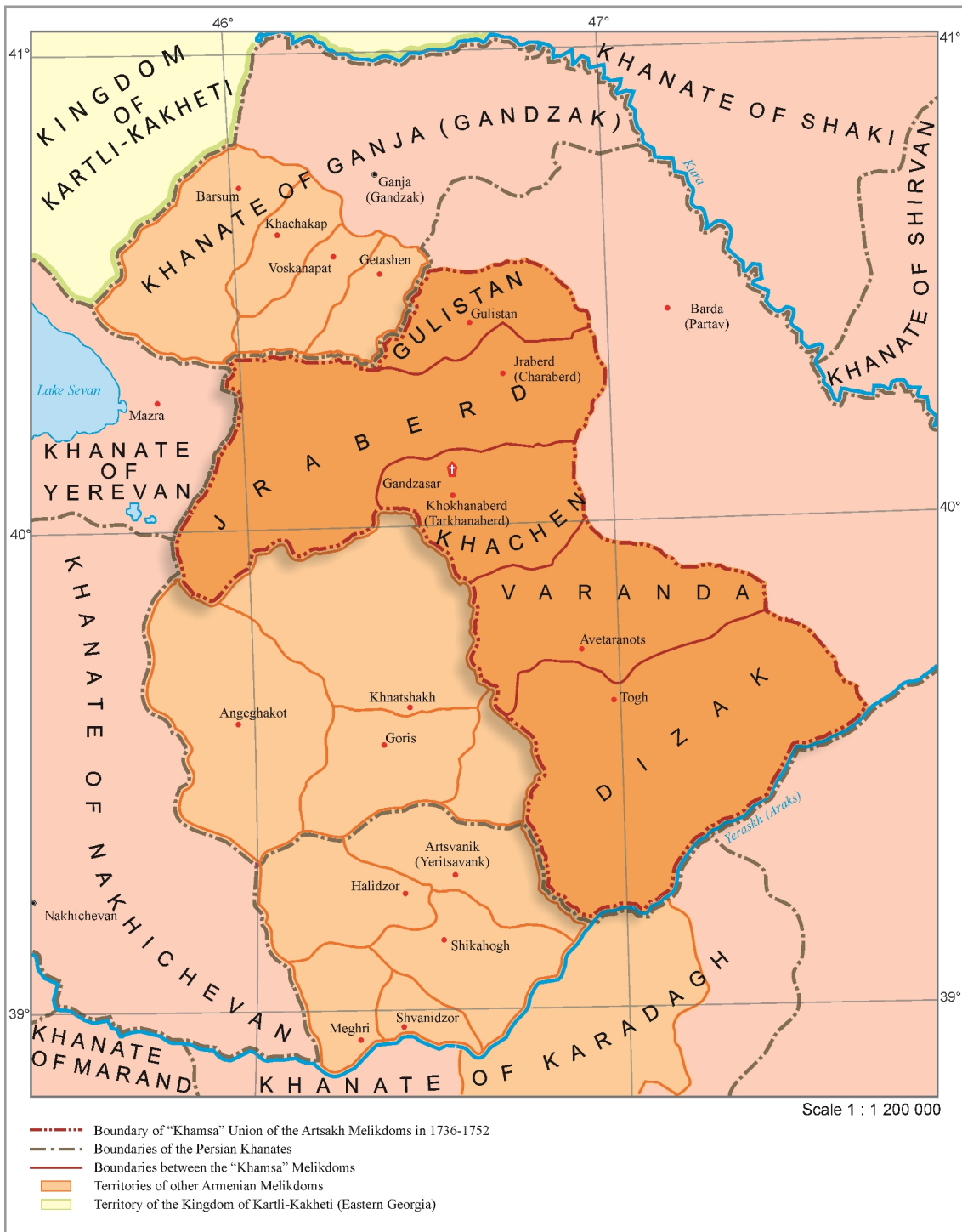
(Dizak, Gulistan, Jraberd, Khachen and Varanda) united to form one political-administrative entity, known in Artsakh's history as the "Khamsa Melikdoms" (Khamsa – meaning five in Arabic). In the 18th century the Armenian Melikdoms became the foundation of the Persia's new administrative unit – Karabakh khanate.

The dynasties of the Karabakh Melikdoms lasted until the 19th century, remaining a pivotal political factor in the region. In the 13-15th centuries they cooperated with the Mongols. The Khachen rulers mediated between the Mongols and the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia. In the 16-18th centuries the Khamsa Melikdoms posed an obstacle to the attempts of the Ottoman Empire to invade the region.



img 10. Shushi Fortress from the North.

THE “KHAMSA” UNION OF THE ARTSAKH MELIKDOMS



map 2. The "Khamisa" union of the Artsakh Melikdoms

Karabakh – A Part of the Russian Empire

In the 17-18th centuries, Artsakh's Meliks led a fight for freedom against Persian and Turkish domination. In parallel with the military campaign, the Artsakh Meliks also sent envoys to Europe and Russia in an attempt to secure help from the Christian West. The Meliks even corresponded with the Russian Tsars, including Peter I and Paul I.

When the 1804-1813 war between Russia and Persia came to an end on 12 October 1813 with the signing of the Treaty of Gulistan, Persia conceded to Russia almost all of Eastern Transcaucasia's khanates, including the Karabakh and Gandzak khanates.

Later, in 1867, according to the Emperor's order, the whole of Transcaucasia was divided into five provinces – Kutaisi, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Yelizavetpol, and Baku – with Karabakh predominantly within the Yelizavetpol province. Such administrative divisions remained, with minor changes, until 1918.

Under the reign of the Russian Empire, Karabakh's center, the




img 11. A view of the town center. Shushi, 1904.

fortress town of Shushi, experienced unprecedented development. The Armenian districts that had fallen into disrepair during Persian rule were rebuilt, each with its own church and square. Since then the seat of the Artsakh Diocese has been moved to St. Amenaprkich (Holy Savior of All) Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi. Favorable economic conditions existed in those days, leading to the development of traditional Armenian crafts – carpet-making and silk-spinning. The economic, social and cultural life of Karabakh developed further and numerous trade and industrial enterprises were launched. Within a short period of time, Shushi became one of the largest cities in Transcaucasia and a key center of Armenian arts and culture. Education and printing reached high levels of development, with over 10 educational centers and 5 printing houses.

During that period, Shushi's residents included Caucasian Tatars (known today as Azerbaijanis), descendants of Turkic-speaking nomadic tribes who had gradually infiltrated into Karabakh.

Wealthy and prosperous Shushi was destroyed in March 1920, when Turkish and Azerbaijani forces invaded the city, pillaging it, and setting it on fire – tens of thousands of Armenian residents were killed and Shushi was razed to the ground.



 *img 12.* A Shushi street left in ruins after the massacre of Armenian population in 1920.

The Status of Karabakh

after the Collapse of the Russian Empire

After the 1917 October Revolution in Russia, from May 1918 until April 1920, Karabakh was *de facto* an independent land. It was during this period that Nagorno-Karabakh, with a 95% Armenian population according to census statistics, legitimately declared itself to be an independent administrative-political entity. It had a National Council, government, armed forces and other specific attributes of statehood; by law and in substance, Nagorno-Karabakh was in no way inferior to the other three Republics of the South Caucasus.

On 29 November 1920 the 11th Soviet Army entered Armenia to establish Soviet rule there. The new Soviet government was established on 2 December 1920, but Soviet Armenia, together with the other South Caucasus states, preserved its *de jure* independence for two more years.

On 30 November 1920 the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee (the chief body of Bolshevik rule at the time) announced that it recognized the territories previously laid claim to by Azerbaijan – Nagorno-Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhichevan – as inseparable parts of Armenia. Moreover, a written decree made by the Azerbaijani SSR National Council on 12 June 1921 declared that Nagorno-Karabakh was an inseparable part of the Armenian SSR.

This decision was welcomed by the new Soviet Armenian government, and steps were taken to establish governmental structures in Karabakh. However, very soon the Azerbaijani leadership stepped back from its previous declarations and made renewed efforts to establish control over Karabakh and Nakhichevan.



The Annexing of Karabakh to Soviet Azerbaijan

On 4 July 1921, in the capital city of Georgia, Tbilisi, the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party organized an executive meeting, during which the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh constituted part of the Armenian SSR was confirmed. However, in the early hours of the next day (July 5), at the insistence of Moscow and following Stalin's personal intervention, that decision was reviewed and, without due procedure, a new decision



map 3. Autonomous Oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh on the 1926 map in Great Soviet Encyclopedia, v3. As shown on the map, Nagorno-Karabakh had a land connection with Armenia in 1920s.

was imposed: to place Nagorno-Karabakh within the jurisdiction of the Azerbaijani SSR as an autonomous *oblast* (province). Such an act is an unprecedented violation of international law – when a group of Bolsheviks led by Stalin without any legal jurisdiction decided to pass the territories of one state to another recently created state, which in 1918 had been named Azerbaijan.

Thus, Nagorno-Karabakh was never a part of independent Azerbaijan. During the whole period of being part of the Azerbaijani SSR, it was repeatedly and consistently subjected to harassment, and the rights and liberties of its ethnic Armenian population were repeatedly violated by the authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan. However, throughout the history of the Soviet Union, the Armenian population in Artsakh time and again appealed to the USSR authorities to re-establish Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the Armenian SSR.

In 1963 Armenians wrote a petition to the First Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, while in 1965 another document was sent to the Central Committee, this time with 45,000 signatures.


In 1966, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union accepted a decision that tasked Armenia's and Azerbaijan's Central Committees with a joint discussion of the issue. In 1977 the Karabakh issue was once again in the spotlight as part of discussions over the USSR's new constitution. However, no solution emerged.

The Oppression of Armenians in Azerbaijan and the Fight for Self-Determination

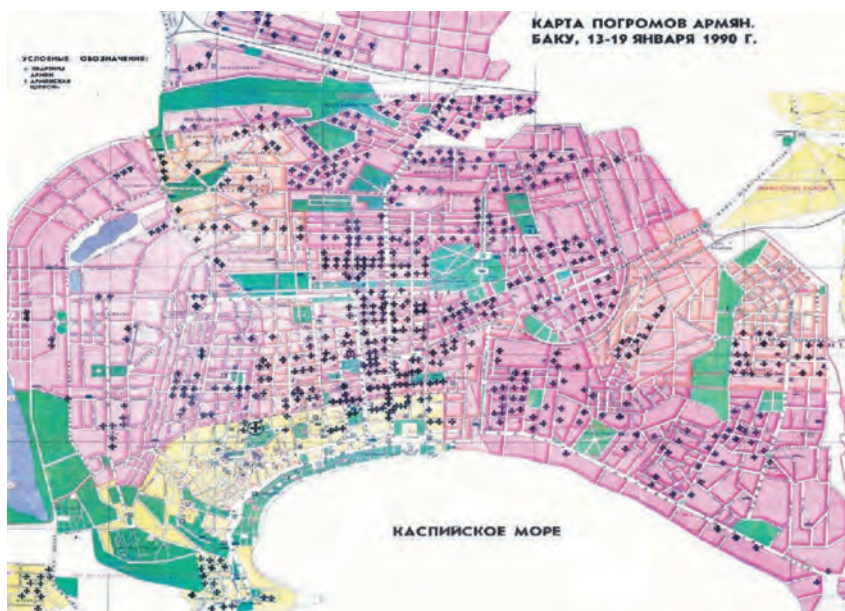
1988 was a turning point in the history of Nagorno-Karabakh. The people of Artsakh called for the defence of their freedom and the restoration of their fundamental rights, which had been violated for decades. On 20 February, the People's Deputies of the Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast called an Extraordinary Meeting and wrote a formal petition to the Armenian SSR, Azerbaijani SSR, and Supreme Soviet of USSR requesting that the jurisdiction over the oblast be transferred from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR.

The Azerbaijani and Soviet Parliaments denied the request. The Armenian Parliament accepted it, and on 1 December 1989



 *img 13.* 1990 Protests in Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh





map 4. During the pogroms of Armenians in Baku, in 1990, copies of this map were handed to the mobsters. The black crosses on the map were to help the gangs to find Armenians living in Baku.

an announcement was made that official representatives from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia had reached a joint decision to unite Artsakh with Armenia.

Azerbaijan's Soviet authorities reacted to the lawful move of Karabakh's People's Deputies by launching large-scale massacres and ethnic cleansing against Armenians living in Azerbaijan – first in Sumgait, then in Kirovabad and Shamkhor, and later in Baku and across all of Azerbaijan. Hundreds of peaceful citizens were killed, tortured and many others became refugees.

On 30 August 1991, Azerbaijan declared its independence, and on 2 September, Karabakh did the same, declaring itself Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (NKR). This was a realization of the right that was reflected in the legislation effective at the

time, particularly the law of 3 April 1990 entitled “Procedure for Decisions about Union Republics leaving the USSR.”

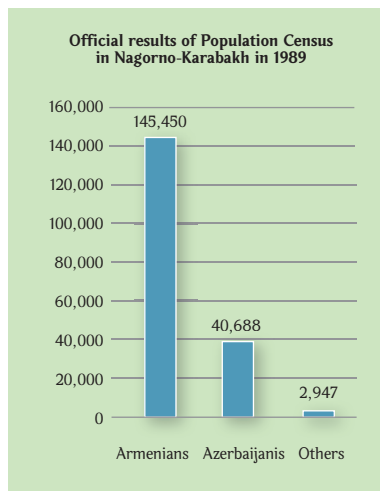
According to that law, “The decision on secession of a Soviet Republic from the USSR is made by the will of the people of that Soviet Republic by means of a referendum.” (Article 2).

“In case the Soviet Republic has autonomous republics, autonomous regions or autonomous territories within its borders, referendums are to be conducted separately in each of the autonomies. The people residing in the autonomies are given a right to independently decide whether to remain in the Soviet Union or in the seceding Republic as well as to decide on their state legal status.” (Article 3)

On 10 December 1991, in the presence of international observers, a referendum was held across NKR with 82.2% of eligible voters participating. Of those voting, 99.89% were in favor of the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic; only 0.02% voted against. The vast majority of those who did not participate in the voting were Azerbaijanis.

Thus, from the moment the Soviet Union was dissolved, two independent and legally equal states were formed on the territory of the former Azerbaijani SSR – the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The subordination of Karabakh’s people, territory and authorities to Azerbaijan ceased in a lawful manner.

In response to the people of Artsakh exercising their right to self-determination, Azerbaijan turned its policy of ethnic cleansing into full-scale military aggression, employing, among





its regular armed forces, militia and gangs, also more than 2,000 mercenaries from international terrorist hubs. But at great cost – and against impossible odds – the people of Artsakh battled to escape annihilation and prove their determination to live in liberty.

In May 1994, both sides of the conflict, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, signed an open-ended ceasefire agreement, to which Armenia joined as well. The ceasefire agreement has remained in force until today, despite incessant provocations from the Azerbaijani side. As a result of the Azerbaijani-unleashed war, the Artsakh self-defense forces were able to reclaim most of the territory that had been taken by the Azerbaijani army, with the exception of some parts in the northern and eastern regions.

img 14. Photo taken on May 9, 1992, a day after the liberation of Shushi. The town is located on a high plateau and has been a natural stronghold for centuries. During the war the Azerbaijani forces used Shushi's geographic position to continuously bomb the civilian objects of Stepanakert, which was located only 10 kms down the road and was an easy target below. The Ghazanchetsots Cathedral was turned into an ammunition depot as the Azerbaijani forces were certain Armenians would not fire at a Church.

✚ *img 15.* The St. Amenaprkich (Holy Savior of All) Ghazanchetsots Cathedral was founded in 1868 as a new center of the Artsakh Diocese in Shushi. The partially destroyed Cathedral was restored after the war with Azerbaijan.







img 16. The Parliament of Artsakh.

The Republic of Artsakh Today

Presently, Artsakh is a Presidential Republic. During the two decades of independence, the Republic of Artsakh has managed to achieve a considerable progress in good governance, including checks and balances in the executive, legislative and judiciary areas by adopting European values and standards. Armenians from all over the world have contributed considerably to the reconstruction and development programs in Artsakh. The government of Artsakh places great importance on attracting foreign investments into the country and utilizing the full potential of the Artsakh economy.

For many centuries Artsakh had been a prosperous region



with both advanced trade relations and infrastructures, and with eminent cultural and economic centers. With gaining independence, the people of Artsakh have managed to restore the stable economic growth of the country, suppressed during the Soviet Azerbaijani rule, and strengthen the republic's state institutions.


Artsakh is rich with historical monuments, and the government pays much attention to the development of historical and

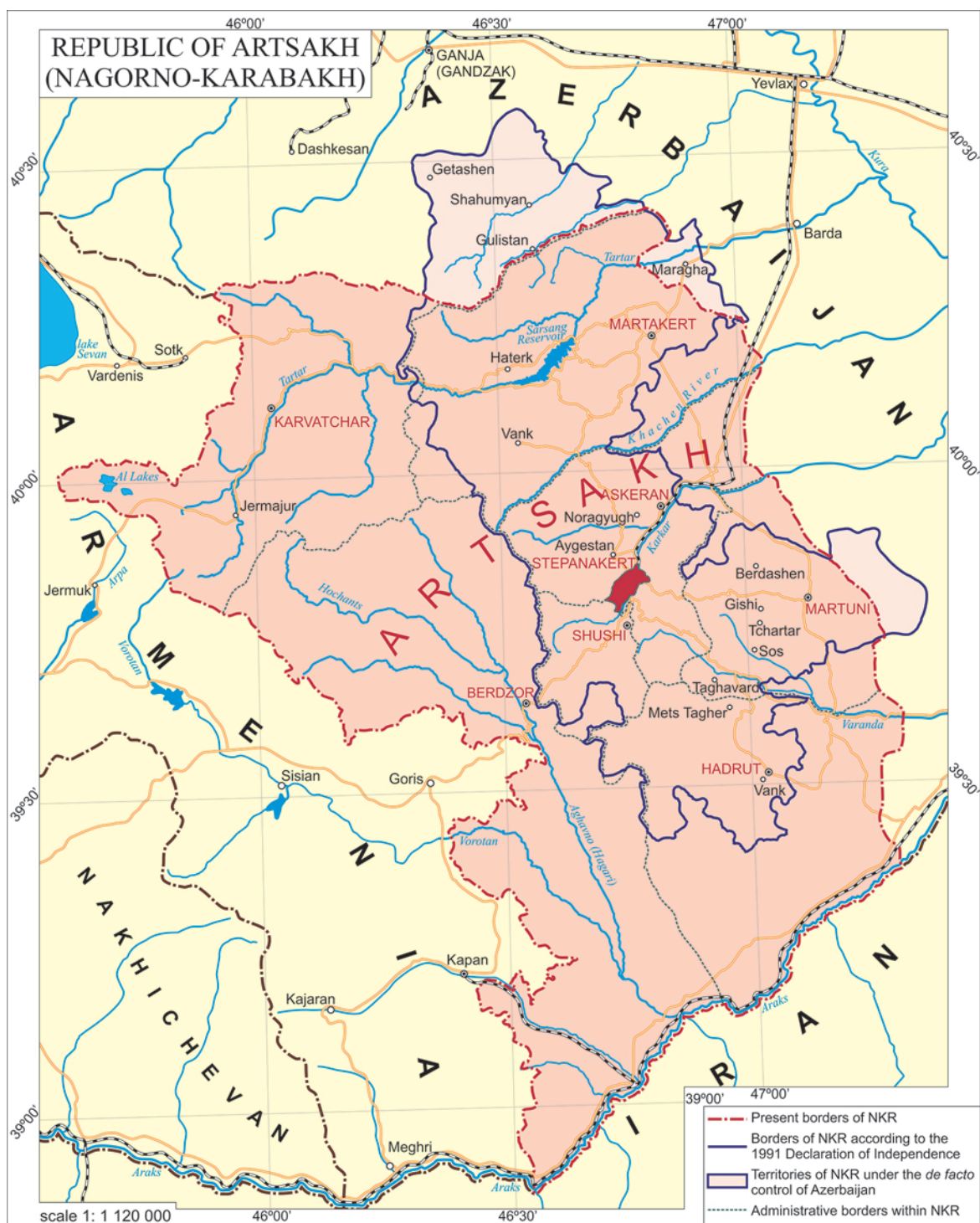
natural tourism in the country.

Because of the blockade by Azerbaijan the only way to travel to Artsakh lies through Armenia.

Although Artsakh is not yet a recognized state, it has permanent missions in Armenia, U.S.A., Russia, France, Germany, Australia and Lebanon.



 *img 17.* Artsakh State University, Stepanakert



map 5. Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh)

img 2-4, 6-10, 15-17

© VAHE GABRIELIAN

"Artsakh. The People and Land of Karabakh", 2011.

img 1

From the film "Returning City: Tigranakert" (2010), dir. RUBEN GRIGORYAN

img 11 and 12

© SHAHEN MKRTCHYAN

"The Historic-Architectural Monuments of Nagorno-Karabakh", 1985.

img 13

© RUSLAN SARGSYAN

img 14

© HAKOB POGHOSYAN

map 2 and 5

© CENTRE OF GEODESY AND CARTOGRAPHY

map 1

© ROUBEN GALICHIAN "Historic Maps of Armenia", 2003.

Image 5 and all margin decorations, except page 17
are taken from ancient manuscripts made in Artsakh.