

HISTORY

From ancient times to the beginning of the 20th century

The Azerbaijani people who restored their independence in the late 20th century have ancient statehood history.

The historical Azerbaijani lands are some of the most ancient cultural sites of modern civilization. Archaeological finds discovered in Azykh, Taghlar, Damjili, Dashsalahli, Gazma caves and in other historical sites, including the lower jaw of the Azyk man - Azykhanthrop, who lived 300-400,000 years ago, also prove Azerbaijan to be one of the sites of the formation of ancient human beings.

At the same time the people of Azerbaijan have the most ancient traditions of statehood. These traditions date back to 5,000 years. The first state establishments or ethnic-political units appeared in the Azerbaijani territory in the late 4th-early 3rd millenniums BC.

In the late 1st millennium BC-early 1st millennium AD, there were strongly organized states like Manna, Media, Atropatena and Albania in the Azerbaijani territories.

The state of Manna occupies a significant place not only in the history of statehood culture of Azerbaijan but also of the world. Manna was closely involved in all military and political events in the entire region and fought against its powerful neighbouring states of Ashshur and Urartu who were trying to invade Azerbaijan.

Cimmerians and Scythians as well as Sakas and Massageteans, who were of the same origin as Scythians, started to play an important role in the military and political life of Azerbaijan in the late 8th-early 7th century BC.

Neither long-term occupation of Ahameni-Iran empire nor invasions of Macedonian Alexander managed to destroy the statehood culture in ancient Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani statehood was restored immediately after the death of Macedonian Alexander. The state of Atropatena appeared in the south of our country, while Albania emerged in the north.

In the early years, AD our country experienced one of the hardest periods of its history: it was occupied by Sasanian-Iranian Empire in the 3rd century and by the Arab Caliphate in the 7th century. They resettled a great number of Persian-speaking population and people of Arab origin in the Azerbaijani territories. Newcomers settled in the most fertile lands and militarily and strategically important regions. They were granted considerable privileges. But this did not destroy ancient statehood traditions in Azerbaijan, and the process of formation of Azerbaijani nation continued. The internal relations, especially commercial ones developed between all regions of Azerbaijan because the entire country had been part of these empires over a long period of its history. That period saw a significant progress in the establishment of ethnic-political and cultural unification of north and south, eastern and western regions of Azerbaijan.

After the fall of the Caliphate, Azerbaijan restored its ancient statehood traditions starting from the middle 9th century: Sajid, Shirvanshah, Sallarid, Rawadid and Shaddadid states were established in Azerbaijan. That period marked a revival in political, economic, cultural and all other areas of life. The emergence of local states after the 600 year-long Sasanian and Arab rule, the spread of Islam across the country played a crucial role in Azerbaijan's development. But the states which were created after the fall of the Caliphate failed to become a single, sustainable, powerful state that would control the entire territory of the country and ensure political stability. Azerbaijan was absorbed into Seljuq Empire that stretched from the Central Asia to Mediterranean shores and from Derbent gateway to the Persian Gulf.

Shirvanshahs and Ildenizids who rose to power after the fall of Seljuq Empire played a crucial role in maintaining and developing the Azerbaijani people's statehood traditions. The state of Ildenizids, which grew into the most powerful state in the Near and Middle East, occupies a significant place in the Azerbaijani people's ethnic and political history.

Azerbaijan's statehood culture was further enriched in the 15th-18th centuries when the states of Kara Koyunlu, Ag Koyunlu and Safavid that stretched over a large part of the East were controlled by Azerbaijani tribes. This important factor positively influenced the state's internal and foreign relations and contributed to the expansion of the sphere of influence of Azerbaijani language and development of people's material and moral culture.

In the late 15th-early 16th century, Azerbaijani statehood entered a new stage of its development as grandchild of Uzun Hasan, outstanding statesman Shah Ismail, managed to unite all Azerbaijani territories within a single state. With its capital in Tabriz, it was the Azerbaijani state of Safavid. The Safavid rule saw the Azerbaijani statehood culture develop even further. The activities and successful internal and foreign policy of Shah Ismayil, Shah Tahmasib, Shah Abbas and other rulers turned the Safavid state into one of the most powerful empires in the Near and Middle East.

Outstanding Azerbaijani ruler Nadir Shah who came to power after the fall of the Safavid state expanded the territory of the former empire. In 1739, he invaded Northern India, including Delhi. But his plans to create a powerful, centralized state on this large territory failed. After the death of Nadir Shah, his empire fell.

In the second half of the 18th century, Azerbaijan was divided into small states – khanates and sultanates. The country entered a period of military and political crisis. Several khans' attempts to unite the country in a single state failed. This situation gave foreign invaders a chance.

Azerbaijan became a theatre of bloody wars between two powers. The territory of Azerbaijan was divided by two great empires under Gulustan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828) treaties: the north of Azerbaijan was annexed to Russia, while the south to Iran which was ruled by Qajar.

But true Azerbaijani patriots and outstanding representatives of the intelligentsia did their utmost to ensure the Azerbaijani people's moral development and preserve their legacy, traditions and national culture.

But true Azerbaijani patriots and outstanding representatives of the intelligentsia did their utmost to ensure the Azerbaijani people's moral development and preserve their legacy, traditions and national culture.

The First Republic: Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920)

On May 28, 1918, the first democratic parliamentary republic in the Muslim East – Azerbaijan Democratic Republic – was proclaimed. The newly established Azerbaijan Democratic Republic did its utmost to honorably fulfill the historic mission that it undertook. The republic made great strides in building an independent, democratic state, creating the first parliament and government, state apparatus and governing institutions, defining the country's borders, establishing military units with high combat capability, ensuring territorial integrity and national security. It adopted the national flag, anthem and emblem, declared the mother tongue as a state language, focused attention on education and culture, and took other purposeful steps in order to ensure comprehensive development of the nation and national statehood in the years to come.

Guided by the principles of people power and equality from the very first days of its existence, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic eliminated racial, ethnic, religious and class inequalities by granting all citizens of the country the same rights. For the first time in the East and long before some European countries, women were granted the right to vote in Azerbaijan.

Unfortunately, Azerbaijan Democratic Republic had to make one of its first decisions under quite complicated conditions when the Armenian military units conducted ethnic cleansing policy against the Azerbaijanis and put forward territorial claims. That decision was to concede Irevan to Armenia as its capital city as a compromise was reached as a result of the Batumi negotiations. This grave historic mistake paved the way for the next tragedies in the life of the Azerbaijani people, encouraging the continuous expansion of the Armenians.

On December 7, 1918, a solemn opening ceremony of the Azerbaijani parliament was held in H. Z. Taghiyev's school for girls (present day Institute of Manuscripts named after Muhammad Fuzuli). This was the first legislative body formed on the basis of the most progressive, democratic principles of that time in the entire Muslim East. The laws adopted during a year-and-a-half activity of the parliament contributed to the strengthening of the national independence, political, economic, cultural and educational development.

Azerbaijan Democratic Republic pursued a peaceful policy trying to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with all states and build relationships based on the principles of respect for each other's rights. It was thanks to the activities of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic that Azerbaijan became a subject of international law, which prevented its disappearance from the political map of the world as a state after the Bolshevik occupation in April 1920.

The Second Republic: Azerbaijan during the Soviet era (1920-1991)

On April 28, 1920, Azerbaijan was occupied by the Bolshevik Russia. During the Soviet era, Azerbaijan's statehood faced serious challenges. In 1920-1922, Azerbaijan formally maintained its independence which was de-facto recognized by the international community. In March 1922, three republics of the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia) were united under a single state of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR) which completely ended formal independence.

During the Soviet period, the territories of Zangazur, Goycha provinces, part of Nakhchivan and other regions were seized from Azerbaijan and annexed to Armenia. The area of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was reduced from 114,000 sq km to 86,600 sq km. In addition, on July 7, 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) was established on the initiative of the Bolshevik leaders, which was a first step towards separating Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's resistance to the Soviet authorities sparked heavy-handed and brutal response which was accompanied by exiles and repressions. During the repressions of 1937, the majority of representatives of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia who disagreed with the Soviet power were arrested under various pretexts or exiled to deserts and steppes of Siberia and Kazakhstan, many of them were executed.

The people of Azerbaijan demonstrated great heroism during the Second World War, and Azerbaijani divisions fought from the Caucasus to Berlin. Baku oil played a decisive role in achieving victory over fascism.

Heydar Aliyev's coming to power in Azerbaijan on July 14, 1969, became a historic event that allowed the country to address many fateful challenges.

Large-scale measures aimed at developing the economy in the early 1970s and early 1980s, including the establishment of a number of industrial enterprises and state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities transformed the republic from an agrarian into an industrial one.

So despite all the restrictions, huge potential gained during the Soviet period, mainly in 1969-1982, was very crucial to Azerbaijan, which regained its independence at the end of the 20th century.

The Third Republic: The Republic of Azerbaijan

On October 18, 1991, when Azerbaijan gained its independence it declared itself the political and legal successor of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and demonstrated its commitment to its ancient traditions of statehood. Soon it restored state symbols of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

The first years of independence were extremely difficult for the Republic of Azerbaijan. The country was significantly weakened by Armenia's expanding aggression, internal power struggle and collapse of the economy. Irresponsible activity of Popular Front-Musavat government brought Azerbaijan to the verge of collapse.

But national leader Heydar Aliyev's returning to power in 1993 marked a turning point in the situation. On June 15, 1993, Heydar Aliyev was elected as chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Azerbaijan. That day went down into the history of Azerbaijan as National Salvation Day. On June 23, the Milli Majlis entrusted the presidential power to Heydar Aliyev. The people united much closer around their leader. On October 3, 1993, Heydar Aliyev was elected as President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Independent state building, ensuring security and territorial integrity, restoration of the economy, democratic development, establishment of international relations of Azerbaijan and its integration into the world community were the key priorities of Heydar Aliyev's national development strategy.

It was Heydar Aliyev's salvation mission that allowed to preserve the state independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The national leader's tenure as president from 1993 to 2003 went down in Azerbaijan's history as a period of fundamental reforms.

The outcomes of 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018 (early) presidential elections are clear examples of this support. The unity between the people and the government is the crucial factor in the development of independent Azerbaijan.

Today, Azerbaijan is one of the world's most competitive countries, and the enormous projects Azerbaijan has implemented jointly with its partners have redrawn Eurasia's energy and transportation map.

The people of Azerbaijan have a great heritage of statehood and are proud of their glorious past. They regard the freedom that they cherish and preserve like the apple of an eye as a historical milestone and demonstrate readiness to any sacrifice for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The 44-day Patriotic war, which culminated in a Azerbaijan's great victory under the leadership of the Commander-in-Chief, President Ilham Aliyev, clearly reflects this determination, resolve and boundless commitment to historical heritage and culture. Today, the Republic of Azerbaijan, as a state that has restored its territorial integrity, is experiencing the time of most significant redevelopment and return in its history.