

Karabakh
a hidden treasure



Shoushi
City of Speaking Stones



REPUBLIC OF
MOUNTAINOUS
KARABAKH



Shoushi

City of Speaking Stones



Shoushi, the city of speaking stones, is perched majestically atop the towering mountains like an eagle's nest. Over its two-hundred-year history, Shoushi has become a symbol of the Armenian people's inexhaustible courage and faith in the future. Carved with the loving hands of the ancient craftsmen, the stones seem to whisper to you, sharing their innermost secrets. With its clean mountain air, mild climate, healing mineral waters and lush greenery Shoushi is a favourite destination in Mountainous Karabakh.

One of the most picturesque vantage points in the republic, the Shoushi plateau has been inhabited for millennia. Archaeological excavations have revealed objects and tools from the Hellenistic period and the early Middle Ages. The foundations of Shoushi's first fortress were laid at the end of the first millennium AD. A much larger fortress was built at the beginning of the 18th century and since it was located along one of the main caravan routes between Armenia and Persia, it later became a rich and densely populated residential area.

HISTORY

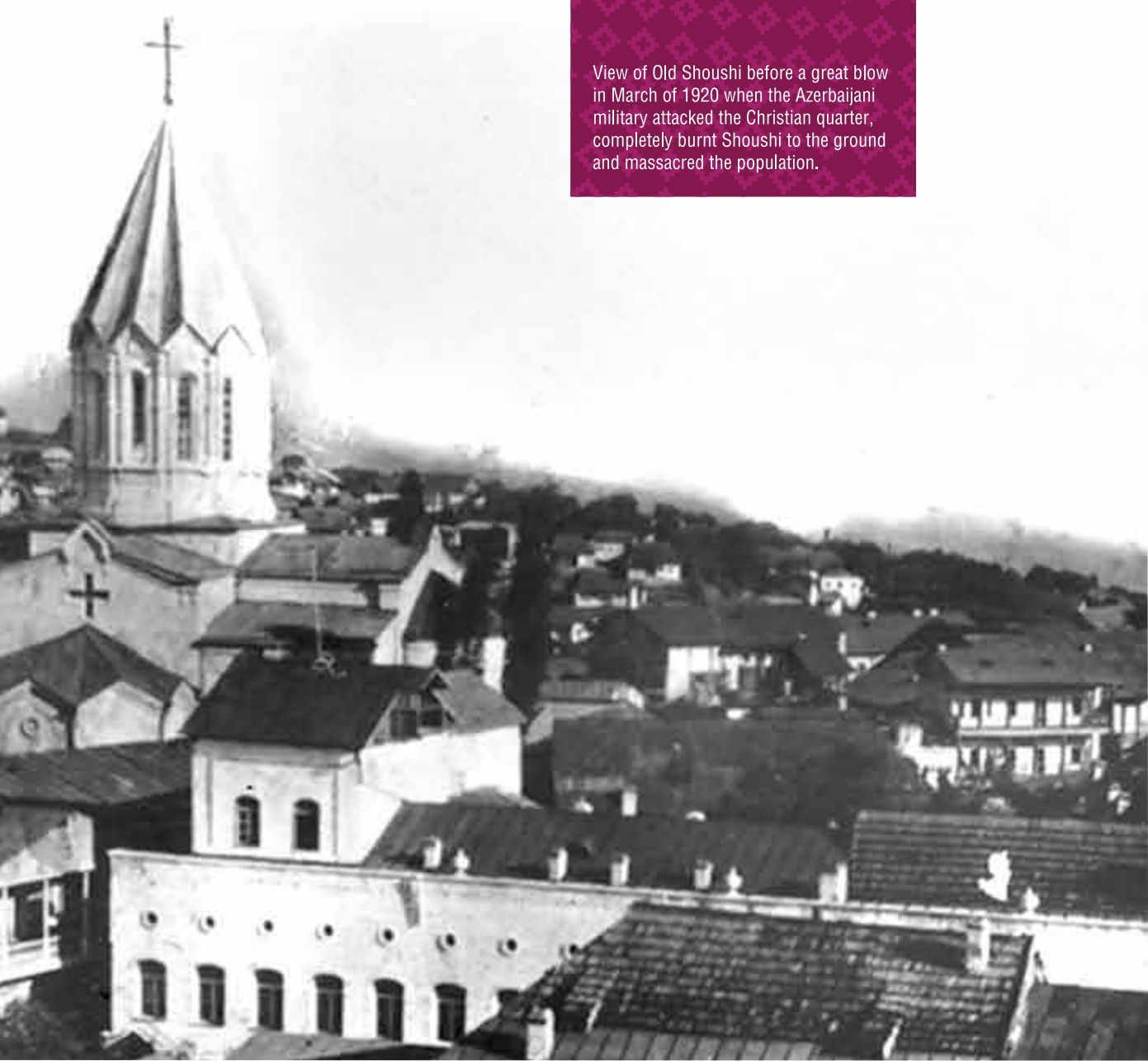
When Karabakh was under the rule of the Persian Empire, Shoushi became a commercial centre. In 1806, Mountainous Karabakh and Eastern Armenia came under the rule of the Russian Empire. A century of relative peace followed, which allowed for an unprecedented boom in construction, arts, crafts and education. In 1847, Shoushi officially gained the status of a city and its emblem was created.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Shoushi was a highly developed city with water and sewage systems, evenly laid out streets and sidewalks, and a rich cultural and commercial life. The city had twenty Armenian language newspapers and magazines and two Russian publications. There were six schools, including the Real School, the Mariamyan Girls' School (the first girls' school in the Caucasus) and the Diocesan School.

Plays by Armenian and European playwrights were performed at the famous Khandamiryan Theatre. There were 570 workshops scattered throughout the city, where artisans wove exquisite Karabakh silks and carpets, made jewellery and created other luxury items. Shoushi's two markets were among the highlights of the city, with their wide range of merchandise and their bright eastern flair. At the time, Shoushi was the capital of Karabakh. It had a population of 45,000 with roughly 30,000 Armenians and 15,000 Muslims. It had seven Armenian churches, one Russian Orthodox church and two mosques. Because of its harmonious blend of cultures Shoushi was nicknamed "the Conservatory of the Caucasus".

However, the lively city suffered a great blow in March of 1920, when the Azerbaijani military attacked the Christian quarter with the support of the city's Muslim residents. Over a short three-day period, they ruthlessly massacred the population, carried out massive looting and burned down houses. Two-thirds of Shoushi was completely burnt to the ground, leaving the city in utter ruins.





View of Old Shoushi before a great blow in March of 1920 when the Azerbaijani military attacked the Christian quarter, completely burnt Shoushi to the ground and massacred the population.



HISTORY

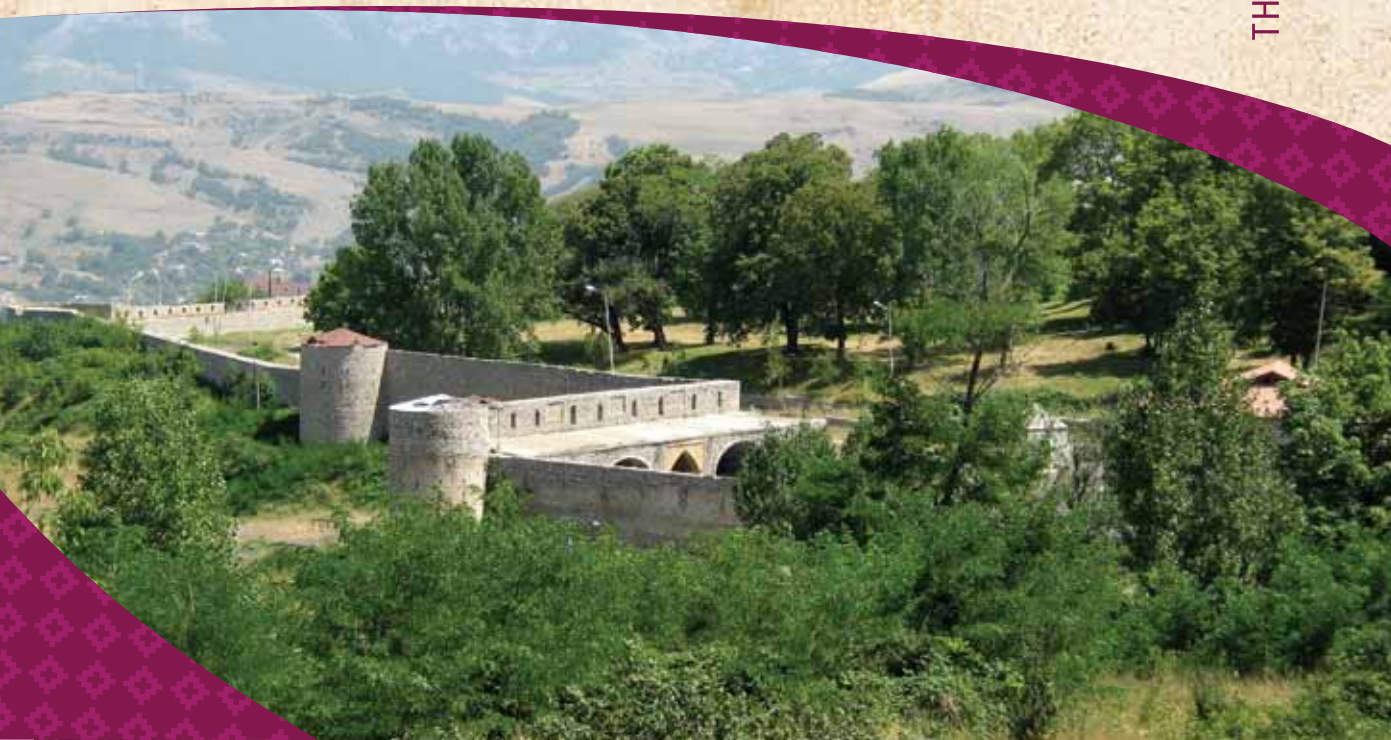
Within a few days, not a single one of Shoushi's 30,000 Armenian residents was left. Those who had survived the massacre had fled to safety. Under the Soviet regime, Shoushi was not able to revive itself from this blow, so it lost much of its cultural value. Once a bustling city, it became more of a sleepy town.

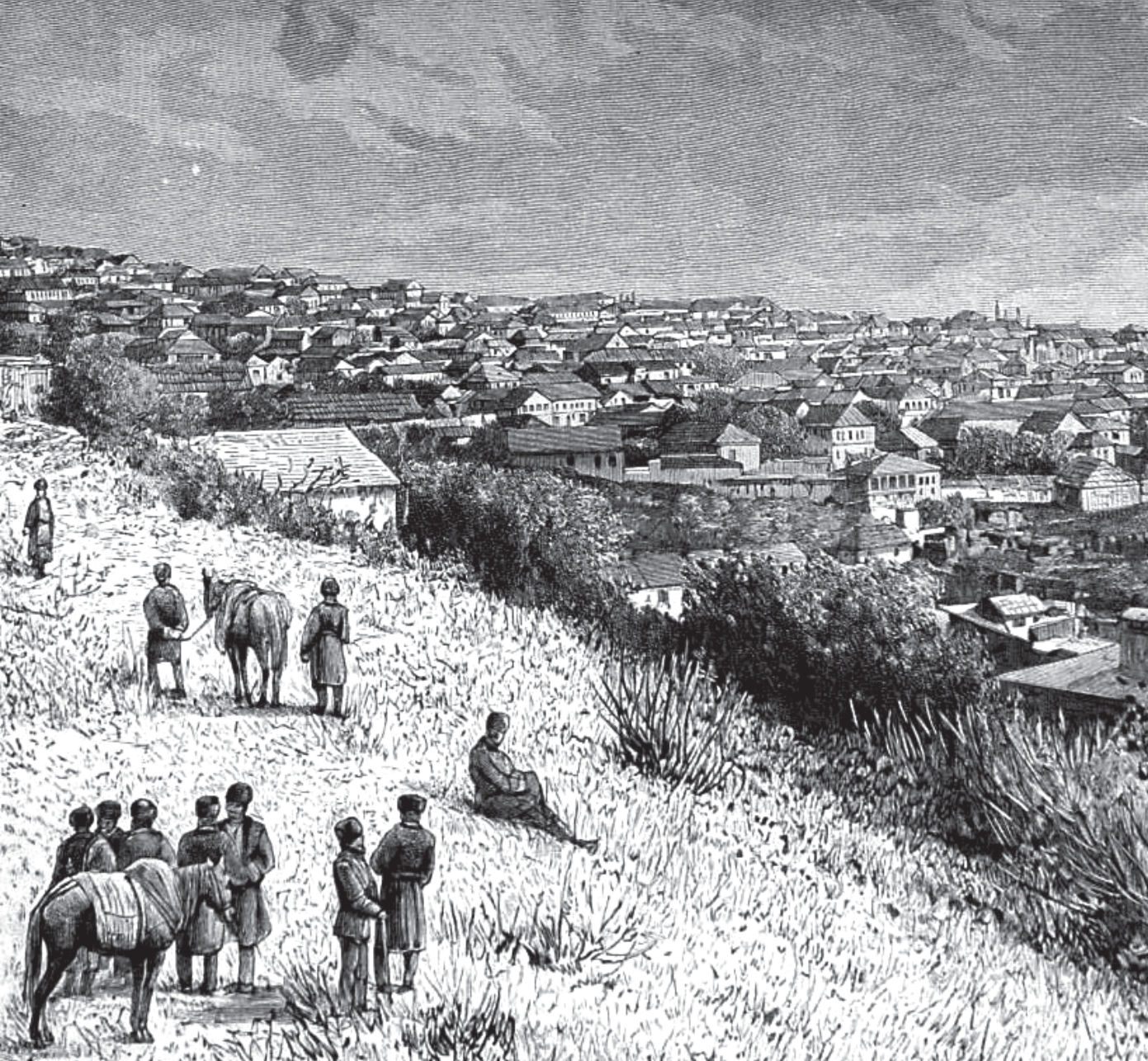
In 1992, after the liberation of Shoushi, a movement started to revive the city's cultural, spiritual and commercial life, and this revival process is still underway. Today, there are a number of hotels in Shoushi as well cultural and artistic centres, such as the Naregatsi Cultural Centre. Shoushi has become a symbol of national revival and a pilgrimage place for tourists, Diaspora Armenians and locals alike.

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One of Shoushi's principal attractions is its medieval fortress. Founded in the early 15th century, it has been almost entirely preserved. The 18th century Meliks of Varanda built upon its foundations and it was soon overtaken by Turkic tribes. A century later, Russian military engineers restored the fortress and used it as a defense post during the Russian-Persian war of 1826.

The 2.5 kilometre-long fortifications start high atop the plateau, spanning all the way to the cliff's edge, bowing down the steep slopes towards the gorge then back up, becoming one with the mighty boulders. The wall is only broken by towers, which seem to be hanging off the cliffs. Of the four walls that surround the fortress-city, only the wall of Elizavetpol is fully intact, hinting at the splendour of this once mighty fortress.







In the 19th century, as the Muslim population of Shoushi grew, two mosques were built. The Upper Mosque, located in the centre of the Muslim quarter, was built in 1883. It was designed by the renowned Persian architect, Kerbali Sefi Khan. This fine example of traditional Muslim architecture works harmoniously with Shoushi's Armenian architectural style.

The facade of the mosque is flanked by two tall brick minarets, from which the call to prayer would ring out five times a day. Later, a madrasa (a Muslim religious school) was built next to the mosque. During Soviet times, the mosque was turned into a museum. Today, there are no Muslims in Shoushi, so the mosque no longer functions, though it is being restored.

Today, there are no Muslims in Shoushi, but there are a lot of fine examples of traditional Muslim architecture which work harmoniously with Shoushi's Armenian architectural style.

ST. SAVIOUR CATHEDRAL

The 50-meter tall St. Saviour Church (also known as Ghazanchetsots Cathedral) is Shoushi's architectural masterpiece, dominating the landscape of the entire city.

Founded in 1888, the cathedral is located in a wide square near the centre of the city. It is built of white limestone and decorated with exquisitely carved ornaments. A majestic bell tower stands adjacent to the church, with four statues of angels proudly sounding their horns. This unique imagery gives St. Saviour Cathedral an important place in Armenian artistic heritage. There is an area below the cathedral's altar that has a unique acoustic quality, refracting sound in a strange and almost surreal way.

Ghazanchetsots is one of the most magnificent and renowned Armenian churches in the world. It is truly a treasure of Armenian spiritual life and architecture.

CIVIL ARCHITECTURE

Shoushi's architectural monuments include residential and public buildings, which give the fortress-city a charming atmosphere with their distinct style. The 19th century stone residential buildings stand stoically, displaying a wide range of building techniques. Their beautifully carved window frames, entrance ways and other details give them a festive air. Surrounded by lush gardens, each house has its own unique charm giving the old quarter a warm, quirky, yet distinguished character.

Shoushi also has several public buildings that are worth noting, both for their architectural style and for their historic significance. The Real School is of particular interest. This two-story building was once one of the most important educational centres in the Caucasus. Built from 1901 to 1908, it is notable for its harmonious proportions and its tasteful blend of Armenian and European styles. The Zhamharyan Hospital is next to the school, along with the Mariamyan Girls' School, both of which were built according to Armenian architectural traditions. The ruins of the caravanserai located a short distance from Shoushi's central square are also worth exploring.

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THE MARKET ■

Shoushi's market is located in the centre of the fortress-city and is one of its main attractions. Its central square, at the intersection of two main streets, is flanked by the Tarkhanyan Brothers Medieval Market building and the Upper Mosque. The two-story market building, a beautiful work of civil architecture, is surrounded by arched galleries, which served both as an area for vendors to display their goods and as their living quarters. One of the areas of the medieval market was designated as a prayer room for Muslims.

The Tarkhanyan Brothers Medieval Market has recently been restored. It houses workshops, souvenir boutiques, and all sorts of stores.

Dozens of memorial fountains are scattered throughout the city. These monuments, which take the form of small shelters, are made of high-quality engraved limestone. Each fountain has a story, adding to Shoushi's unique and colourful atmosphere.

Shoushi's first two memorial fountains were built in 1871. In 1896, after the construction of a water supply system under the patronage of philanthropist Tadevos Tamiryan, several others were built, bringing the total number of Shoushi's memorial fountains to twenty. Many of them are well-preserved, standing as reminders of Shoushi's glorious past.

The Local Lore Museum of Shoushi is situated in a fascinating 19th century residence. Its exhibits paint the picture of Shoushi's history through a varied collection of artefacts. One of the display halls is dedicated to the liberation of Shoushi on May 8, 1992. The museum's collection is frequently replenished, so it's always worth a visit.

MEMORIAL FOUNTAINS

MUSEUM





The Hunot Gorge is one of the most beautiful sites in Karabakh. More than three kilometers long and 250 metres deep, it's a unique natural and historic treasure, covered in dense forests.



The Hunot Gorge is one of the most beautiful sites in Karabakh. More than three kilometres long and about 250 metres deep, it is a unique natural and historic treasure, covered in dense forest. In the depths of the gorge, there is a little gift from nature: a cave that is only accessible by going through a waterfall.

The ruins of Hunot village are preserved here: several water mills, three stone bridges, a church and fortresses, which played an important role in Shoushi's defense. The residents of nearby villages still use one of the bridges, which was built in 1720. Near the western slope, you can still see the defense post and the remains of ancient cave dwellings. You can access the Hunot Gorge from the breathtaking cliffs at the eastern end of the city known as Djdrdyuz, where you'll have a splendid panoramic view of Shoushi and the depths of the mighty gorge.

THE HUNOT GORGE



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REPUBLIC OF MOUNTAINOUS KARABAKH

Government Tourism Department

2, Knounyantsneri str., Stepanakert
+ 374 47 94 91 72
info@tourismdept.nkr.am

www.karabakh.travel

