

Nino Chanishvili

RESEARCH PROJECT

**NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE OF TBILISI AS A REFLECTION OF
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE CITY**

**BAKU STUDY TRIP REPORT
(24-27 April, 2008)**

In the frame of research project financed by FaRiG I organized study trip in Baku in 24-27 April 2008. The goal of the trip was to gain first-hand experience of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century architecture of Baku.

The trip was very useful. During these four days, I managed to see almost all of the most important buildings of the city and to examine the urban structure of the old part of Baku, which along with the study of primary and secondary sources will help me to conduct a comparative analysis. Preliminary results of the study show that XIX century architecture and urban culture of Baku and Tbilisi have similarity. However, Baku compared with Tbilisi was developed far later as a regional metropolis. In 1870s rise of oil industry was major factor for city development; since before this period Baku was a calm little city.

By the first half of XIX century core part of Baku was still Ichari Shahar (inner city), which was surrounded by city walls. Urban tissue was irregular as in many other medieval cities. I have possibility to compare typical traditional houses of Ichari Shahar with houses located in Kala, which is also medieval part of Tbilisi. In both cities traditional houses have same planning and façade articulation. The dominant of façade wooden balconies are often combined with classicist architectural details. However, we could not meet in Ichari Shahar houses set back from the street or faced with wooden galleries to the street, which is very common for houses in Kala.



1. Traditional dwelling in Ichari Shahar

From 1870s Baku was rapidly increasing outside from Ichari Shahar. In new quarters, which had more regular planning, were built new administrative, public and commercial buildings. Moreover, oil barons built their private apartments there. Similar situation can be traced in Tbilisi. In the first half of the nineteenth century new districts Solalaki and Mtatsminda became administrative and cultural centers and more attractive for bourgeoisies.

Aim of my study was to compare dwellings and tenement houses built in new quarters of Baku and Tbilisi. In both cities, architecture followed different styles, which were popular in Russian Empire and Europe. Architecture was combined with Classical, Renaissance and Baroque elements. Gothic revival and pseudo Moorish styles were also employed. However, as I found in Baku rear of houses is simple and not essential, while in Tbilisi residential houses courtyards were always enclosed by broad wooden balconies. In Tbilisi classic, renaissance or baroque elements on facades were intertwined with balconies and this forms essential element of Tbilisian dwellings. Therefore, I assume that generally architectural tradition was more kept in Tbilisi dwellings.

It should be mentioned one common trend, which I found after visiting Baku. There was



an attempt to revive traditional architecture in new buildings. In Baku source for inspiration was mosques and palaces which still stood in Ichari Shahar. Medieval architecture was revived with the use of muqarnas, arches, ornamented patterns and wooden balconies terminated with domes. While façade articulation in Tbilisi was reminiscence of medieval Georgian church architecture with the use of Georgian ornaments. Though, in both cases this again was stylization and not organic development of traditional architecture.

2. Ramazanov house (sample of national revival).



3. City Council. Architect I. Goslavski. 1900-1904.

In the end I have to mention preliminary results of studying architecture of public buildings in Baku. As it is known before the 19th century Tbilisi and Baku had no tradition of constructing European-type public buildings. Only after becoming part of Russian Empire it was adopted to build administrative buildings, theatres, opera houses, lyceums, museums, hotels. In public buildings, especially in administrative buildings we cannot trace any connection with local architectural traditions. Architecture of public buildings followed only European models as it was required by Russian Empire.

In conclusion field work in Baku enabled me to understand how through the policy of Russian empire and rapid economic development was neglected traditional architecture in public buildings, while at the same the tradition was continued in old districts, where mostly poor people lived; How in regional metropolises it was changed taste toward architecture with the social and economic changes.