

BOOK REVIEW: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE KARABAKH CONFLICT AND SHUSHA, THE CULTURAL CAPITAL by *Vefa Kurban*

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One of the major consequences of the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by the Russian Empire in the early 19th century was the emergence of an Armenian presence in the region. From that time onwards, Armenians relocated from Iran and the Ottoman Empire were settled in various parts of the South Caucasus, including Revan, Karabakh, Nakhchivan, and others. This process paved the way for the emergence of the so-called “Armenian issue,” which would later serve as an effective tool for the Russian Empire to maintain its control over the South Caucasus. Throughout the 20th century, this manufactured issue was warmed over, resulting in the occupation of Azerbaijani territories, ethnic clashes, and the establishment of an Armenian state on Western Azerbaijani lands. Starting from 1988, in the chaotic environment that eventually led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenians renewed their territorial claims against Azerbaijan. In such a tense international climate, the situation escalated into open conflict, culminating in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, which was brought to a halt by a ceasefire agreement signed in 1994. Throughout the approximately quarter-century-long ceasefire, Armenia took no constructive steps toward fostering peace between the two nations. Instead, it took action in 2016 and 2020 to further its occupation efforts. The Armenian army’s offensive in September 2020 marked the beginning of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The 44-day war ultimately concluded with a victory for the Azerbaijani army. Throughout the two-century-long conflict and occupation process, Armenia sought to exert psychological pressure on Azerbaijan not only through armed means but also through information and propaganda tactics. In this context, the biased stance of major powers, double standards, and the support of the Armenian diaspora played a significant role in Armenia’s success in its attempts. Many works published by Armenian scholars, both within their country and abroad, which lack a solid scholarly foundation and distort historical facts, often attempt to justify the Armenian occupation by discussing topics such as the “Armenian genocide,” the “ancient Armenian state,” “injustices suffered by Armenians,” and the “ancient Armenian state of Artsakh (Karabakh).” In such an environment, the works authored by Turkish and Azerbaijani scholars not only serve as a response to Armenian false claims but also hold significant importance in filling the gaps within academic literature. The book “Historical Background of the Karabakh Conflict and Shusha, the Cultural Capital,” authored by Prof. Dr. Vefa Kurban and published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2023, is a noteworthy contribution in this regard. During the writing of this book, a comprehensive literature review was conducted, including the works of distinguished Turkish and Azerbaijani scholars and researchers who have made significant contributions to the field,

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such as Cavid Abdullahzade, Araz Aslanlı, Toğrul İsmayıl, Nesib Nesibli, Ramin Sadık, Sebahattin Şimşir, Aydın Balayev, Okan Yeşilot, Rasim Sadiq, and others.

In the first chapter of the book, the historical background of the so-called "Karabakh issue" is discussed, drawing upon primary sources and archival documents to shed light on the process that has been ongoing since the early 20th century. The second chapter delves into the developments in Azerbaijan's second period of independence and Armenia's occupation policies. The chapter covers the ceasefire process initiated in 1994, the provocative activities by Armenians during this period, and last but not least, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, which lasted for 44 days and resulted in Azerbaijan's victory. Additionally, the chapter also addresses the stances and policies of regional states. The book's third chapter is dedicated to Shusha, one of Azerbaijan's historical cities and an important centre of Turkish culture. It is worth noting that despite clear historical documents detailing how this city was built, Armenians have baselessly claimed ownership of Shusha. In reality, this city was constructed at a relatively recent date by Shusha Khan Panah Ali Khan as described by Mir-Mohsun Navvab, *"In the year 1170 of the Hijri calendar (1756 A.D.), at the order of Panah Khan, a fortress was built on this place, and it was named Panahabad Fortress. Now, this fortress is referred to as Shusha Fortress. Over time, this fortress developed into a city."* Additionally, it is crucial to underscore that, for Azerbaijan Turks, Shusha carries immense cultural and historical value beyond being just a piece of land within their country. Therefore, the liberation of Shusha from Armenian occupation is regarded as a significant event symbolizing the victory of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. It is the reason why the Shusha Declaration, which holds immense importance for Turkey-Azerbaijan relations, was signed in this city, chosen as the Cultural Capital of the Turkic World in 2023. This section of the book presents Shusha's mosques, houses, caravanserais, fountains, and other historical and cultural landmarks based on documents that establish ownership and historical records. These documents serve as compelling evidence to debunk baseless claims and falsehoods put forth by Armenians. Prof. Dr. Vefa Kurban's work not only makes a significant contribution to existing literature but also inspires future research in this field.