

IRAVAN CITADELS

Two powerful fortresses existed in the territory of the former Iravan Khanate in Azerbaijan in the past. The first structure of this type was the Iravan fortress built in the early 16th century, while the other one was the **Sardarabad** fortress, which was erected on the orders of Huseyn Khan. The latter was named after the khan, who had the title of sardar, i.e. the Iranian Shah's army commander. Both fortresses had been constructed by the Azerbaijanis.

The Sardarabad fortress was located on a wide plain at the foot of Mount Alagez, 24 versts (a Russian measure of length that equals about 1.1 kilometers) away from the Echmiadzin monastery. This location provided for extensive visibility, which was a significant factor during siege. The fortress, which had a quadrangular shape, was surrounded by two rows of high walls and towers at the corners. Moreover, broad gates were built in the walls. **The fortress was safeguarded by an almost**

Banner of the Iravan Khanate from the collection of the National Museum of Georgia at an exhibition in the Heydar Aliyev Center. Baku, 2019

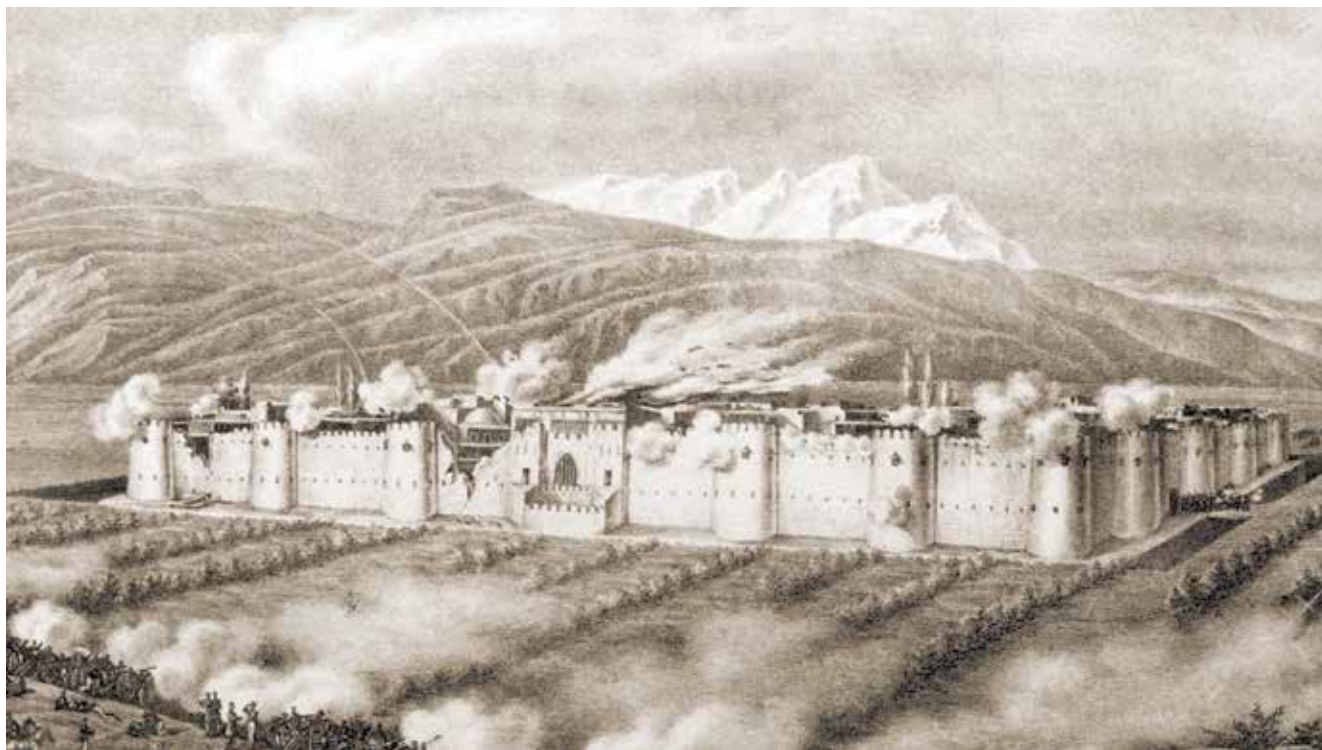




*Standard of the Iravan khan. Early 19th century. Azerbaijan
National Museum of History*



*Iravan on a Russian military map
of the early 19th century*

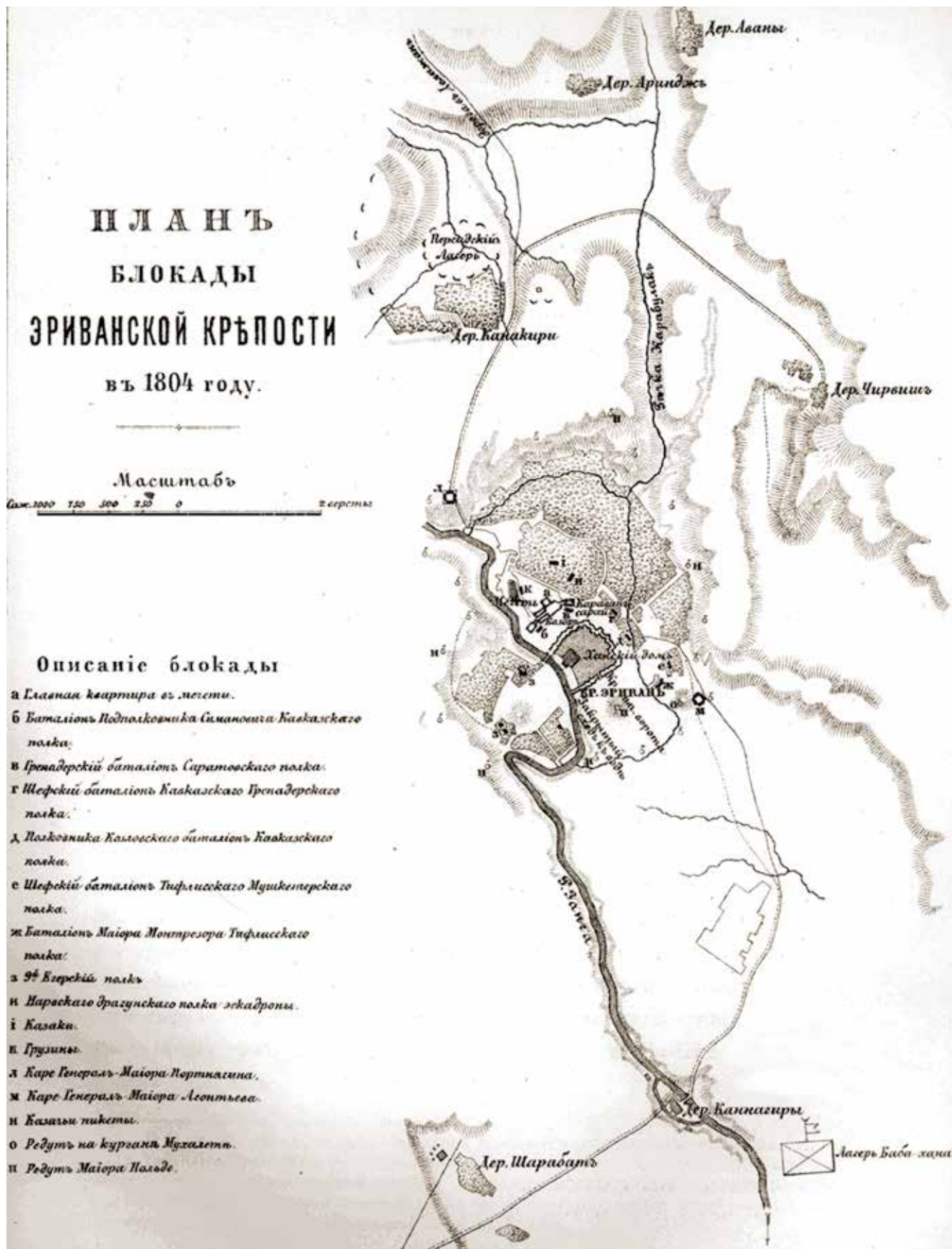
Russian assault on the Sardarabad fortress. 1827. Artist V. Mashkov, an eyewitness to the events

2,000 people-strong garrison; 14 weapons were installed upon the walls (1). The Sardarabad fortress was one of the most inaccessible fortifications of that time period. It turned out to be a formidable stronghold for the Russian troops that had launched an assault upon the Iravan Khanate.

The Iravan fortress was not only an older structure but it was also larger than the Sardarabad fortress. It had a strategically beneficial location on the steep right

bank of the fast-flowing Zengichay river. Its western wall was situated against the river bank. The fortress had an almost quadrangular shape, with the exception of the arched western wall, which stretched along the high bank of the river. The walls were honed of rocks and raw bricks. The height of the external wall was 5 sazhen (a measure of length formerly used in Russia that equals about seven feet); according to some data, it had 17 towers. The interior wall, which was some 50-60 meters

Russian assault on the Iravan fortress. 1827. Artist V. Mashkov



Plan of the Iravan fortress drawn up by Russian military topographers in the early 19th century



away from the external one, was even higher (2) and also had several towers, which were shaped as a semi-circle. Thus, **if the attackers managed to break through the external wall, they ended up in a confined space between two rows of walls**, which complicated their maneuvering capabilities and facilitated the task of the defensive garrison troops.

The fortress had two gated entrances: the Tabriz gate on the south side and Shirvan in the north. The gates were made of thick wooden plates with iron sheet upholstery. The design of the openings was aimed at obstructing the passage of wagons. The gates were protected by guards placed in special rooms on the external wall (3). The external and interior walls of the



*View of the Iravan fortress from the Zangi river.
Photo of the 20th century*



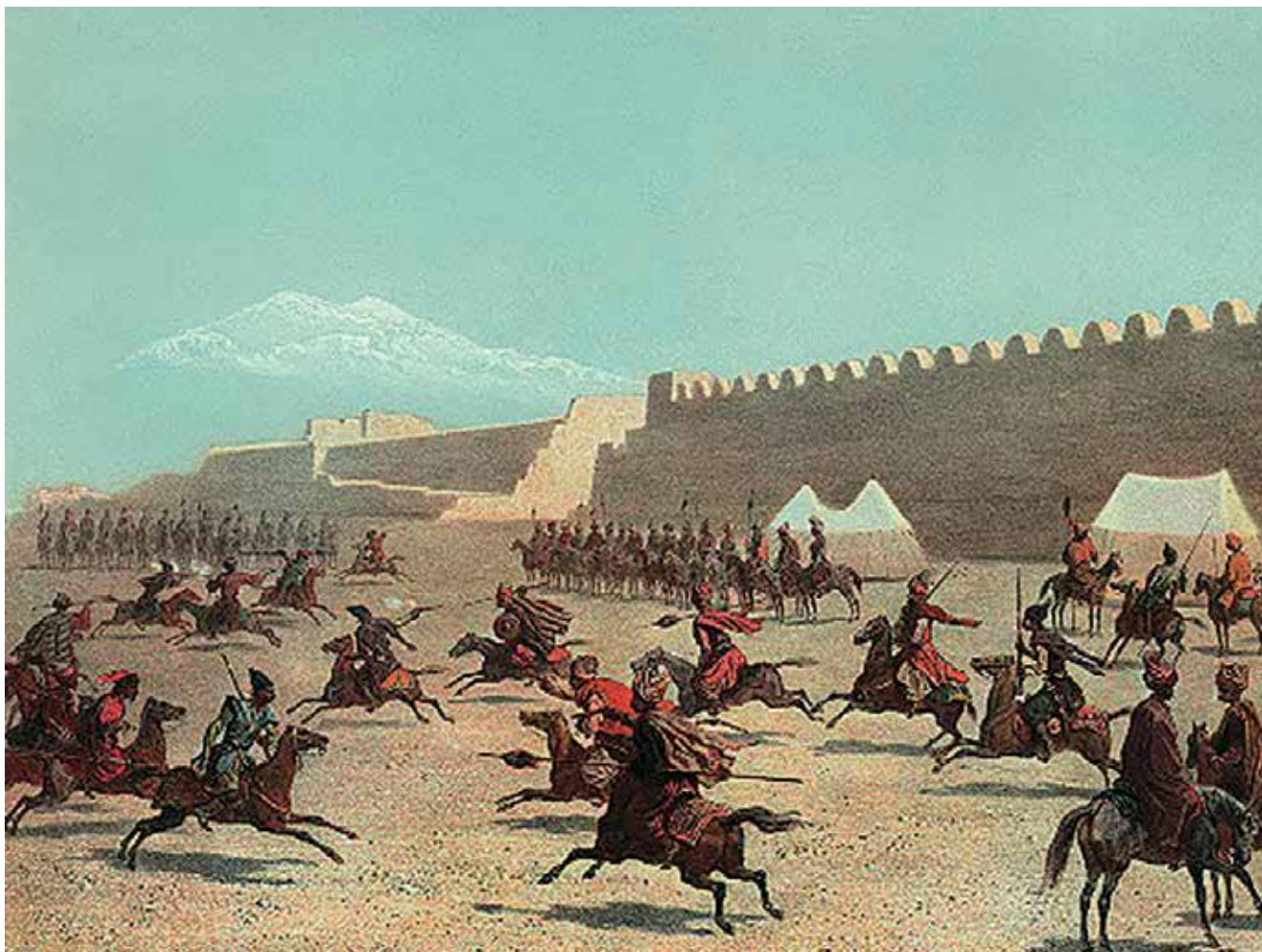


fortress were connected by transitional walls near both gates. It is worth mentioning that the **Iravan fortress walls were very steadfast and could withstand artillery shells. The fortress had a hidden water pipe, which allowed the garrison to endure lengthy siege.** During their second attack the Russian troops discovered this pipeline and destroyed it. On the whole, **it was known as the most impregnable fortress available in the Azerbaijani khanates** and its fortification features were repeatedly noted by Russian generals in their reports. It was largely thanks to this fortress that the Iravan khanate was the last Azerbaijani khanate to have been conquered by Russia. The first assault, undertaken by the Russian troops under the command of **P. D. Tsitsianov** as early as in 1804, was a failure. This was followed by a new offensive of the Russian troops in 1808, which was led by Field Marshal-General **I. Gudovich**. The Russian army was defeated again and Gudovich had to step down as the commander of Russian troops in the Caucasus. It was not until October 1827 that the

Russian armed forces finally managed to take over this formidable citadel, using long-range weapons. **On this occasion, the church of the Winter Palace hosted a service on November 8**, which was attended by the Russian Emperor.

Interestingly, two ladder-shaped ponds, which significantly impeded an open attack, were open around the Iravan fortress. The so-called upper pond, located near the northern gate of the fortress, was replenished through an earthen stream derived from the Girkhbulag river. Extra water flowed into the lower pond via a similar waterway made of clay. The upper pond was supported by a dam reinforced by logs. Their sharp edge was buried in the ground (4).

French traveler **J. Chardin** said while referring to the Iravan fortress in the 17th century that the length of its wall amounted to 4,000 steps and that it included 800 houses. Chardin recalled that **the population of the fortress included only Azerbaijanis, while Armenians visited it for commercial purposes** and there



*Stunts on horseback (military exercises) of Iravan riders at the walls of the Sardarabad fortress.
Artist G. Gagarin. 1830s*

were several Armenian trade outlets there. The Armenians were engaged in commerce in the city in the afternoon and left in the evening (5).

The fortress had a design inherent to Oriental urban structures, including houses with high and secluded walls overlooking narrow streets, which blocked the view of the homes and courtyards.

According to the accounts of Decembrist **Y. Lachinov**, who took part in the last Russian military campaign into the Iravan khanate, the fortress had two mosques (6), though other sources cited as many as four mosques; the oldest shrine was built on the orders of Shah Ismail Safavi in 1510 during the groundbreaking of the fortress itself.

A jami (Friday mosque), built during the rule of Shah Abbas I, was located in the vicinity of the khan's palace. A library, a madrasah and guest rooms were available within this mosque. Undoubtedly, "**Sardar-sarai**" or the

khan's palace was an architectural pearl of the Iravan fortress. The palace construction had been started along with the groundbreaking of the mosque itself. Subsequently, the palace was significantly rebuilt, becoming one of the most magnificent structures of that period. The work done by architect Mirza Jafar in the late 18th century during the tenure of Huseyn Ali Khan and Mahammad, his son, is remarkable in this regard. As a result of this overhaul the palace turned into a complete architectural ensemble and one of the shining examples of Azerbaijani architecture. Y. Lachinov provided a notable description of Sardar-sarai, including the khan's residence. According to the Russian officer, the latter was designed in line with a refined taste and skill, with portraits and drawings hung up on the walls. The summer audience hall of the khan, located in front of it, was arranged and furnished just as exquisitely. There were



Weaponry of Iravan khanate soldiers from the collection of the National Museum of Georgia at an exhibition in the Heydar Aliyev Center. Baku, 2019

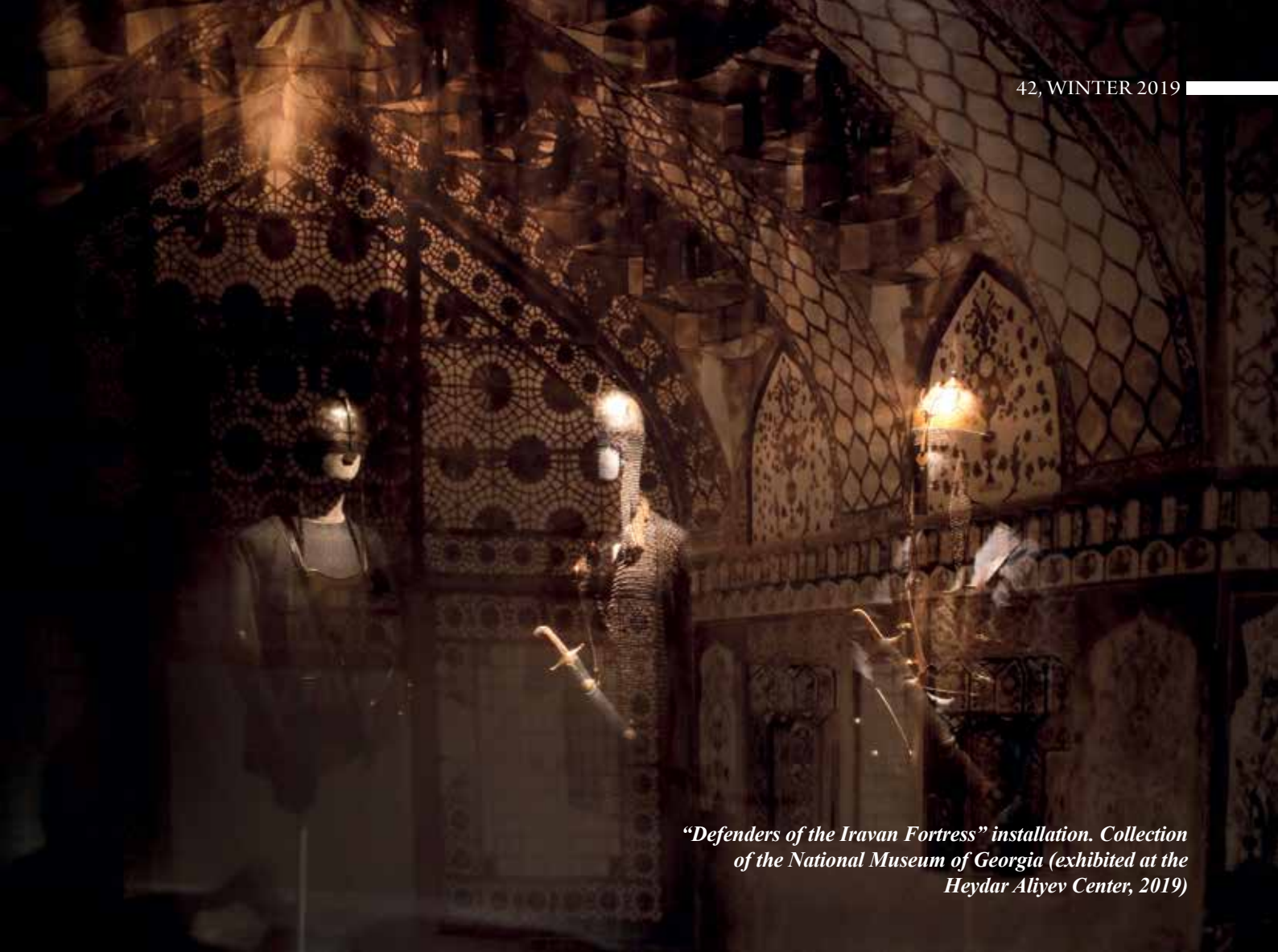
paintings featuring Iranian Fath-Ali Shah seated on the throne on one of the room's walls, along with that of Prince Abbas Mirza. The pictures of Huseyn, the last Iravan khan, and his brother, Hasan, as well as those of two Kurdish fighters (7), were seen on another wall.

The construction of the city of Iravan, itself, had been launched on the northern side of the fortress at a certain distance away from the fortification walls, which also served defensive purposes.

Currently, even ruins of the Iravan fortress, which was once a grandiose and inaccessible stronghold, are no longer available. This structure had the same fate as the other architectural monuments, which indicate that Iravan, just like the entire territory of the present-day Armenia, is indigenous Azerbaijani land. ❀

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"Defenders of the Iravan Fortress" installation. Collection of the National Museum of Georgia (exhibited at the Heydar Aliyev Center, 2019)



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