

THE DRAMA OF THE HAJINSKI HOUSE

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Isa Bey Hajinski

THE MAJESTIC MANSION ON THE FORMER ALEKSANDROVSK EMBANKMENT (NOW NEFTCHILAR AVENUE) NEAR MAIDEN'S TOWER IS ONE OF THE MOST FLAMBOYANT AND REMARKABLE ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS OF THE FIRST OIL BOOM PERIOD (1872-1920). THIS PALATIAL BUILDING IS KNOWN AS THE HAJINSKI HOUSE TO THE OLDER GENERATION OF BAKUVIANS. IN THIS HOUSE, WHICH DATES TO APPROXIMATELY 1910-1912, IT IS POSSIBLE TO TRACE THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THAT TIME – SUCH AS ECLECTICISM OF STYLE, FILIGREE STONEMWORK AND EXCEPTIONAL FLIGHTS OF FANCY BOTH OF OWNER AND ARCHITECT.

Like many pre-revolutionary mansions, it is difficult to classify the Hajinski House as belonging to a specific architectural style. However, the charm of pre-revolutionary Baku architecture can to a significant extent be found in this mix of architectural directions...

A detail noted as a strictly personal and individual observation by the author of these lines is that many Baku houses in their appearance partly remind you of the appearance of

their owners. Thus, the lightness and delicacy of the Hajinski Palace is very appropriate to the stately and aristocratic nature of its highborn owner – Isa Bey Hajinski. Who was this person who presented such a bright and unusual architectural masterpiece to the city?

Belonging to a noble family by birth, the merchant of the top guild, Isa Bey Abdulsalam-bey oghlu Hajinski was born in Baku in 1861. He was home-educated. Being a heredi-



Present-day appearance of the Hajinski House

tary owner of large land holdings on which vast deposits of oil were discovered (mainly in Balakhani and Ramana villages), I. Hajinski developed rapid entrepreneurial activities in the oil industry in the beginning of the 20th century. In 1903 he established a company, the productivity of which reached half a million poods of oil per year in the first two years of its existence. In 1910 the company had eleven oil wells, five steam generators and five steam engines with 145

horsepower.

In addition to the Balakhani fields, Isa Bey Hajinski was one of the pioneers of oil extraction on Chalakan Island near the Turkmen coast and also the owner of a kerosene factory in Baku's Black City. In 1912 the Isa Bey Hajinski oil industry company had one full vote on the board of the Baku Oil Producers Congress. The Isa Bey Hajinski and Gadimov Brothers' Company had one more vote. Along with oil production, Hajinski actively

penetrated the fisheries industry and the production of caviar in the Caspian and in October 1916 the major Hajinski-Baku trade and industrial enterprise started operating.

As we see, the entrepreneurial activity of Isa Bey was multi-faceted and varied. No less wide and many-sided was his social activity. During the twenty years following 1896 I. Hajinski was a member of Baku City Council. During the revolutionary disturbances, which in the Caucasus



The Hajinski House on the Aleksandrovs Embankment



were unavoidably accompanied by bloody interethnic conflict, he was a member of the Pacifying Committee, under supervision of Baku city, which undoubtedly testified to his high authority in the community. From 1906 until his death in 1919 I. Hajinski continuously held the post of honorary magistrate of Baku City. No less productive were the charitable and enlightening activities of Isa Bey Hajinski. From 1909 he was honourable benefactor of the first Baku High School for Boys, named after Tsar Alexander III. This was one of the major educational institutions in the city, which was originally located in the Haji Rajabli Hajiyev House (now Vatan Cinema) and later, in 1911, moved to a splendid building in the former Balakhan Street (now Fizuli Street). Today, the F. Afandiyev Fourth City Hospital is located in this mansion.

While being the honourable benefactor of the Alexander High School, Isa Bey Hajinski increased his contribution from the traditional 800 to 1000 roubles per year and in 1913 he allocated 1000 additional roubles for buying a cinematograph for the school – this was a rare phenomenon

for schools of that time. In November of the same year Hajinski bought a summer house in Mineralniye Vodi in which students with weak health could spend their holidays. The many-sided social and charitable activities of Isa Bey Hajinski undoubtedly could not go unnoticed. He was awarded with two orders of St Stanislaus (of the third and fourth degree) and the Great Gold Medal to be worn on the chest on the Andreev Ribbon.

Furthermore, Hajinski made a considerable contribution to the shaping of the architectural appearance of Baku. In addition to the place on the Aleksandrovs Embankment he owned the gorgeous mansion on Balakhani Street (now 39 Fizuli Street) and a picturesque villa in Mardakan. The building of what is now the American Embassy in Baku was built with Hajinski means. The primary owner of this building was the civil engineer who constructed the Hajinski Palace on the embankment. As old residents recount, the building now housing the embassy was built with means which were saved by the engineer during construction works – this was usual construction practice in

pre-revolutionary Baku.

The mission of the Hajinski Mansion near the Maiden's Tower was to reflect the status, position and colossal authority of its owner. The lightness and airiness of its shape, emphasised by the seven spires of different height, the brilliantly designed corner façade, with its colourful tower and rich architectural décor carried out in the best traditions, and mosaic works in the style of ancient Assyria create a fantastic impression and take you to a fairytale world. The irrepressible fancy of the owner, the refined taste of the architect and the high quality of the construction created an authentic masterpiece of pure Baku architecture which managed to absorb and organically synthesise the influences of very different cultures.

The whole family of Isa Bey Hajinski lived in this palace in former days: his wife Kheyransa khanim, from a no less eminent family, his sons Sadikh bey, Ahmad bey, Ali bey and his daughter Zibeyda. A brief encounter with the portraits of the Hajinski household is enough to feel their noble origin, refined manners and elegance.

However, the history of the family

mansion and its owners was as tragic as those turbulent and sometimes unpredictable times. The family could not avoid the tragic March events of 1918, during which the palace on the embankment was seriously damaged. During these anxious days Isa Bey sent an angry letter to Shaumian in which he exposed the chauvinistic policy of the Baku Council of Peoples' Commissars. However, after this, in January 1919, Isa Bey Hajinski died. After a year his three sons emigrated to France but the traces of two of them were lost in emigration and Ali bey, the youngest of the sons, who returned to Baku after the Second World War, was met with arrest and all possible ordeals.

Even more tragic was the fate of the female part of the family, who did not manage to emigrate. Fifteen year old Zibeyda khanim and her mother met with the humiliations, misery, poverty and all-round persecution of the noble bourgeoisie strata of society. However, even after dozens of years she maintained a favourable memory of her family home and even as much as circumstances allowed, cautiously tried to share nostalgic memories with her grandchildren about her unexpectedly interrupted childhood...

Every Baku mansion has its own history, the history of the former owners and the history of the whole epoch. The Isa Bey Hajinski Palace is an obvious example. This house, which survived the period of rapid prosperity, met with the aggressive fury of the Dashnaks and Bolsheviks and endured total nationalisation, absorbed the whole turbulent history of the past century. By the way, in November 1944 during the Second World War, General De Gaulle stayed in the Hajinski House on the way from Tehran to Moscow and in a later period the same apartment was inhabited by the family of the outstanding scientist and chemist and twice President of



the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan Yusif Heydar oghlu Mammadaliyev, whose hundredth anniversary was formally celebrated by UNESCO in 2005. It is comforting that today the façade of the Hajinski House is decorated with memorial plaques dedicated to its outstanding inhabitants and guests. However, today no original reminders of the owner of the house survive, although on old photos it is possible to see Arabic and Cyrillic script containing the name of Isa Bey Hajinski carved on the stone on two of its facades. These elements of the décor completely disappeared in Soviet times and have never been restored.

Until recently the Hajinski House

was in a deplorable state. In the course of repair works carried out in 2007 some mosaic adornments and elements of the décor were partly reconstructed. However, the restoration did not affect a number of important elements of the façade, such as the triangular balconies of the second floor of the apartment of De Gaulle and Mammadaliyev and the inscriptions of the name of the owner and the colourful tiles of the central tower were changed into monotonous metallic sheets of a silver colour, which do not at all enhance the façade. We can only regret that the so called restorers did not even find time to have a look at the numerous archive photographs of the heyday of the Hajinski House. 🌟