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Horse Breeding

The History of Horse Breeding:
From Early Domestication to Modern Times

2

People have been engaged in horse breeding since the earliest times — from the end of the Stone Age. Historical sources indicate regions where the horse was first domesticated: from China's Gansu region westward through Central Asia, along the Caspian's south-west and south-east shores, and stretching to the Balkans — areas predominantly inhabited by Turkish peoples. The domestication of the horse most likely occurred in two stages. Archaeological evidence and rock art confirm that early humans hunted wild horses, using their meat and hides, and gradually domesticated them for both meat and milk, while extensively utilizing horse skins in daily life. The domestication of horses facilitated the expansion and development of agriculture-based animal husbandry. Domestication as a riding animal, in turn, allowed humanity to reach an important cultural stage. It is probable that early humans initially used domesticated horses as a means of hunting. In later stages, horses were primarily domesticated for riding and draft purposes. Domestication of the horse for riding and draft power provided humans with greater mobility and speed, enabled communication between previously isolated human communities, and, to some extent, facilitated cultural diffusion.

Azerbaijan's historic territories lie at the intersection of the places where the horse was domesticated and where horse breeding took shape. Worldwide, including in Azerbaijan, the Middle Ages are regarded as the "golden age" of horse breeding. In Arabia the Arabian horse was prominent; in Turk-

menistan the Akhal-Teke; in Azerbaijan the Karabakh and Dilbaz horses; in Russia the Don horse; in England the Thoroughbred riding horse; at the end of the 18th and in the 19th century in Russia heavy draft horses; and in Europe many sport-horse breeds were formed. The use of the horse as a living means of transport has changed considerably with the development of productive forces. Because horses possess speed, strength, endurance, and beauty, and because they also play a significant role in performing various tasks in farm enterprises, horse breeding remains an irreplaceable force alongside modern machines and equipment.



Karabakh stallion
"Əlyetməz", 1864.

Horses have played a central role in human history, and their domestication marked a transformative stage in the development of civilization. Archaeological evidence indicates that the first domesticated horses appeared around 4000–3500 BCE in Central Asia, Southern Russia, and present-day Ukraine. Discoveries associated with the Botai culture reveal that people kept horses not only for transportation and carrying loads but also for milk and other products. The domestication of horses enabled humans to cover long distances, carry heavy burdens, and gain strategic advantages in warfare. Horses also played a crucial role in agriculture, serving as draft animals for plowing, sowing, harvesting, and irrigation, which significantly reduced manual labor and increased productivity.



Karabakh stallion

In ancient Mesopotamia, horses became integral to agriculture and trade around the 2nd millennium BCE. They were used to pull carts, transport grain, and work alongside oxen and donkeys on farmland. In Egypt, war chariots pulled by horses provided tactical advantages in battles, particularly during the New Kingdom period. Horses also facilitated communication and the movement of goods along caravan routes, becoming indispensable in the economic life of these early civilizations. In Persia and the Arabian Peninsula, Arabian horses were selectively bred for speed, endurance, and obedience as early as the 2nd millennium BCE. These horses played a strategic role in protecting trade routes, conducting military campaigns, and serving as symbols of status and wealth.

In ancient China, horses were used extensively from the 2nd millennium BCE for military units, postal services, and agricultural work. They were vital for plowing fields, transporting heavy stones, and carrying supplies, while cavalry units provided strategic advantages in defending the empire's borders. Similarly, in the Roman Empire, horses were employed for both military and communication purposes. Roman legions relied on cavalry for border defense, rapid message delivery, and maintaining the empire's strategic superiority. The Romans also developed systematic horse breeding programs, importing superior breeds from North Africa and other regions to enhance the qualities of speed, endurance, and strength.

During the Middle Ages, horse breeding in Europe advanced both militarily and socially. Heavy-armored knights participated in tournaments, which contributed to the physical and endurance development of horses. Horses were essential in battles and competitions, serving as symbols of aristocratic status. In the Islamic world, the breeding of Arabian horses intensified, focusing on their speed, endurance, and adaptability. Arabian horses spread across Europe, North Africa, and Asia, influencing the development of local breeds and the establishment of organized selective breeding practices.

In Central Asia and the Eurasian steppes, horse breeding was crucial for nomadic societies such as the Scythians, Huns, and Turks. Horses were central to military strategies, particularly



*Tersk purebred stallion "Duman",
1948*

4

in mounted archery and rapid assault tactics. In addition to warfare, horses supported agricultural and pastoral activities, helping plow fields, transport goods, and manage pastures. Their speed, stamina, and adaptability made them indispensable for both work and combat.

By the 15th and 16th centuries, European horse breeding became more systematic. Spanish horses, Friesians, and other European breeds were developed for warfare, competitions, and light load-carrying. Horse racing, polo, and equestrian sports became increasingly popular among the aristocracy. At the same time, horses remained crucial in agriculture, particularly for light plowing, sowing, harvesting, and transporting goods alongside oxen and donkeys.

Azerbaijan has a long and rich tradition of horse breeding, combining economic, military, and cultural significance. Archaeological findings indicate that horses were kept in Azerbaijan as early as the 3rd–2nd millennium BCE. The Karabakh horse, emerging between the 17th and 19th centuries, became especially renowned for its endurance, obedience, and speed. These horses were used both in warfare and for racing. By the second half of the 19th century, horse breeding in the Karabakh, Shirvan, and South Azerbaijan regions had reached industrial and selective breeding levels, with prominent stud farms operating throughout the country. In 1864, the celebrated Karabakh stallion Alyetmez was recorded, leaving a lasting mark on local breeding history. In the early 20th century, Russian military officer B. A. Chudovski noted that Karabakh horses demonstrated exceptional endurance during Transcaucasian campaigns and sweated less in hot climates, making them uniquely suited to local conditions.

Azerbaijani horse breeding was not only economically vital but also culturally significant. Horse races, exhibitions, and festivals served as social events, while horses symbolized wealth and status and appeared frequently in literature, music, and art. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, stud farms systematically improved the physical and endurance traits of horses. Karabakh, Arabian, and other breeds were intensively raised and supplied to both local and international markets. Horses also played an important role in agriculture, assisting in plowing fields, transporting crops, and performing heavy labor in rural areas.

In modern times, horse breeding continues to develop across sports, tourism, and selective breeding programs. Globally, horse racing, polo, and equestrian sports remain popular, while in Azerbaijan, horseback riding, equestrian clubs, and tourism initiatives are expanding. Selective breeding and reproductive programs are essential for preserving rare and national horse breeds. The Karabakh horse, as a national breed, holds a crucial place in Azerbaijan's equestrian history. Its characteristics—endurance, obedience, speed, and adaptation to hot climates—make it valuable for sports and cultural heritage alike.

Horse breeding continues to be instrumental in preserving historical legacy and sustaining national culture. Exhibitions, competitions, and festivals held in Azerbaijan transmit equestrian traditions from generation to generation. Local and international equestrian events also contribute to the development of the country's culture and tourism sector, ensuring that both the economic and cultural significance of horses remains strong.

Horse Breeding in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijani horse breeding is one of the ancient and eternal homelands of world horse breeding. It is a homeland with a name, reputation, and glory. The horse is a contemporary, companion, and confidant of our people's history, which spans millennia. It is a support in difficult times, a symbol of skill, victory, aspiration, and desire. It has witnessed centuries of bloody wars, participated in them, and experienced both victory and defeat. Rightly, we are called a people of horse riders.

Turks are born on horseback, grow up on horseback, fight on horseback, and achieve martyrdom on horseback.

The horse is a high-quality means of riding and pulling carts. It is a source of spiritual wealth. It performs and adorns national games and entertainment, bringing joy and delight to the heart. The horse is health, a healer, and a remedy.

The horse embodies delicate matters and pure feelings. It is a world of wonders and legends. It is the hero of our wise and marvelous epics and fairy tales. It is the muse for poets and artists, a masterpiece in itself.

The horse represents a thousand aspirations and wishes; it is glory, honor, skill, victory, support, and a pillar.

The horse is not only a means of riding but also a spiritual value. This spiritual value complements bravery and heroism, each enhancing the other.

A brave man's companion, The horse is a brave man's own brother.

Our people continue to preserve the traditions of horse breeding that have come down through millennia, and in the modern era, Azerbaijani horse breeding is developing under new demands and conditions.

Horses were also widely used in the military. Concerning the current state of horse breeding in the Republic of Azerbaijan, it should be noted that after agricultural reforms the number of horses in the republic increased to 71,000. This is 27,000—or 61 percent—more than in 1995. Today in Azerbaijan



Karabakh stallion "Nadir"
1965

high-quality Karabakh and Dilbaz horses, as well as local horses of Quba, Shirvan and other regions, are being bred.

State enterprises involved in horse breeding include the Agdam and Aghstafa stud farms, the horse farm belonging to the “Dashuz” breeding enterprise in Sheki, the Baku State Hippodrome, and the “Dilbaz” horse-breeding enterprise in Aghstafa. Private entities engaged in horse breeding are also being formed. About 30 legal entities and individuals in Azerbaijan keep more than 800 horses of various breeds. Among such enterprises, the Azerbaijan Jockey Club, the “Gunay” Horse Breeding Enterprise, and the “Murad” firm operate according to modern stud requirements.

Alongside local breeds, Arabian, English Thoroughbred riding horses, Akhal-Teke, Hannoverian, Holsteiner, Budyonny and other breeds and their crosses are raised here. Centralized accounting and registration of pedigree horses are maintained in the State Stud Books by the “Azerdamazlıq” Public Association of the Ministry of Agriculture. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Horse Breeding” (2007) has been adopted.

The Karabakh Horse

The Karabakh horse is a mountain-riding breed created and widely distributed in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. In the 17th–18th centuries this breed was further refined in the Karabakh khanate. Karabakh horses are considered among the oldest breeds in Asia and the Caucasus. Today, the Karabakh horse is the national breed of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

There are four types of Karabakh horses: Maymun, Qarnıyirtıq, Alyetmez (Ceyran), and Toxmaq. They are distinguished by their high speed. The Karabakh horse is tall and agile, with a strong body structure. The frontal and nasal bones are well developed, and its eyes are prominent. The neck is of medium length, sometimes somewhat short and carried high. The Karabakh horse is comparatively hardy and undemanding in feed. Karabakh-type horses are

6



“Model exterior of the Karabakh horse of the original type, used for breeding and improvement of the Karabakh breed.

Artwork by A. Aliyev.”

medium-sized, muscular, and saddle horses. Their heads are small with straight profiles. Their backs and loins are straight; their chest and body are generally broad; legs are dry, temperamental, and lively. Their skin is thin and their coat soft and glossy. The main gait is a gallop, its walk is broad and brisk, and all its movements are agile.

One of the main traits distinguishing the Karabakh horse is its lemon-tinged, yellow-golden, or bright orange coloring. Unique shades — chestnut, golden chestnut, golden brown — emerged that are characteristic only to Karabakh horses. Another characteristic of Karabakh horses is their shining orange coat. Mane and tail hairs often have reddish tips, darker brown in color. Yellow-golden, golden-brown shades are mostly particular to Karabakh horses. Infrequently, chestnut, gray, and dun colors occur. One of the characteristic marks is the white spots of different sizes on the legs — these spots are called *Səkil* in Azerbaijani (known in horse terminology as stockings or socks, depending on their height). The special sign or color difference on the forehead is called *Təpəl* or *Qaşqa* in Azerbaijani (known in horse terminology as a star, blaze, or snip, depending on its shape and position). These marks are especially common in the “Ceyran” type. Old types of Karabakh studs included stallions named “Maymun” (“Xoşbəxt”), “Qarnıyırtıq” and “Əlyetməz” (“Ceyran”). The grayish subgroup of the “Ceyran” type was called “Gülgün.” In the second half of the 19th century, through crosses with the Akhal-Teke, the “Teke-Ceyran” horse was bred — tall and fast horses.



*Karabakh stallion
“Meymun”
1861*



*Karabakh stallion
“Timur” 1954*

The “golden age” of Karabakh horse breeding is considered to be the 18th–19th centuries. During this period, the most typical specimens of the breed were raised at the stud farms of the Karabakh khans—Panah Khan, Ibrahim Khan, Mehdiqulu Khan, Jafarqulu Khan, and Khurshidbanu Natavan (Usmiyevs). At that time, Karabakh horses were represented in many international exhibitions and achieved high rankings. The stallion “Alyetmez,” owned by Khan’s daughter Natavan, won recognition at the All-Russian Horse Exhibition in 1867, while a horse nicknamed “Khan” received an award at an exhibition in France the same year. Moreover, at the horse exhibition held in Paris, the Karabakh horse called “Khan,” which was awarded a silver medal, amazed French women with its color, inspiring them to dye their hair in an open golden-fawn shade.



Karabakh stallion "Nadir"
1919

8 Karabakh horses were widely distributed in the regions of Agdam, Barda, Agjabadi, Beylagan, Shusha, Khojaly, Khojavend, Tartar, Jabrayil, Fuzuli, and Kalbajar. Horses of this breed were also taken to stud farms in the North Caucasus, to the Don and to the south of Russia. Karabakh horses were widely used in the formation of various famous horse breeds. For example, out of 919 horses brought to the Don Horse Stud in 1839, most belonged to the Karabakh breed. The Platov stud, considered the leading horse stud of the Don, was almost entirely composed of Karabakh horses.

The Karabakh horse is notable for its high running speed. A record speed was recorded by a horse named "Sumqanda," bred at the Agdam Stud Farm: it ran 1,600 meters in 1 minute 54 seconds (50.52 km/h) and 2,400 meters in 2 minutes 52 seconds (50.24 km/h). A horse's ordinary walk exceeds 8 kilometers per hour. In England, designers included the symbol of the Karabakh horse — representative of Agdam's "Karabakh" football club — in the club's logo.

Historically, stallions named "Sardar," "Sultan," "Shah," "Aghalar," "Divar," "Maymun" and others once formed exemplary mounts for the cavalry guard regiment. The famous Russian painter Vasili Vereshchagin wrote in 1870: "The best horses I have ever seen in my life belong to Jafarqulu Khan in Shusha. I have never seen such horses anywhere else. I even painted a picture of a stallion of this breed."

The military officer B. A. Chudovski wrote in 1914: "When our military detachments were in Transcaucasia, officers of many regiments had Karabakh horses. These horses endured very well during all Transcaucasian marches as well as in marches along the Iran and Turkey borders. The Karabakh horse is very valuable for local conditions. In hot weather it sweats less under the rider than, for example, the Kabardian horse, which completely drenches in sweat."

The History of Karabakh Horses

The history of Karabakh horses is deeply intertwined with the ancient lands of Azerbaijan, where horse domestication began thousands of years ago. Archaeological evidence suggests that equestrian culture in Azerbaijan dates back to the Eneolithic period, around the 5th millennium BCE. Excavations at Alikomektepe revealed horse bones indicating the presence of two distinct horse types, characterized by significant tooth wear. Rock carvings in Gobustan, dating to the 4th millennium BCE, further confirm the widespread use of horses in Azerbaijan, depicting their roles in transportation, warfare, and cultural practices. These findings highlight the integral role horses played in the lives of the Azerbaijani people from early times.

In the 1st millennium BCE, during the Manna state, horses were widely used as pack animals. Following the fall of Manna, equestrianism flourished in states like Media, Atropatena (Azerbaijan), and Albania. Media, in particular, was renowned for its advanced horse breeding. The Greek historian Herodotus, in the 4th century BCE, noted that large, strong, and beautiful horses were bred in the Nesayi Plain, located southwest of the Caspian Sea. Scholars believe these Nesayi horses are the ancestors of the Karabakh breed. Historical evolution split these horses into two main branches: one leading to the Akhal-Teke horses of the Turkmen people and the other to the Karabakh horses associated with the Azerbaijani people. Some Soviet researchers, such as Professor I.I. Kalugin, linked the Karabakh horse's origins to Arab breeds, while also acknowledging influences from Akhal-Teke and Persian horses.

In medieval sources, there is interesting information about Azerbaijani horses, including the Karabakh breed. Both in the Middle Ages and in subsequent centuries, Arab horses were used to improve the breeds of Karabakh and Dilboz horses. However, it should be noted that during the medieval period, as a result of military and political events, a large number of golden-colored Karabakh horses were taken from Azerbaijani territories to Arabia.

Karabakh stallion "Noxta"
1935





From the late 18th century to the early 20th century, for approximately 170 years, numerous horse farms belonging to khans and beys operated in Karabakh, each housing 50–100 mares and stallions. The khans and notable figures such as Panahali Khan, Ibrahim Khalil Khan, Mehdiqulu Khan, Mohammad Hasan Agha, Jafarqulu Khan, Ayvaz Khan, Khurshudbanu Natavan, Mirza Ali Bey, Rustam Bey Behbudov, Asad Bey, Ugurlu Bey, Fareculla Bey, Ibrahim Bey, Suleyman Khan, Taghi Bey, Karim Agha Javanshir, Bahadur Bey, Shamil Bey, Abish Bey, Abdul Bey Galabeyov, Huseyn Agha Aranli, Mammad Bey Gilani, Adigozel Bey Gilani, Huseyn Bey Mirza Adigozel oglu, Javad Bey Adigozelov, Salim Bey Adigozelov,

Salim Bey Rustambeyov, Farrukh Bey Vaziriov, Mammad Bey Qaradaghi, Mammadqasim Agha, Hashid Bey, Cavalier Ali Bey, and others established horse farms and kept purebred horses.

10 Due to the Karabakh horse's tireless, fast gait and other positive qualities, they had enthusiastic admirers not only in Russia but also in European countries such as Poland, England, and France. Famous Karabakh horses, particularly stallions, were purchased by stud farms for breeding purposes, which helped improve local horse breeds. It is likely that the export of Karabakh horses to Europe was related to the migration of Germans to the Caucasus. Although Germans had moved to the Russian Empire earlier, under the command of A.P. Yermolov, they initially settled near the village of Sartichala (Mughanli) 38 km from Tbilisi along the Iori River (Marinenfeld colony) and, from 1818 onward, also in Yelizavetpol alongside Tiflis. In 1819, the Germans established two colonies near Ganja: Helenendorf (Goygol) and Annenfeld (Shamkir), and later founded a total of eight colonies in the areas of Gazakh, Tovuz, and Aghstafa, including Georsfeld, Grunfeld, Eigenfeld, and Traubenfeld.

Starting in 1817, 18 horses were exported from Russia to Württemberg, Germany, to establish new horse farms, six of which were Karabakh horses. In German sources, these horses were referred to as "Persian horse," "Sarylar," "Saridan," or "Saridan Karabach" (meaning "Sarylar-Karabakh"). The ages, heights, and colors of these horses were documented in the 1823 book *Königlich Württembergisches Gestüt Weil* (Royal Württemberg Stud): "Achwerdow (Axverdov, 9-year-old stallion, golden chestnut, from Mehdiqulu Khan's stud), Mirza (10-year-old stallion, chestnut), Dscheran Bassan (Ceyranbasan, 9-year-old mare, golden chestnut, from Ugurlu Bey's stud in Tiflis), Derbendisch (10-year-old mare, golden chestnut), Saridan (10-year-old mare, golden chestnut, from Mehdiqulu Khan's stud), Beko (Bedko, 8-year-old mare, light chestnut-white)."

Among the horse farms in Karabakh, those of Mehdiqulu Khan and Jafarqulu Khan were the most famous for purebred horses. After Mehdiqulu Khan's death in 1845, Khurshudbanu Natavan paid special attention to the development of horse breeding. S. Taliz wrote about this: "I visited Khurshudbanu Natavan's stud at Shahbulag. I was struck by the tall stature and handsome appearance of the horses there."

Horses bred at the khan's studs were considered the purest and most valuable Karabakh horses. In the late 18th to early 19th centuries, only horses bred in the khan's studs were accepted in their stables, ensuring the purity of the Karabakh breed. During this period, horses in the khans' stables were marked with a special stamp on the upper left thigh using a mold in Arabic script indicating the owner's name. For example, Mehdiqulu Khan's stamp depicted the name "Mehdi," which his descendants did not change after his death, and Jafarqulu Khan's stamp depicted "Jafar." In the 18th century, khans' horse farms primarily served internal needs; the horses were not intended for mass sale but rather as gifts.

During the Russian Empire's occupation, Karabakh and Dilboz horses were sent in large numbers to Russian markets and horse farms to improve breeding. Various authors reported that during the Russo-Iranian wars, Cossack officers took Iranian and Karabakh horses to the Don region. For over a century, the "golden flow" of horses from Karabakh to the Don and Kalmyk steppes greatly influenced local horse breeding. Modern Don horses owe their appearance, beauty, and golden color primarily to the Karabakh horse. Some sources indicate that one of the internal types of the Don breed was called the "Eastern Karabakh" type.

The first official mention of the Karabakh horse in stud literature was made in 1824 by veterinarian Kresting, who, while part of the Russian expedition to Iran in 1822, saw Karabakh and Khiva horses in Georgia. He believed the Karabakh horse resulted from crossbreeding local mares with purebred Arab stallions. In 1823, British merchants purchased 60 mares from Mehdiqulu Khan's stud and took them to India, which reportedly weakened the stud's operation.

The activities of Armenian-origin Russian Lieutenant General Valerian Grigoryevich Madatov during the expansion of Russian occupation seriously harmed the Karabakh breed. The horses he forcibly collected from the population under the guise of gifts were sent to Russian markets and sold in large numbers. After Madatov's death, his horse farm collapsed, and some horses were reacquired by Khurshudbanu Natavan.

The Russian army extensively used local Azerbaijani horses to supply cavalry units. In the early period of occupation, the Karabakh Cavalry Regiment (or First Muslim Regiment) was established. The regiment consisted of five squadrons. Its commanders included Staff Captain Gulmammad Bey Rustambeyov and Colonel Jafarqulu Khan Neva Sarijali Javanshir, with Captain Rustam Bey Javanshir serving as deputy commander in 1829. Sources also mention Adjutant Rahim Bey Ugurlubeyov and in 1831 standard-bearer Behbud Bey Ismayil Bey oglu. The regiment's camp was located near the village of Agjabedi and consisted of cavalrymen collected from the regions of Kolani, Dizag, Zargar-Dilagar, Iyirmidord, Otuziki, Javanshir, Demirchihasanli, Khachin, Veranda, and Chilebord.



*Karabakh stallion
"Pulemyot" 1930*



*Karabakh mare
"Sevgül"
1954*

Karabakh horses were used in the creation of new breeds at Orlov and Rostopchin studs. S. Urusov evaluated the Karabakh horse's historical significance: "Just as the English thoroughbred played a role in European horse breeding, the Karabakh horse held the same importance in the development of Asian horse breeding."

In 1865, the famous Russian artist V.V. Vereshchagin, who met Jafarqulu Khan and admired his horses, wrote: "...the most beautiful horses I have ever seen in my life are bred at Jafarqulu Khan's stud in Shusha. I have never seen such horses anywhere else. I drew one of the stud horses." At the First All-Russian Horse Exhibition in Moscow in 1866 and the 1867 World Exhibition in Paris, a Karabakh horse nicknamed "Khan" amazed spectators with its beauty and form. Karabakh horses also attracted special attention and won awards at subsequent exhibitions, including the Second All-Russian (1869, horses "Maymun," "Toxmaq," "Selbinaz,"

12

"Alyetmez"), Third All-Russian (1872, "Bayram"), Fourth All-Russian (1882, Khurshudbanu Natavan's "Surmeli" and "Qura-Khanim"), and Pyatigorsk regional exhibitions (1912, "Maral," "Ceyran," "Pahlavan"). D. Dubenski wrote in 1869: "Although there are many horse breeds in the South Caucasus, essentially they are all descendants of the main Caucasus breed, the Karabakh horse."

In the 19th century, the number of horses in Shusha alone was significantly higher than in other Caucasus regions. The spread of the Karabakh breed across the Caucasus was also facilitated by local nobles such as Ugurlu Bey, Fareculla Bey, and Allahyar Bey Zulqaderov, who established studs in Tbilisi and other parts of the Tiflis Governorate (Signakh, Telavi). In 1867, a stud was established to improve the Kuban breed, housing 54 Karabakh stallions. That same year, a stud of Karabakh horses was established in Maykop to improve Cossack breeds. In 1879, five Karabakh stallions were kept at the Semirechensk stud, and in 1880, 28 Karabakh stallions were maintained at the Eysk, Yekaterinodar, and Temryuk studs. In 1874, a breeding stud was established in Khokh, later becoming the Canyonat stud. The successes of Karabakh horses in various exhibitions increased imperial interest, although subsequent developments followed a different course.



*Arabian stallion Sophist II,
1948*

From the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, foreign horse breeds unsuitable for local climate and conditions were brought from Russia to Azerbaijan to develop working horse breeds. The famous breeder Marshal S.M. Budyonny considered it essential to cross local horses with productive foreign breeds in southern USSR regions, South Caucasus republics, and Dagestan. During the 19th–20th centuries, Terek, Kabardin, Tusheti, and other horses were imported from Russia and crossbred with local horses to create new draft and carriage breeds. Since local horses were superior in numbers, quality, and adaptability, imported breeds were gradually assimilated.

In the 20th century, some Russian (I. Urusov, I.I. Kalugin, Diterixs) and occasionally local authors attempted to associate the Karabakh horse with foreign breeds, a biased approach that persists today.

R.X. Sattarzade thoroughly studied the Karabakh horse in his books *The Karabakh Horse* (1954), *Azerbaijani Horse Breeding* (1960), and *Horse Breeding* (1971), and co-authored *State Stud Book of the Karabakh Horse, Book One* (1981) with S.O. Hasanov. He refuted claims by Russian authors that the Karabakh horse originated abroad, documenting the breed's history, types, and characteristics.

Sattarzade wrote: "The Karabakh horse is the oldest valuable and well-known horse breed of Azerbaijan." He analyzed works of Russian breeders such as I. Urusov, Prof. Brauner, specialists Simonov and Merder, Germans Fitsinger, Gutgen-Chapski, Prof. I.I. Kalugin, cavalry colonel Diterixs, Dubenski, Rudanovski, Jafarov, and others, noting that these authors merely copied each other in claiming the Karabakh horse descended from the Arab horse.

Sattarzade also clarified that stories attributing the creation of the Karabakh breed to Panahali Khan seizing Nadir Shah's Arab stallions or Abbas Mirza gifting Arab horses were historically inaccurate. Panahali Khan ruled only 16 years (1747–1763), an insufficient period to create a new breed. Moreover, Abbas Mirza was not yet born in 1747. Even Ibrahim Khan, writing to his father in 1762 from captivity in Fatali Shah Afshar's court, requested his own chestnut horse be sent to aid his escape, indicating that golden chestnut, fast, and enduring horses existed in Karabakh before Ibrahim Khan.

Historical information on Azerbaijani horses shows that the Karabakh horse is an ancient breed, a type of ancient Azerbaijani horse, known and highly valued long before any records of Arab horses existed. Therefore, the theory that the Karabakh breed was formed in the mid-18th century with the participation of Arab and Iranian horses is untenable. The Karabakh horse is an entirely original and pure ancient breed, created over centuries through the selection and breeding efforts of the Azerbaijani people.

The wide distribution of the Karabakh horse in the khanates and across the Caucasus confirms it as a native breed, refuting claims linking it to Arab or other horse breeds. Although



Karabakh stallion "Tamar"



Karabakh stallion "Signal"
1959

precise numbers of horses in medieval and khanate periods are unknown, the presence of cavalry units provides an idea of the number of riding horses.

14

For many years, baseless claims persisted that the Karabakh horse descended from Arab or other breeds. However, in the 19th century, several Russian authors repeatedly emphasized that the Karabakh horse was a native breed. Dubenski considered all South Caucasus breeds as branches of the Karabakh horse. Specialist Nanni observed that most stallions among notable South Caucasus individuals were Karabakh horses, with only a few Turkmen horses and a single Arab stallion in Tbilisi.

Referring to K.C. Diterixs' 1882 article responding to Rudanovski, R. Sattarzade highlighted that claims about the Karabakh horse's poor adaptability and limited distribution were unfounded. Diterixs noted that in 1830, 200 mares from Karabakh were sent to southern Russian provinces, where they bred successfully. By 1842–1860, Karabakh studs reportedly had 7,000–9,000 mares, not including privately owned horses, which would double the count. According to the 1891 military horse census, 5,000 Karabakh horses and crossbred mares were in Ganja and Baku governorates, with 2,000 purebred Karabakh horses mainly in Shusha, Javanshir, Ganja, and other districts.

Throughout the 19th century, Karabakh stallions and mares were sent to Ozarov, Korduba, Kharkov, and Rostopchin studs. Karabakh mountain horses contributed to the development of the Orlov riding horse breed. By the 1860s, a Russian commission concluded that the horse breed bringing fame to Iran had originated in the Karabakh khanate. Russian specialists noted that the Karabakh breed's quality could rival the Arab horse.

Repeatedly recognized at international exhibitions for its appearance, gait, agility, and elegance, the Karabakh horse played a significant role in horse breeding and the creation of new breeds. However, in the first half of the 20th century, political and economic processes, collectivization, and other factors caused neglect of this famous breed. During World War II, attention to horse breeding increased for military transport purposes, leading to further scientific study of Azerbaijani horse breeding and the publication of several works.

The Golden Age in the Karabakh Khanate - The Middle Ages marked the “golden age” of Karabakh horses, particularly during the 17th and 18th centuries in the Karabakh Khanate. Recognized as one of the oldest horse breeds in Asia and the Caucasus, Karabakh horses were extensively bred in regions like Shusha, Agdam, and surrounding areas. The khans’ stud farms, or “ilkhilar,” played a pivotal role in the breed’s development. According to Rzagulu bey Mirza Jamal oglu’s *Karabakhnama*, the khanate’s stud farms housed over 3,500 mares, excluding stallions. These horses gained fame across the South Caucasus, Iran, and Turkey for their beauty, endurance, agility, and speed.

Arab sources from the 8th century claim that, following the spread of Islam in Azerbaijan, golden-colored Karabakh horses were highly sought after, with approximately 60,000 horses reportedly exported to Arabia. This underscores their international value even in ancient times. Unlike their use in agriculture, such as threshing grain, Karabakh horses were primarily bred for riding, military purposes, and display. Their distinctive features—lemon, golden-yellow, or vibrant orange coats, thin skin, glossy manes, and agile movements—set them apart. The khans, including Panah Khan, Ibrahim Khan, and Mehdiqulu Khan, managed their stud farms at a high level, producing exemplary specimens. The poetess Khurshidbanu Natavan’s stud farm was also renowned, with her horses winning awards at international exhibitions.

The 19th Century: Russian Empire and Global Recognition - The annexation of the Karabakh Khanate by the Russian Empire in 1822 brought both opportunities and challenges for the breed. While the dissolution of the khanate negatively impacted local stud farms, Karabakh horses maintained their prominence in Russia and Europe. In 1832, the Karabakh province had 11 stud farms with 250 stallions and 1,400 mares. Feudal lords bred horses for sale, maintaining large mare populations and exporting foals. In 1831, a Karabakh horse’s price ranged from 30 to 300 chervonets, a significant sum for the time.

In 1866, Colonel K.A. Diterikhs published *A Review of Karabakh Horse Breeding* in the *Konnozavodstvo* journal, considered the first scientific document on the breed. Diterikhs described Karabakh as a natural homeland for horses, emphasizing that the breed’s development was

15



Karabakh stallion “Seyvar”
1949



Karabakh stallion "Sultakin"
1953

closely tied to the local people's economic needs, lifestyle, and cultural traditions. He noted that Karabakh horses descended from "khan sari kohlani" and "sari" lines, particularly in Shusha, where they evolved with minimal crossbreeding with other Eastern lines. Diterikhs detailed their characteristics: compact bodies, straight backs, sturdy hooves, thin skin, glossy manes, and agile movements.

In the 1870s, the Yelizavetpol stud farm was established in Karabakh, where Karabakh mares were occasionally crossed

with Arab and Anglo-Arab stallions. The breed achieved significant success at international exhibitions. In 1867, a Karabakh horse named "Khan" won the highest award at the World Agricultural Exhibition in Paris. In 1869, at the All-Russian Exhibition, "Maymun" earned a silver medal, "Tokhmaq" a bronze, and Khurshidbanu Natavan's "Alyetmez" received a certificate. Karabakh horses were exported to Russia, the North Caucasus, the Don region, and Europe, influencing the improvement of breeds like Kabardin and Don. In 1823, the British purchased 60 mares from Mehdiqulu Khan's stud farm for a high price, taking them to India. By 1891, 5,000 Karabakh horses were recorded in the Ganja and Baku provinces, 2,000 in Shusha and Javad districts, and 200 in the Signakh and Telov districts of Tiflis province.

However, the late 19th century saw a decline in the breed due to the erosion of feudal-economic structures, integration into the Russian Empire, and large-scale mare exports. Russian military officer B.A. Chudovsky wrote in 1914 that Karabakh horses demonstrated exceptional endurance in Transcaucasian campaigns and along the Iran-Turkey borders, outperforming breeds like the Kabardin in hot climates without sweating excessively.

The 20th Century: Challenges and Revival Efforts - The early 20th century posed significant threats to the Karabakh breed's population and genetic purity. In 1926, an expedition led by Professor I.I. Kalugin concluded that no pure Karabakh horses remained in Azerbaijan's regions, leading some Soviet researchers to claim the breed was extinct. However, Professors R.Kh. Sattarzade and A.A. Agabeyli challenged this, arguing that the deterioration of breed traits did not equate to extinction. In the 1920s, remnants of khanate stud farms were found in Sheki's "Dashuz" farm, including stallions like "Bala Maymun," "Nadir," "Nadir II," and "Shamilchik."

In 1921, a central breeding station with 20 stallions was established, with horses distributed to stations in Sheki, Shamakhi, Agdash, Gazakh, Goychay, and Shusha during the spring breeding season before returning to the central station. Archival records indicate that 12 of these stallions were of the Karabakh type. In 1933, a state stud farm was established in Lachin, followed by others in Sheki (No. 71 "Dashuz" DDKTIM) and Gusar (No. 75 Khil) in 1934, consolidating many Karabakh horses.

The most significant event in the breed's 20th-century history was the establishment of the Agdam Stud Farm in 1948, formalized by the USSR Council of Ministers' Decree No. 1681 (October 8, 1948) and the Azerbaijan SSR Council of Ministers' Decree No. 583 (May 27, 1949). In 1946, a special commission (N. Afandiyev, S. Jafarov, S. Agushevich) se-

lected 60 Karabakh horses (59 mares, 1 stallion) from Agdam, Shusha, Khojavend, Barda, Yevlakh, and Tovuz districts. In 1947, 27 mares were identified as typical Karabakh horses. These horses were initially relocated to the Khalda poultry sovkhos in 1948, but due to hot summers and unsuitable soil, the stud farm was moved to Goytape near Agdam in 1949. In 1952, six typical Karabakh horses were sent to Moscow for the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition.

In 1956, the Soviet government gifted a Karabakh stallion named “Zaman,” bred at the Agdam Stud Farm, to Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, showcasing the breed’s international recognition. The 1960s and 1970s saw growth in the breed, driven by agricultural development, the strengthening of the Agdam Stud Farm’s infrastructure, and increased interest in horse racing. Family lines and branches were established within the breed, which actively participated in All-Union exhibitions and competitions. In the 1980s, Karabakh horses were sold through Moscow auctions to Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and France. Swiss horse owner Hans Hutmeyer erected a statue of the Karabakh horse “Elyetmez,” which had won an award at the 1867 All-Russian Exhibition, in front of his estate.

The 1993 Occupation and Modern Revival - The 1993 occupation of Agdam by Armenian forces dealt a severe blow to the Karabakh horse’s gene pool. The stud farm was relocated to Khamtorpag village in Aghjabadi district. Despite these challenges, the breed was preserved. The 2007 adoption of Azerbaijan’s “Law on Horse Breeding” provided a legal framework for its revival. Presidential decrees issued on November 19, 2014 (“On Additional Support for the Development of the Karabakh Horse Breed”) and August 21, 2015 (“On Measures to Improve the Material and Technical Base of Livestock Breeding”) played a crucial role in preserving the gene pool. In 2017, 2 million manats from the Presidential Reserve Fund facilitated the completion of the Karabakh Horse Breeding Complex.

In 2010, during the opening of a new settlement for internally displaced persons in Agdam, President Ilham Aliyev was presented with a Karabakh horse. At that time, the Agdam Stud Farm housed approximately 500 horses. In 2016, Karabakh horses attracted significant attention at Queen Elizabeth II’s 90th birthday celebration in the UK. The “Friends of Karabakh Horses” club in Germany, led by Verena Solia, and the publication of a Karabakh horse catalog have further promoted the breed internationally.

17



*Karabakh mare Azeliya and Yasmin,
1960*



Karabakh stallion "Sultan"
1949

18

Cultural and Historical Significance - Karabakh horses are a vital part of Azerbaijan's cultural heritage. In the epic *Kitabi-Dede Gorgud*, horses are depicted as essential to the Oghuz way of life, with famous examples like Kazan Khan's horse, Koroghlu's Qirat, and Gachag Nabi's Bozat. The epic praises horses as "Shahbaz," "Karaquch," and "Gaziliq" horses, emphasizing



Karabakh mare –
Narinchkhanlik
1891

their role in warfare. The traditional equestrian game Chovkan, played with Karabakh horses, was included in UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2013.

Karabakh horses have also appeared on postage stamps, with issues released in 1993, 1995, 2006, and 2011. French writer Jean-Louis Gouraud's book *Karabakh Horses* and the documentary *Sarylar: In the Footsteps of the Karabakh Horse* have further popularized the breed's history and cultural significance.

Karabakh horses embody Azerbaijan's ancient equestrian traditions and cultural heritage. From their origins in the 5th millennium BCE to their prominence in the Karabakh Khanate, their recognition in the Russian Empire, and their modern revival, these horses have been celebrated for their beauty, endurance, and speed. Despite challenges, state-led efforts have restored the breed's former glory, ensuring that Karabakh horses continue to represent Azerbaijan's national pride on the global stage.



“A Look at Karabakh Horsemanship” article

Colonel K. A. Diterikhs was one of the horse breeding specialists and military officials of the Russian Empire in the 19th century. At the request of the Directorate of Russian State Stud Farms (the official institution of the Russian Empire), he made a special expedition to the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan to study the original characteristics, breed, and potential applications of Karabakh horses.

As a result of this research, he wrote an article titled “A Look at Karabakh Horsemanship” in 1866, commissioned by the Directorate of Russian State Stud Farms and published in the journal *Konnozavodstvo*. This article is considered one of the first scientific studies describing the condition of the Karabakh breed from the Middle Ages to the 19th century and holds an important place in the history of Azerbaijani horse breeding.

Diterikhs pointed out that Karabakh, as part of Western Asia, is one of the regions regarded as the natural homeland of the horse. He emphasized that the formation and development of the Karabakh breed were not only related to the material-economic needs of the local population but also closely tied to their lifestyle, culture, and national traditions preserved for centuries.

This article was commissioned and written as part of the Russian Empire's efforts to develop its horse breeding industry by studying the Karabakh horses (Karabakh breed). Diterikhs conducted his observations in the mountainous areas of Karabakh, particularly in livestock centers during the khanate period (such as Shusha and its surroundings).

He described Karabakh as the natural homeland of horses, as the region's mountainous terrain and climate conditions were favorable for the development of horse breeds. He linked the formation of the Karabakh horse not only to economic needs but also to the cultural and social characteristics of the region. The article particularly emphasizes the important role of the Karabakh Khanate in horse breeding, especially the concentration of horse-breeding centers around Shusha.

He also highlighted the superiority of Karabakh horses in terms of speed, endurance, and beauty, recommending them for both military and sporting purposes. Diterikhs' article, being one of the first scientific analyses documenting the unique characteristics and historical significance of the Karabakh horses, also underlined their physical advantages, the horse-breeding traditions of the Karabakh Khanate, and their military potential.

Diterikhs wrote that the foundation of the Karabakh horse breed was formed by strains known as "Khan Sarilar Köhleni" and "Sarilar." These horses, mainly raised in the Shusha area, represented the descendants of Eastern horses from the last millennia and were only minimally mixed with other breeds.

In the main content of the article, Diterikhs described Karabakh as part of Western Asia and emphasized that it was regarded as the natural homeland of the horse. He noted that the formation and development of the Karabakh breed were not only linked to the material-economic needs of the local population but also to their lifestyle, culture, and centuries-old traditions.

20 The article contributed to the inclusion of Karabakh horses in the official horse-breeding programs of the Russian Empire. Even today, it serves as a reference source in studies of Azerbaijan's national horse-breeding heritage. The article notes that Karabakh horses are a symbol of Azerbaijan's ancient livestock heritage. In the 18th–19th centuries, the Karabakh Khanate played a leading role in the development of this breed. Diterikhs' research was conducted in order to assess the economic and military potential of Karabakh during the imperial period.

The full text of the article was originally published in Russian (probably under the title "Взгляд на карабajское коневодство" or something similar), but Azerbaijani translations and summaries exist in modern studies.





Purpose of the Article

- The article presents systematic scientific observations about the genetic purity, economic value, and military significance of Karabakh horses.
- It was written to assess both the suitability of Karabakh horses for Russian cavalry troops and their use in the Empire's horse breeding industry.

Characteristics of Karabakh Horses

Diterikhs and other contemporary researchers highlighted the following features of Karabakh horses in the 18th–19th centuries:

Body Structure

Mountain horse proportions: Karabakh horses had a harmonious and compact body. The head was proportional to the neck, the forehead was strong, hooves were durable, the back straight, and the saddle area well defined.

Mobility: Thanks to a short neck and agile center of gravity, the horses were able to stop abruptly and maneuver quickly even at high speed.

Height: On average 140–150 cm, an ideal size for movement in mountainous terrain.

Southern Features

Skin and coat: Thin, dry skin and shiny, silky hair. They were especially famous for their “golden-flame” (zard-colored) shades.

Temperament: A sanguine-choleric type, lively and energetic. At the same time, they showed some weaknesses typical of southern horses, such as sensitivity to cold.

Aesthetic appeal: Their bright appearance and graceful movements attracted attention, especially in races and exhibitions.

Purity and Behavior

Genetic purity: The Karabakh horses, particularly the “Khan Sarilar Köhleri” and “Sarilar” lines, were minimally mixed with other breeds, preserving their unique qualities.

Loyalty: They were distinguished by attachment to their owner, purposeful gaze, and gentle behavior. These traits made them valuable for both military and civilian use.

Historical Roots

Karabakh horses are considered descendants of Eastern horse breeds and have spread throughout the region for millennia. Diterikhs noted that the “Khan Sarilar Köhleri” line was the product of the traditional horse-breeding culture of the Karabakh Khanate.

The Shusha district is especially emphasized as the center of horse breeding, as the best stud horses were raised there.

Development of Karabakh Horse Breeding

- **18th–19th centuries:** The Karabakh Khanate held a leading position in horse breeding. The use of Karabakh horses in Nadir Shah’s armies demonstrated their military value. These horses were superior on the battlefield in terms of speed and endurance.
- **1870s:** The establishment of a stud farm in the Yelizavetpol (present-day Ganja) region gave a systematic impetus to the breeding of Karabakh horses. The best Karabakh mares were collected here and occasionally crossed with Arabian or Anglo-Arabian breeds. Although this was intended to improve quality, in some cases it affected genetic purity.

Importance of the Article

- **Scientific Contribution:** Diterikhs’ article helped integrate Karabakh horses into the horse-breeding programs of the Russian Empire. His research emphasized their potential for military (cavalry) and sporting (horse racing) purposes.
- **Cultural Heritage:** The article documented the role of Karabakh horses in Azerbaijani national culture, laying the foundation for their recognition on a global scale.
- **Modern Era:** Today, Karabakh horses are preserved as one of Azerbaijan’s national symbols. Modern researchers (for example, Samed Vekilov) use Diterikhs’ article to study the breed’s history. The Aghdam Stud Farm plays an important role in preserving this heritage.





Karabakh Horses in the Karabagnames

The *Karabagnames* stand as invaluable historical sources, documenting the political, cultural, and economic life of the Karabakh khanate. Among the diverse subjects they address, one of the most prominent is horse breeding, which held a central role in the region's economy and identity. These chronicles not only provide factual information but also reflect the prestige that Karabakh horses enjoyed both locally and internationally.

Rzaqulu bey Mirza Camal oghlu, one of the chroniclers, wrote that Karabakh horses had gained considerable fame in Iran and Turkey. The khan's *ilkhis* (stud herds) contained more than 3,500 mares, excluding stallions, a figure that reveals the organized and large-scale nature of breeding operations. Such records highlight that the management of horse herds was not an occasional activity but a state-level concern, deeply integrated into the khanate's socio-economic structure.

The *Karabagnames* emphasize that horse breeding was among the most important branches of the local economy. Karabakh horses were admired throughout the South Caucasus for their distinctive type, beauty, endurance, lightness, and speed. Their fame extended far beyond the Caucasus, reaching international markets. English merchants purchased Karabakh horses for their cavalry in India, which illustrates both the high quality of the breed and its strategic importance for military use.

Physically, Karabakh horses distinguished themselves through their golden coats, elegant forms, and balanced proportions. Their aesthetic appeal, combined with resilience and stamina, made them highly desirable. Unlike many other regional breeds, they were seldom employed for heavy farm work, being used only occasionally for threshing in barns. This limited use in agriculture underlines their value as luxury and military horses rather than ordinary working animals.



Inturist

By the early 19th century, the scale and structure of horse breeding had become systematized. In 1832, the Karabakh province contained 11 stud farms, maintaining 250 stallions and 1,400 broodmares. Large feudal lords raised horses not only for personal prestige but also for profit: they bred mares extensively and sold their colts, turning horse breeding into a profitable branch of trade. Prices recorded in 1831 ranged from 30 to 300 chervonets per horse, a substantial amount for the period, underscoring both the economic value of the breed and its elite status.



Intokorf

Beyond their economic role, Karabakh horses contributed significantly to the khanate's exports. They became a key element of trade relations, enhancing the region's reputation abroad. The export of these horses not only generated revenue but also functioned as a form of cultural diplomacy, projecting the image of Karabakh as a land of refinement and skilled animal husbandry.

In sum, the *Karabagnames* provide a vivid picture of the central role played by horse breeding in the Karabakh khanate. Karabakh horses were more than animals of utility; they symbolized wealth, cultural pride, and international prestige. Their beauty, strength, and adaptability elevated them to the status of a national treasure and made them one of the most distinguished breeds of the Caucasus, whose legacy endures in historical memory.



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Types of Karabakh horses

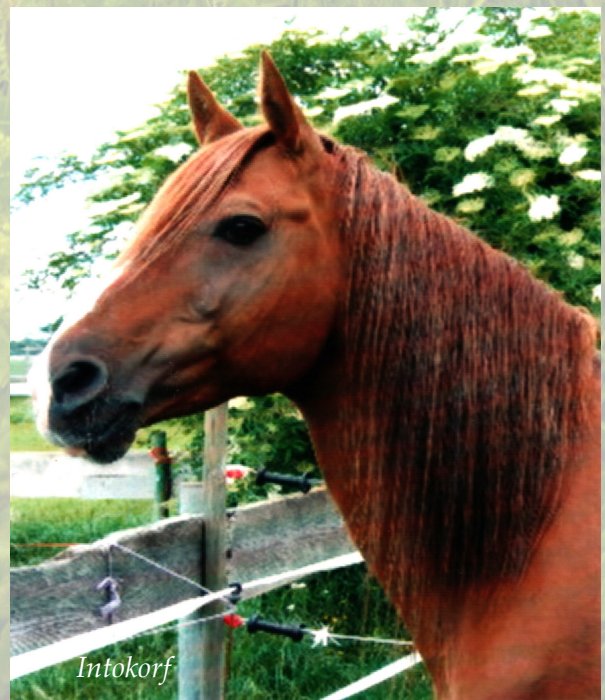
The exterior, color, and various characteristics of the Karabakh horse are based on the research and conclusions of R. X. Sattarzadeh conducted in the mid-20th century.

The Karabakh breed included the types “Maymun” (Happy), “Qarnıyırtıq”, and “Əlyetməz” (“Ceyran”). The depiction of a Karabakh horse was featured on the coat of arms of Shusha, approved on May 21, 1843.

Horses of the “Maymun” type were distinguished by a broad forehead, somewhat long face, long body, strong neck, and well-developed croup. Compared to other types, they were durable over long distances, capable of endurance riding, and had a calm temperament. In 1869, a “Maymun” Karabakh horse won a silver medal at the Russian horse exhibition and received a cash prize of 300 rubles.

Horses of the “Qarnıyırtıq” type were very attractive, notable for their head and long, upright neck. They were agile, with smooth movement, moderate temperament, and comfortable gait. However, in strength and endurance, they were inferior to the “Maymun” type.

The “Əlyetməz” (“Ceyran”) type was dry and light, with energetic movement and high jumps,



Intokorf



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26

distinguished by agility and smooth gait. In strength and endurance, it was intermediate between “Maymun” and “Qarnıyırtıq”, but excelled in speed over short distances. The gray horse descending from “Əlyetməz” became famous under the name “Gülgün”.

In the early 19th century, crossbreeding with Turkmen (Akhal-Teke) blood produced a new type called “Teke-Ceyran”, known for being tall and fast. In 1869, a chestnut stallion named “Əlyetməz” was acquired for the state stud farm at the Second Russian Exhibition.

The famous Russian sculptor of Polish origin, Felix Ignatievich Khodorovich (1840–1913), created the sculpture “Karabakh Horse Gülgün”. Mehdiqulu Khan Usmiyev, the son of Azerbaijani poet Khurshudbanu Natavan, had a golden Karabakh horse named “Gülgün”. After the horse died in a hunting accident, Khodorovich was commissioned to make a sculpture. Khodorovich, exiled to the Caucasus in 1884, lived there for over 50 years and was a guest of Mehdiqulu Khan. The sculpture remained in the Khan’s house for many years and is now kept at the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan.

Besides the “Maymun”, “Əlyetməz”, and “Qarnıyırtıq” types, Karabakh horses also included color-based types: “thick yellows” (dark golden), “yellows” (golden), and “purebred yellows”. They were generally distinguished by shades of yellow-chestnut, yellow-bay, yellow-dark chestnut, and light yellow.

During this period, a new type called “Toxmaq” emerged. These horses were relatively large, fast, enduring, with golden-yellow color. The “Toxmaq” stallion won a bronze medal at the Second Russian Exhibition in 1869.

In the second half of the 19th century, crossbreeding with Kabardin purebred riding horses produced lesser-known and later extinct lines: “Shahmar”, “Durnalar”, “Agachidali”, and “Alagoz”.

The main distinguishing feature of the Karabakh horse is its lemon-colored golden or bright orange coat. Other markings include white on the legs and “tepəl-qasqa” on the forehead, particularly in the “Əlyetməz” type.

Karabakh horses are typical mountain riding horses, alert and spirited. They can traverse difficult terrains, jump between rocks, and preserve their hooves on stony paths. Their body parts are harmoniously proportioned, with a strong neck, solid hooves, straight back, and visible saddle position.

The structure of the Karabakh horse is dry and strong; head proportional and elegant; skull, forehead, and nasal bones well-developed; eyes large and bright; chest wide and deep; croup broad; muscles well-developed; temperament spirited, playful, and gentle; movement comfortable, high, and agile.

Average measurements: withers height 138.5 cm, croup 138.3 cm, body length 142.1 cm, chest girth 164.6 cm, chest depth 66.1 cm, chest width 33.7 cm, croup width 45.1 cm, croup length 45.1 cm, cannon bone 17.7 cm.

Karabakh horses excel in mountain endurance and speed. They can reach 50 km/h in a sprint, with normal walking speed over 8 km/h.

In the 20th century, Soviet collectivization negatively affected horse breeding, with horses mainly used for riding and draft purposes. Large-scale breeding farms were established by the late 1940s.

Famous stallions: "Bala Meymun", "Nadir", "Nadir II", "Noxta", "Ataman", "Abadan", "Amazan", "Ismet", "Sultan". Famous mares: "Nazenan", "Khanime", "Khinali", "Surat", "Shamama", "Shekil", "Zengi", "Zengin", "Bostan", "Zemile", "Bildirchin".

Historical and ethnographic studies confirm the significant role of the Karabakh horse in the development of Azerbaijani horse breeding.



Persis

Types of Karabakh Horses: External and Physical Characteristics (Main Types)

Karabakh horses are recognized as a brilliant symbol of Azerbaijan's national heritage. They are traditionally divided into four main types – **Maymun**, **Garniyirtiq**, **Alyetmez (Ceyran)**, and **Tokhmaq** – each distinguished by unique external (appearance) and physical characteristics. These types were bred in the Karabakh khan stud farms during the 18th–19th centuries and are generally characterized by medium height (144–154 cm), harmonious body structure, thin skin, glossy coat (mainly golden-red), and strong legs. Below is a detailed description of the external and physical traits of each type, based on historical documents and modern research.

Maymun Type

The Maymun type is one of the oldest and most enduring Karabakh horse types, also known as “Khoshbekht” (Happy). In appearance, these horses are elegant and calm: small, neatly shaped head; wide nostrils; large expressive eyes; medium-length straight neck; thin skin covered with glossy golden-red hair; dark brown mane and tail; broad chest; slender but strong legs. The coat is mainly orange-golden, sometimes with brown traces.

Physically, Maymun horses are adapted for long-distance travel: compact and muscular body, straight back and loins, strong hooves, and an ability to jump. Average height is 140–150 cm, facilitating easy movement in mountainous terrain. A unique feature is their ability to jump high, which is advantageous for sport and riding purposes. The temperament is calm and obedient, yet highly durable (suitable for long journeys). In 1869, this type was awarded a silver medal at the All-Russian Horse Exhibition.



Maymun



Garniyirtig Type

The Garniyirtig type is one of the aesthetically most appealing Karabakh horse types, with distinct features particularly in the neck and general appearance. External characteristics include a tall, straight neck; small head (straight profile, wide nostrils, large eyes); thin skin covered with glossy golden-red hair; dark brown mane and tail; broad chest; and dry strong legs. The coat is golden-red, sometimes bright orange, with white markings on the legs (sakal) and a forehead mark (tupil) often present.

Physically, this type has a harmonious and compact build: strong forequarters, straight back, broad torso, well-developed muscles, and strong chest. Height ranges from 144–152 cm, creating a balance between strength and speed. Physical strengths include endurance and power, although slightly less than the Maymun type – performing best in short- to medium-distance travel. Temperament is spirited and playful, with aesthetic qualities making them suitable for shows and competitions. Historically, they were kept in Karabakh khan stud farms and noted in 19th-century ethnographic literature.

Alyetmez (Ceyran) Type

The Alyetmez, or Ceyran type, is a fast and playful type, with delicate and graceful features resembling a gazelle. Externally, it has a slender and agile body; small head (straight profile, large eyes, wide nostrils); medium-length neck; thin skin covered with bright golden-red or gray (“Gulgun”) hair; dark mane and tail; broad chest; and long dry legs. Coat color is mainly bright golden-red, with gray variants also present; white leg markings and a forehead spot are frequent.

Physically, this type is adapted for speed: agile and compact build, high jumping ability, strong chest, straight back and loins, and firm hooves. Height ranges from 142–150 cm, allow-



ing high speed over short distances (up to 40–50 km/h). Physical strengths include surpassing others in short-distance racing and high jumping ability, with easy maneuvering in mountainous terrain. Temperament is energetic and courageous; famous examples include the horse “Alyetmez” owned by Khan’s daughter Natavan. In 1869, this type received a certificate at the All-Russian Exhibition, and a statue exists in Switzerland in its honor.

Tokhmaq Type

30

The Tokhmaq type is one of the large and strong Karabakh horse types, with distinctive color and size characteristics. Externally, it has a relatively large body, golden-red coat, dark brown mane and tail, same-colored legs, small head (wide nostrils, large eyes), straight neck, thin skin with glossy hair, broad chest, and strong back. The coat is uniquely golden-red with dark brown elements, and legs have minimal white markings.



Tokhmaq

Physically, this type is muscular: broad torso, straight back and loins, strong fore and hind-quarters, dry chest, and firm hooves. Height can reach 148–155 cm, suitable for work requiring strength. Despite the large body, this type demonstrates endurance and durability, performing well over medium distances. Temperament is calm and obedient, preferred by breeders. In 1869, it received a bronze medal at the All-Russian Exhibition.

These types reflect the “golden era” of Karabakh horse breeding and are currently preserved at the Agdam Horse Center. Their external and physical characteristics developed through adaptation to mountainous climates, exhibiting speed, endurance, and aesthetic appeal.

Importance

Experts say Karabakh horses had a significant influence on the development of horse breeding in Russia and European countries. In 1823 the English bought 60 broodmares from Mehdiqulu khan’s stud for a high price and took them away. The breed’s fertility and working capacity have always attracted attention. From the mid-19th century Karabakh horses participated in All-Russian and world exhibitions and were granted lavish awards. The Agdam Stud Farm’s horse “Sumqanda” ran 1,600 meters at two years old in 1 minute 54 seconds, and at three years old 2,400 meters in 2 minutes 52 seconds, showing record speed. Other Karabakh horses such as “Liston,” “Signal,” and “Naliv” at different times showed record results reaching world-class performance. It is said that modern dun horses owe their golden color primarily to Karabakh horses. Karabakh horses have taken honorable places at various international exhibitions and competitions, winning awards and medals. Some horses participated under names such as “Maymun,” “Toxmaq,” “Aghalar,” “Bayram,” “Zaman,” “Qaragözlü,” “Qafqaz güzəli,” etc., and repeatedly won.

The arrival of the Karabakh horse in Europe has an important date in 1956. At that time Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev presented Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom with a Karabakh stallion named “Zaman,” bred at the Agdam Stud. The gift of this stallion to the Queen by the Soviet government is considered an important event in the breed’s history. The famous jockey Ali Tagiyev took that horse to the Queen. In the 1960s–1970s the overall development of agriculture, the strengthening of the Agdam Stud Farm’s material and technical base, and the increased interest in racetrack competitions created favorable conditions for the Karabakh horse’s devel-

31



opment. After the establishment of the stud, lines and branches within the breed formed, and the breed actively took part in many All-Union exhibitions and competitions during those years. In the 1980s many Karabakh horses were sold through Moscow auctions to various foreign countries including Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, France and others. The Swiss horse owner Hans Hutmeyer placed a statue of the famous 19th-century Karabakh horse Əlyetməz in front of his mansion; that horse had belonged to the Usmiyev princess's stud and won prizes in the 1867 All-Russian exhibition. In the 19th century French women colored their hair in shades matching the Karabakh horse's golden-chestnut coat. Today in Frankfurt, Germany, a "Friends of Karabakh Horses" club operates under the leadership of Verena Solian, and a Karabakh horse catalog has been published in Germany on her initiative.

Karabakh Horses on Philately

In the Republic of Azerbaijan several postage stamps devoted to Karabakh horses have been issued. The first such stamp was presented on 1 February 1993. Subsequent stamps on this subject were issued on 30 November 1995, 27 June 2006, and 16 November 2011 by the "Azərmarka" company of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan.



Equestrian (Mounted) Games

In our country from the remotest times, compared to other sports, people engaged in mounted national games more frequently. These games have a history of 24 centuries. In the Near East and Central Asia mounted games were symbols of heroism and bravery. But until the 1950s, information about mounted games in the country had not been revealed. Games played with enthusiasm 1,000 years ago — Chovkan, Sür Papaq, Baharband, Yaylıq and others — were unknown to most people, especially the youth. This issue drew the attention of the republic's honored coach Fikrət Hüseynov, who began research in this field. Undoubtedly, the revival of national mounted games after a thousand years required intense search and work.

In 1958 a small racetrack was established on the outskirts of Ganja's Bagmanlar settlement; horses were selected from four kolkhozes and mounted games began to be played. Until that period Azerbaijan could not participate in Union-level (USSR) mounted national games. To address this, special teams were created in more than 10 kolkhozes around Ganja and training commenced. In 1961 the Azerbaijani mounted national team was invited to a competition in Moscow. The first match was supposed to be between Azerbaijani and Armenian riders; the Azerbaijani team won 3:1.



The mounted national games first revived by F. Huseynov were demonstrated in Ganja in 1958–1960 under his leadership. Thanks to his efforts, in the late 1950s several national games, led by Chovkan, were revived. He restored ten folk games based on historical documents and folklore materials, prepared competition rules, and published booklets for the public. “Piyalə və ox” (Cup and arrow), “Baharbənd,” “Sürpapaq,” “Gərdək qaçıрмаq” and others are among these games.

At least the following can be cited as an example: several renowned horse breeds exist in the world, and one of them belongs to Azerbaijan.

33





Equestrian Games in Azerbaijan

34

In Azerbaijani national culture, horseback games have been practiced since ancient times as traditional sports aimed at developing military skills, uniting the community, and providing entertainment. These games were especially widespread in the Karabakh and Shirvan regions, emphasizing the horse's speed, endurance, and maneuverability. Historical sources show that such games are mentioned in works from Nizami Ganjavi to archaeological findings of the medieval period. Many of these games were influenced by Central Asian and Persian cultures but enriched with local Azerbaijani features. Today, these games are included in UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage and are revived during holidays and sporting events. Below is a brief overview of some of these games, with the most detailed section dedicated to Chovkan.





Chovkan Game

Chovkan is Azerbaijan's most famous equestrian game and a national sport, considered an ancient form of modern polo. This game is played on Karabakh horses and was inscribed on UNESCO's "Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" list in 2013. Historically, it originated in Persia in the mid-1st millennium and became popular in Azerbaijan from the medieval period onwards. It is depicted in Nizami Ganjavi's *"Khosrov and Shirin"*, in *Kitabi-Dada Qorqud*, and in 11th-century miniatures. Archaeological excavations (for example, near Oran-Qala) have uncovered Chovkan-themed vessels dating to the 11th century. The game was popular among aristocrats and royal families, and even international tournaments were held in Baghdad in the 12th century. Via the Great Silk Road, it spread to India and Europe.

35

Rules and Setup:

The name "Chovkan" means "to hit with a stick" in Turkish. The game is played on a straight, rectangular field (200–300 m long, 100–150 m wide). Two teams, each consisting of 5 players (2 defenders and 3 attackers), compete on Karabakh horses. Players wear traditional attire (chukht,





etik) and use a wooden mallet (1–1.2 m long with a curved end) to hit a small leather or wooden ball (8–10 cm in diameter) toward the opponent's goal (3–4 m long). The game is divided into four periods (7–10 minutes each) with breaks. Maneuvering the horse is essential to strike the ball: horses must be fast (40–50 km/h) and agile. Scoring includes 10 points for a goal and 5 points for moving the ball away from the opponent's goal. Traditional music called *jangi* (zurna and reed instruments) accompanies the game, enriching its cultural aspect.

36

Historical and Cultural Significance:

Chovkan is not only a sport but also a symbol of nomadic culture, representing the unity of horse and rider, courage, and teamwork. In the Karabakh Khanate (18th–19th centuries), horses bred in volunteer studs were specially trained for the game. Tournaments held in Shusha and the Cıdır plain were transformed into cultural festivals. Today, it is revived by local communities returning to Shusha, with lessons held in schools and international competitions (e.g., in Baku). In 2015, Chovkan was demonstrated during the European Games in Baku. Similar forms exist in Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, but the Azerbaijani version is distinguished by the use of Karabakh horses.

Modern Situation:

Currently, training is conducted at equestrian centers in Agdam and Shusha. Within UNESCO's safeguarding program (2017–2019), information about players was collected in Sheki and Ismayilli, and pilot programs were implemented in schools. Chovkan has both sporting and tourism potential, as the speed of Karabakh horses and the game's dynamics attract spectators.

Brief Overview of Other Equestrian Games

- **Jirit (Cirit):** A horseback jousting game in which two teams try to hit each other with leather or wooden javelins (~1 m long). It develops military skills and has been popular since the medieval period. Modern tournaments preserve this tradition.
- **Sürpapaq:** Players ride horses to collect hats (sharvar) thrown on the ground. It requires speed and agility and is played during Karabakh celebrations.

- **Baharbənd:** Spring celebration game involving horseback races and symbolic dances. It symbolizes unity among people and is rarely played.
- **Yaylıq:** Collecting headscarves while riding. Each team has five scarves placed 40 m apart; they must collect them in 30 seconds. Speed and accuracy are essential.
- **Horseback Wrestling:** Two riders wrestle while on horseback. It requires endurance and balance and originates from military training.
- **Cıdır:** Horse races and obstacle courses, typically in mountainous terrain. Agility and horse control are crucial.
- **Qızqov (Girl Chase):** Riders protect girls while racing. It carries romantic and cultural elements.
- **Gərdəkqaçırma:** Maneuvering and evading obstacles on horseback. Requires fast and skillful riding. Rarely mentioned in historical sources.
- **Shepherd Game:** A game of herding and guarding livestock on horseback. Combines racing and gathering elements.
- **Qopuq:** Chasing and collecting an empty bag on horseback. Popular among children and develops speed.

These games preserve Azerbaijan's equestrian heritage and are revived during holidays, such as Novruz, maintaining both cultural and sporting traditions.

Information About the Shirvan Horse Breed General Context and Historical Background

The Shirvan horse is one of the local breeds in Azerbaijan that gained fame. However, information about its origin, distribution area, working qualities and exterior is limited.

According to data dated 2012, the number of horses in Azerbaijan was 77,208 head. Since then the number of horses has continued to decline. Compared to 2016, the number of horses decreased by 5,542 head—or 7.17 percent—bringing the country's total to 71,666 head. The main reason for the decrease in horse numbers in the country is informal local consumption. Until 2016 Azerbaijan had not exported horses. In 2016, for meat purposes, 1,155 horses were exported from Azerbaijan. The prevalence of meat-oriented horse exports from Azerbaijan is due to the low domestic price of horse meat. Considering world average import prices for horse meat, the price of horse meat exported from Azerbaijan is about two times lower than the world average import price. Kazakhstan is the main importer of horse meat from Azerbaijan.



In Literature

The literary monuments, historical heritage, statehood history, economic life, and both material and spiritual culture of our people provide a comprehensive view of the horse-breeding traditions that existed in the territory of Azerbaijan. The epic *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud* contains fascinating information about the breeds, types, exterior traits, and structure of Azerbaijani horses.

For example, when Dədə Qorqud went to beg for Banıçığayi Beyrək, two horses were given to him from Bayındır Khan's stable: *"From Bayındır Khan's stable, bring two swift horses: one Keçi-headed Keçər stallion, and one Toğlu-headed Turı stallion."* Thus, the epic's hero Dədə Qorqud is presented with two famous horses. Here, the Toğlu-headed Turı stallion is relatively weaker, while the Keçi-headed Keçər stallion is stronger: *"The Toğlu-headed Turı stallion became tired; Dədə Qorqud mounted the Keçi-headed Keçər stallion."*

Similar details are characteristic of the *Koroğlu* epic. First, it is impossible to imagine the hero Koroğlu without his horses, Qırat and Dürat. Second, these horses, which form Koroğlu's main striking force, were taken from Hasan Khan's stud. Third, in the epic, Qırat is described as an unparalleled, very strong horse, whereas Dürat is relatively weak and less powerful.

The horses mentioned in *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud* and *Koroğlu* — Keçi-headed Keçər, Toğlu-headed Turı, Qırat, and Dürat — in terms of both exterior and characteristics, resemble the **Karabakh and Dilboz breeds**, which have been historically widespread in Azerbaijan. Archaeological evidence and epic narratives indicate that, starting from the mid-18th century, these horses were selectively bred, widely distributed across Azerbaijan, and primarily used as riding horses.

38 In Azerbaijani oral folklore and historical epics there is a love and affection for the horse. Famous examples include Qazan khan's horse in *"Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud,"* Koroğlu's horse Qırat and Qaçaq Nabi's Bozati. Azerbaijani poets such as Qazi Burhaneddin, Imadeddin Nesimi, and Rukneddin Masud Masihi mentioned the game of chovkan in their works. Masihi structured a ghazal using chovkan as a motif. His work indicates that the game was widely loved and played in the 17th century. Masihi used elements of the chovkan game in a mystical sense. In *"Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud,"* "the Oghuz warriors" strength lay in their weapons and horses. The horse, belonging to the Oghuz way of life, was an essential element. The Oghuz were born on horseback and lived their lives on horseback. In the epic, horses are praised in many beautiful words; in the preface we read: "A brave man knows his horse," showing how close the horse was to the Oghuz. Dədə Qorqud's maxims also mention horses: "An unsteady rider's gray-white horse should not stumble." The epic's hero Qazan khan is praised as having the "brown horse's hoof." Phrases like "Shahbaz horses in large numbers," "karaquc horses," "Arab horses," "kulun," "gaziliq horses" demonstrate the development of horse breeding in the period depicted by the epic. The epic's hero Beyrək believes he will go to the other world with his horse; he addresses the horse as friend-brother and calls it the most beautiful name. The horse also understands the feelings of oghuz owner and influences his life. In the story, warriors' main forces are cavalry; thus the horse was crucial for military tactics and surprise attacks. The epic says, 'a foot soldier has no hope,' meaning 'there is no hope for one who fights on foot. Without horses, the Oghuz could not demonstrate their skills: "If the horse does not perform, the man cannot boast. Skill belongs to the horse."

The opening ceremony of the Karabakh Equestrian Complex

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and the First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva attended the opening ceremony of the Karabakh Equine Farm Complex of the "Karabakh Horse Breeding Enterprise" LLC under the Ministry of Agriculture's Animal Science Research Institute.





Karabakh, one of our country's charming regions, is known not only for its enchanting nature, astonishing music and ancient monuments, and exquisite carpets but also for its rare breed horses. Karabakh horses, a national treasure of Azerbaijan, are among the oldest cultured horse breeds in the world, formed here through centuries of popular selection. The Karabakh khan studs played an irreplaceable role in the breed's refinement and wide distribution. That is why the 18th–19th centuries are considered the golden era of Karabakh horsemanship. The most important event in the Karabakh breed's 20th century history was the establishment of the Agdam Stud Farm. The stud was officially set up by USSR Council of Ministers decision dated 8 October 1948 No. 1681 and by the Azerbaijan SSR Council of Ministers decision dated 27 May 1949 No. 583. In 1993, after the Agdam district was occupied by Armenian aggressors, Azerbaijan's national treasure, the Karabakh horses — a key element of the local gene pool — experienced displacement. Since 1994 the Karabakh horse breeding enterprise has continued its activities from Xamtorpaq in the Agjabadi district. Despite all difficulties, it has been possible to preserve

Karabakh horses to this day. Recently, state efforts have sought to restore the former glory of Azerbaijan's horses and ensure the development of horse breeding in the country. In 2007 the "Law on Horse Breeding" was adopted. Following implementation of this law, the President signed a relevant decree and a program for the development of horse breeding was approved. President Ilham Aliyev's decrees dated 19 November 2014 "On providing additional support for the development of the Karabakh horse breed in Azerbaijan" and dated 21 August 2015 "On measures to improve the material and technical supply of livestock breeding" are of great importance in preserving the Karabakh breed's gene pool and restoring its historical renown. On 22 February 2017 President signed another decree regarding. According to the decree, funds of 2 million manats from



the Presidential Reserve Fund were allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture for the construction of the Karabakh Horse Breeding Complex under the Animal Science Research Institute. Now the Karabakh Equine Complex is fully ready for use.

It was reported that the Karabakh Equine Complex was constructed on an area of 35.5 hectares. Greenery has been planted across the surrounding area; trees and decorative shrubs have been planted. The complex comprises a security building, disinfection pool, administrative building, foaling section, stables for stallions, broodmares and young horses, indoor manege, riding area, canopy, examination room, quarantine building, farm storehouse, open manege, race strip, training facilities, fertilizer store and auxiliary facilities. The administrative building of the equine complex provides top-level working conditions for staff.

The President and the First Lady familiarized themselves with the conditions created in the closed manege. A museum dedicated to the history of Karabakh horses has also been organized at the complex.

It was noted that historically Karabakh khans — Pənah khan, Ibrahim khan, Mehdiqulu khan, Jafarqulu khan, the poetess Khurshidbanu Natavan and other noble families — maintained stud farms and stables, carrying out stud breeding at the level of classical stud horsemanship, producing typical examples of the breed. The Karabakh horse — a typical mountain riding horse — is valued for its endurance and loyalty to its owner. Mainly golden-chestnut and chestnut colors are common; it is of medium stature and adapted to harsh conditions. Karabakh horses have been represented and achieved success in many international exhibitions. For instance, in 1867 a Karabakh horse nicknamed “Khan” received a top award at a French exhibition; in 1869 at the All-Russian exhibition “Maymun” won silver and “Toxmaq”



Startak



Sultan



won bronze, while the horse named “Əlyetməz” owned by Khankizi Natavan received a certificate. Karabakh horses were exported to Russia and a number of European countries and influenced the improvement of breeds such as the Kabardian and Don.

President İlham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva watched the national ancient equestrian game “Sür-papaq” performed in the indoor manege.

It was noted that the “Sür-papaq” game is played by two teams of 4–8 athletes and lasts 20 minutes. The President and the First Lady also toured the facilities in the complex’s stables.

In 1946, a special commission toured the districts where Karabakh horses were widely bred — Aghdam, Shusha, Khojavend, Barda, Yevlakh, and Tovuz — and selected 60 Karabakh horses exhibiting the breed’s characteristic traits, including 59 mares and 1 stallion.

In the autumn of 1947, these horses were re-examined by specialists from the Soviet farms and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Azerbaijan SSR, and 27 mares were identified as typical Karabakh horses. Subsequently, in 1949, a horse-breeding farm was established in the village of Eyvazkhanbeyli in the Aghdam district.

In the 1960–1970s the general development of agriculture, the enhancement of the Aghdam Stud Farm’s material-technical base, and growing interest in racetrack competitions contributed to the Karabakh horse’s flourishing. After the stud’s establishment, family lines and branches formed within the breed, and Karabakh horses actively participated in many all-Union exhibitions and competitions. In 1956 the Soviet Government presented a Karabakh stallion named “Zaman” to Queen Elizabeth II of England, showcasing the breed’s renown. In the 1980s Karabakh horses were sold through Moscow auctions to many foreign countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy and France. Karabakh horses, considered among the most beautiful in the world, possess an elegant appearance and excellent breeding abilities. Their body size, color, temperament, endurance, behavior toward their owner, and sociability are the main advantages of Karabakh horses.

Due to the attention and care of the President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Ilham Aliyev, our country's achievements in sports have been rising year by year. Equestrianism and equestrian sports are also given special attention. In short, this branch of sports is experiencing a period of development in our country.

In December 2013 in Baku at the 8th session of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the Karabakh chovkan game played with Karabakh horses was inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. A documentary film "Sarılar — In the Trace of the Karabakh Horse" has been produced about Karabakh horses. French writer Jean-Louis Gouraud wrote and published a book titled "Karabakh Horses." At the horse show held near Windsor Castle in honor of Queen Elizabeth II's 90th anniversary, Karabakh horses made a magnificent appearance and drew great interest. In short, the conditions created at the complex provide grounds to say that Azerbaijan's national treasure — the Karabakh horse — is now regaining its former glory. The measures taken have helped to restore the historical prestige of the Karabakh breed. As a result, our horses will once again successfully represent the nation at international competitions and exhibitions and become a source of pride for our people.

At the opening ceremony the Agricultural Museum organized a special exhibition that attracted significant interest. The exhibit presented various expositions reflecting Azerbaijan's rich agricultural heritage — traditional farming tools, archival documents, photographs and information about the history of the Karabakh horse. Visitors familiarized themselves with the deep roots of Karabakh horsemanship traditions and the national cultural significance of this sphere. The museum's materials highlighting the breed's selection, conservation, and restoration sparked particular interest.

The Head of State and the First Lady examined the exhibits and highly appreciated the initiative of the Agricultural Museum.



The exhibition was well received by participants and was regarded as an important step both for demonstrating the region’s agricultural potential and promoting national heritage.

Below is a photo showing the President’s and the First Vice President Mehriban Aliyeva’s participation in the groundbreaking ceremony of the Horse Breeding and Reproduction Center in Eyvazkhanbeyli village of Agdam district. The image captures the horses and the festive atmosphere of the ceremony.

**Post-War Revival of Horse Breeding in Agdam:
The Reestablishment of the Karabakh Horse Stud Farm**

The post-war period in Azerbaijan has seen significant efforts to restore and develop horse breeding, particularly in the Agdam region. Among the most notable initiatives is the construction of the **Karabakh Horse Stud Farm** in Eyvazkhanli village, aimed at preserving and propagating the renowned Karabakh horse breed. The project represents both a cultural and agricultural milestone, reaffirming the historical ties of this unique equestrian heritage to its native lands.



Objectives and Scope of the Project

The newly established stud farm is designed to focus on the breeding and maintenance of **Karabakh horses**, ensuring that the breed’s distinctive traits—endurance, agility, and refined aesthetics—are preserved. According to **Elman Qadirov**, Director of the Karabakh Horse Stud Farm, although favorable conditions have been provided for Karabakh horses in other regions such as Aghjabadi, the natural habitat of these horses is the mountainous and semi-mountainous areas of Karabakh. The return of the horses to their native territory is expected to further enhance their breed characteristics.

Scientific and Technological Collaboration

A memorandum of cooperation has been signed between **Aghdam Horse Stud Farm LLC** and the **Scientific-Research Institute of Animal Husbandry of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan**. This collaboration encompasses:

- Genetic selection and breeding programs for the Karabakh horse.
- Digital monitoring of health and veterinary care.
- Optimization of feeding rations according to local climatic conditions.
- Implementation of advanced reproductive and management techniques.

These initiatives aim to ensure both the biological preservation of the Karabakh breed and the sustainability of horse breeding practices adapted to contemporary scientific standards.

The Karabakh horse is not only a national symbol but also a living embodiment of Azerbaijan's equestrian tradition. By reviving the breed in its historical homeland, the project strengthens national identity, preserves intangible cultural heritage, and provides opportunities for equestrian sports, tourism, and local economic development.

The revival of the **Karabakh horse breed** in Aghdam represents a remarkable synthesis of cultural preservation, scientific innovation, and sustainable agriculture. As one of Azerbaijan's most treasured native horse breeds, the Karabakh horse carries profound historical, aesthetic, and functional significance.

The post-war restoration initiatives, including the establishment of the Aghdam Stud Farm, mark a new chapter in the protection and promotion of this heritage. By combining modern genetic, veterinary, and management practices with the breed's traditional characteristics, Azerbaijan is ensuring that the Karabakh horse will continue to flourish in its native landscapes.

This endeavor not only preserves a living cultural icon but also provides a dynamic platform for education, equestrian sport, and heritage tourism, reinforcing the enduring legacy of the Karabakh horse for future generations.



*Karabakh stallion "Karvənd",
1952*



*"Arab horse –
Contingent 1946.
Aghdam Horse Breeding
Farm.*



*Karabakh stallion
"Xan" 1861*



*Karabakh stallion "Zaman"
1953*



*Karabakh mare "Nazanan 10"
1943*



*Karabakh mare Shakil,
1948*



"The Karabakh horses are renowned not only for their beauty but also for their endurance. This reflects the character of our people. We will preserve the Karabakh horses, increase their numbers, and introduce them to the whole world!"

— İlham Aliyev

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From the Founder and Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

The journal you hold in your hands is dedicated to the Karabakh horse – a true symbol of Azerbaijan's culture, history, and pride. Our goal is not only to shed light on the rich past of this rare breed but also to present its current state, the efforts made to preserve it, and the prospects it holds for the future.

For centuries, the Karabakh horse has been an inseparable part of battles, epics, poetry, and the collective memory of our people, becoming one of the most important symbols of our national identity. Its magnificent beauty, endurance, and intelligence have always been highly valued both within our country and on the international stage.

We believe this journal will serve as a valuable source for researchers as well as horse enthusiasts, helping future generations to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the Karabakh horse.

I wish you an inspiring and rewarding reading.

Sincerely,

Yadigar Bagirova

Founder and Editor-in-Chief



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Presented to His Majesty King Charles III
by
The Republic of Azerbaijan

Dutton Horse - named Zafar - meaning Victory

