

# The Eastern Gate of Shusha: Askeran Fortress

[Qarabag.com](http://Qarabag.com) has prepared material on the history of education and the architectural structure of one of the major defensive fortifications of the Karabakh Khanate – Askeran Fortress which is located approximately 25 km from the city of Shusha.



Askeran Fortress is located among the mountains in the gorge, on the right and left banks of the Karkarchai River, in the village of Askeran in Khojaly region of Azerbaijan. The fortress played a special role in the defense capability of the Karabakh Khanate. If the enemy occupied a fortress that locked the entrance to a narrow gorge, there would be free access to Shusha.

The fortress was founded by Mehrali bey, the son of Panakh Ali Khan Karabaghi in 1758-1760.

[\[Ahmadbek Javanshir. The political existence of the Karabakh Khanate \(from 1747 to 1805\)\].](#)

[1961, p. 71\]](#)

[\[News of the Azerbaijan Archaeological Committee. 1926. The article "Askeran" written by E.A.Pakhomov 1902, p. 9\]](#)

[\[Yevlakh-Shusha: An archaeological essay. J.Alexandrovich, I.Azimbekov, M.Sysoev. 1928, p. 10\]](#)

[\[Azerbaijan. \(Historical places and places of interest\). 1960, p. 133\]](#)

According to Azerbaijani historian Mirza Jamal Karabaghi, the fortress was built by Mehrali Bey's brother Ibrahim Khalil Khan of Karabakh in 1788-1789. However, the book of the corresponding member of the Imperial Moscow Archaeological Society V.M.Sysoev indicates that the fortress was built by Panakh Ali Khan in the middle of the XVIII century.

[\[Mirza Jamal Dzhavanshir Karabaghi. The history of Karabakh. 1959, pp. 101-102\]](#)

[\[V.M. Sysoev. A short guide to the most famous monuments of antiquity and nature in Azerbaijan. 1930, p. 8\]](#)

Russian writer V.M.Sidorov in the book "Travel notes and impressions. Practical information for a tourist" of 1897 describes the fortress as follows:

*"Mountains began to appear behind Aghdam. We drove along a dried-up river, among mulberry orchards and vineyards, passed a forgotten little cemetery with a white Tatar chapel and soon we saw the amazingly picturesque Askeran Fortress on a high mountain. The towers of the fortress occupied the tops of two mountains, between which the river runs. The walls are located from both sides of the river, which probably in the old days was bordered by a mountain chain"*

[\[V. Sidorov. Across Russia. 2. The Caucasus. Travel notes and impressions. Practical information for the tourist.1897, pp. 238-239\]](#)

The defensive system of Askeran was built during the formation of the Karabakh Khanate as a protective barrier against attacks from the lowlands on Shusha Fortress. Azerbaijani historian Mirza Jamal Karabaghi writes: *"If there were a small infantry in the fortress during the war, the enemy would not be able to pass by them in the direction of Shusha Fortress."*

[\[Mirza Jamal Dzhavanshir Karabaghi. The history of Karabakh. 1959, p. 102\]](#)

[\[A.V. Salamzadeh. Architecture of Azerbaijan in XVI-XIX centuries, 1964, p. 87\]](#)

The fortress consists of two parts – two fortifications, one of the which is on the right – eastern bank of the river, and the other on the left – western. They block the gorge of the river, leaving only its bed free. In “The assertion of the Russian rule in the Caucasus” of 1901, it is noted that the riverbed was blocked by a fortification consisted of two towers:

*“After passing a large village of Aghdam, the road enters the gorge of the Karkar-chay or the Askaran-chay. Here, about 25 versts from Shusha, the path through the gorge is blocked by the walls of the Askaran Castle. The fortifications located on both sides of the river consist of towers interconnected by high (up to 3 sazhen.) walls. The rocky shores of the Askaran-chai are so steep and precipitous that it is impossible to bypass the fortification. Even in the riverbed, there are two towers.”*

[\[The establishment of Russian rule in the Caucasus. Volume I. 1901, p. 202\]](#)



The right-bank fortification of the fortress is a double wall

up to 250 cm with towers and fortifications on a hill, and the left-bank part is a large fortified quadrangle with towers at the corners and no buildings inside. The walls of the fortress are built of river stone. The height of the walls is up to 9 m, and the thickness is up to 2 m.

[\[The establishment of Russian rule in the Caucasus. Volume I. 1901, p. 202\]](#)

[\[Yevlakh-Shusha: An archaeological essay by J.Alexandrovich, I.Azimbekov, M.Sysoev. 1928., p. 10\]](#)

[\[A.V. Salamzadeh. Architecture of Azerbaijan in XVI-XIX centuries, 1964, p. 88\]](#)

Soviet archaeologist E.A.Pakhomov in his article "Askeran" of 1902 noted that the walls of the fortress were made of rubble stone, which was taken nearby and broken into cubes; cobblestone was mixed with this stone in some places (especially inside the masonry walls), and all this elements are connected with very strong cement.

[\[News of the Azerbaijan Archaeological Committee. 1926. "Askeran" by E.A.Pakhomov 1902, p. 7\]](#)

It is also known that in order to build a highway along the left bank of the river, the part of the fortress walls was destroyed. In the book "The History of the reign of Emperor Alexander I and Russia in this period" written in 1871, it is indicated that part of the fortress was destroyed by the Russian general of Armenian origin, Prince Valerian Grigorievich Madatov in 1823-1825:

*"In order to strengthen the trade and industry of the region, Madatov undertook to improve the roads. In 1823, the road from Askeran to the fortress of Shusha and from there almost to Ah-Oglan began to be repaired; this work was completed in 1825 by the residents without any costs from the government. A new road has been laid from the 20th verst from Elisavetpol to the ascent to Shusha. Prince Madatov himself indicated on it convenient and safe locations for Cossack posts and postal stations".*

[\[The History of the reign of Emperor Alexander I and Russia in this period. Volume VI. 1871, p. 328\]](#)

“The establishment of Russian rule in the Caucasus” of 1901 states the following:

*“In modern times, when laying the Shusha highway, the builders were forced to make a breach in the walls and make a road through the fortress”*

[\[The establishment of Russian rule in the Caucasus. Volume I. 1901, p. 202\]](#)

[\[Yevlakh-Shusha: An archaeological essay by J.Alexandrovich, I.Azimbekov, M.Sysoev. 1928., p. 10\]](#)

[\[V.M. Sysoev. A short guide to the most famous monuments of antiquity and nature in Azerbaijan. 1930, p. 8\]](#)

In 1810, during the Russian-Iranian War (1804-1813), peace talks between Russia and Iran were held in the fortress for 18 days, which ended unsuccessfully.

[\[The establishment of Russian rule in the Caucasus. Volume II. 1902, pp. 160;163-166\]](#)

[\[H.M. Ibrahimbeyli. Russia and Azerbaijan in the first third of the XIX century \(from military and political history\) 1969, p. 62;64\]](#)

[\[Azerbaijani Soviet Encyclopedia – IV vol., p. 233\]](#)

With the liquidation of the khanates by the Russian Empire (the late 20s of the XIX century), Askeran Fortress lost its defensive significance and was abandoned.

[\[Azerbaijan. \(Historical places and places of interest\). 1960, p. 134\]](#)

After the occupation of the Khojaly region by the Armenian armed forces in 1992, the fortress was subjected to destruction. On August 2, 2001, the fortress was registered by the state as an architectural monument of local significance.