

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES FOR REASSESSMENT OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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The new strain of coronavirus - COVID-19 - shocked the whole world and turned into a global pandemic. The closure of interstate borders and the complete cessation of international tourism hit hard the financial position of museums and galleries. While the world is struggling with COVID-19, the museums, galleries, national libraries in developing countries discovered digital portals that had moved forward and provided researchers with a powerful tool, often helpful than direct access to the actual manuscript. The digital portals were a pleasant surprise as it allowed perusing, long-distance, practically all of their important illustrated medieval manuscripts, page by page. The high resolution of their images was of immense help to this study. Similarly, museums that now offer digitized images of their collections provide a great service to researchers. What they have achieved in this respect is not only of value to researchers, but it opens the door to the general public, for items that only a privileged few could previously see and admire.

The unique example of miniatures, books, clothing, carpets, metal, jewelry, gardens and architectural masterpieces make up an important part of the world's cultural heritage.

For example, after the Azerbaijani Safavid State was founded, many travelers came to Azerbaijan territory and made some observations. While most of these travelers came on official business as a member of an embassy, some of them came for the purpose of adventure, trade etc. and took some notes about events they witnessed. Those travelers provided us with much significant information about culture and art, life style, architectural structures, commodities, clothing, and so on, which are not found in historical chronicles. Later, the notes that were published and have survived were translated into various languages.

For the early research of the art of medieval Azerbaijan, miniature paintings are a very attractive topic.

The miniature paintings were always produced for the elite, and mostly for manuscript illustration. As such, they were confined to libraries that only a privileged few had access to. However, with the advent of photographic techniques in the early twentieth century, the first travel enthusiasts began to discover paintings. Many art history studies of those eras, carried out in the second half of the twentieth century, were based on books - albums of these enthusiasts.

Later, the art history of Azerbaijan has been studied by many regional scholars from Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iran and elsewhere. But the bibliography containing publications in the last ten years shows that the main research on the medieval Azerbaijan art is very popular in Turkey, Europe and North America. Literature on this subject is increasing day by day.

What caused the outbreak of interest in the art of Azerbaijan?

Now, on the one hand, the digital revolution is changing the basic premises of miniature studies. On the other hand, all important collections are gradually putting their treasures online. As a result, the access problem is becoming less and less relevant.

Two decades of the 21st century are over. The development of physical methods of identification and digitalization of miniatures make it possible to reassess the art criticism studies.

However, until now, many complex and incomprehensible works of art require new and precise research to re-evaluate the medieval cultural heritage of Azerbaijan. We hope that the digitalization of cultural heritage will give a tangible impetus to such research.

