

EMANUELE GIULIANELLI



# QARABAG

THE TEAM WITHOUT A CITY  
and Their Quest to Conquer Europe

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# Transliteration

MOST OF the names of the people and places that appear in this book are in the Azerbaijani language, which uses a script with characters and sounds that differ greatly from the Latin script used in English.

I have employed the international transcription criteria for transliteration, attempting to write everything in the form used most commonly in texts written in English and by leading press organisations in the English-speaking world.

What complicates this is that many words have multiple transliterations rather than a single equivalent. One example is provided by the place name Agdam; in the original spelling it is written Ağdam, while western transliterations use both Aghdam and Agdam, the version you will find in this book.

Hours could be spent discussing the word that gives this book its title: Qarabag. The disputed region between Armenia and Azerbaijan is called Qarabağ in the Azerbaijani language. Over the decades, the name has been westernised in a variety of ways: Qarabagh (as it appears in the club's official website address), Qarabag,

Karabakh, Karabagh and even Garabagh. The form you will find in the pages that follow is the same as the one on the cover.

One final note on the terms used in this book. I have used 'Azerbaijani' rather than 'Azeri' almost exclusively. 'Azeri' often refers to ethnic Azerbaijani populations living in Iran, while in English the terms are equivalent, according to the most commonly used dictionaries.

# Qarabag is Agdam

AGDAM NO longer exists.

Rubbed out by the war, razed to the ground by the hatred and blind fury of boorish nationalism, of flag waving, flags later used as shrouds to cover coffins and corpses. I will not linger here to explain how war in general has no meaning other than for those who foment it and feed off blood and the dead; I will instead try, as best I can, not to take the side of either of the contenders in a territorial dispute that has turned into a fratricidal bloodbath, a storm of hatred, an insane and irrational yearning for destruction.

What I will try to do is tell a story, to talk about what has happened and what is happening, with some attempt to speculate on what will or what may happen. Or what can never happen. I will not lose my way in controversy. I will not try to say who is right and who is wrong because in a conflict between neighbours in which some 1,500 to 2,300 civilians and some 25,000 to 36,000 soldiers have lost their lives, with a million refugees forced to leave

their homes, in a war that has continued for years, for decades, all reason has been lost. The shadow of reason has vanished in the fine dust that rises from the rubble of Agdam; reason has lost control, stunned by the smell of blood emanating from the mangled bodies on the streets of Khojaly; and reason has shattered on the ground, breaking into a thousand pieces like the windowpanes at Ghazanchetsots Cathedral and Shusha Mosque.

The story I will tell is that of a football team, Qarabag Agdam FK, which has not played in its stadium, its city, since 12 May 1993. And that of the city, Agdam, Qarabag is now all that remains. Qarabag is Agdam.