

## Senri Ethnological Studies

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## THE VALUE OF THE PAST: MYTHS, IDENTITY AND POLITICS IN TRANSCAUCASIA

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The Armenians cannot but emphasize that Armenia was the first Christian state on the Earth, which has to upgrade its prestige and help them to overcome contemporary hardship.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE BIRTH OF THE AZERI NATION

Original Azerbaijan, or more correctly, the state of Atropatene, was one of the Hellenistic states situated in northwestern Iran from the end of the 4th century B.C. until the mid-2nd century B.C. It was populated by Iranian-speaking people up to the arrival of the Seljuqs in the 11th century A.D., when intensive Turkification took place. Until then, the local inhabitants spoke "Azeri", an Iranian language. Even earlier, i.e. before an arrival of the Iranian-speaking tribes, northern Iran was populated by the Hurrians, whose language belonged to the North-Caucasian family of languages.

In the 1st Millennium A.D., Caucasian Albania was situated where the Republic of Azerbaijan is nowadays. The population of this state initially spoke various languages that were related to those of the contemporary North Caucasians. The Udins, occupying the Kutkashen area of Azerbaijan, remind us of that early language sub-stratum. Yet, even at the time of Caucasian Albania and later on, as well, the region was greatly affected by Iran, and Persian enjoyed even more success than the Albanian language. The Persians did their best to impose Zoroastrianism on the local inhabitants, and the Armenians imposed the Armenian-Gregorian Church (monophysiticism). In the 7th century, Caucasian Albania was conquered by the Arabs, and in the 7th – 8th centuries, Islam began to spread there. In the 6th century, the Persian Sassanians established the small frontier state of Shirvan on the left of the Kura River as an outpost against the Khazars. Gradually, it grew in power, and by the 10th century, after it had incorporated the former Albanian lands on the right of the Kura River with the cities of Barda and Ganja, it came to be a large state.

The Turkic-speaking groups began to infiltrate eastern Transcaucasia after the Hunn invasion of the 4th century A.D. However, the main threshold of intensive Turkification was the beginning of the 11th century, when a big new wave of conquerors flooded Azerbaijan. At that time, the Seljuqs came, a branch of the Oghuz Turks, who arrived from Central Asia. They waged successful wars against Byzantium, and after victory, at the battle of Mantzikirt in 1071, they subjugated the lion's share of Transcaucasia. Since that time, the population of northern Azerbaijan was intensively Turkified. The same occurred in southern Azerbaijan later by more than a century, i.e. from the 13th century on, when the region was incorporated by the Mongol state of Il-Khans whose capital was established in

Tabriz. Since the beginning of the 16th century, Azerbaijan was the center of the Safavi Persian Empire (1502-1722) which annexed Shirvan and introduced Shiism there. They used Shiism advantageously to oppose themselves to their enemies, the Ottoman Empire in the west and the state of Sheibanids in the east, which were run by Sunni Muslims. In this way, the Safavids, who used Turkic at court, opposed themselves to all the other Turks and emphasized their close relationships with Iran, who had a great cultural effect upon them (Novosel'tsev 1991: 190-196; Buniatov 1987a: 126-127).

In the meantime, those Albanians who continued practicing Christianity after the Arab conquest and Islamization and lived on the right bank of the Kura River were rapidly Armenized, and the Albanian Christian Church merged with the Armenian one. Under the Safavids, the Azerbaijan territory was divided into four provinces: Tabriz (with its center in Tabriz), Shukhur-Saada (with its center in Nakhjivan), Shirvan (with its center in Shirvan), and Karabagh (with its center in Ganja) (Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1984: 29-31; Altstadt 1992: 2-9). The lowlands and hilly flanks fell under administration of the Muslim dynasties of the Turkic khans, and some highland areas, including Karabagh, were still run by Armenian meliks, albeit under Persian protection.

Impetuous development in the beginning of the 18th century caused the decline of the Safavids, and after 1747, they broke up into several khanates, namely, the Karabagh, Nakhjivan, Shemakha, Yerevan and some others. Their rulers belonged to the Muslim Turkic dynasties, but the main body of population was heterogeneous in both language and religion. Besides the Turks, there were Armenians, Georgians, Lezghins, Avars and some other groups. Their communities enjoyed local autonomy, and in particular, the Christian communities successfully maintained their identity, church, language and literature (Altstadt 1992: 8). There were five Armenian polities in Karabagh, which were generously supported by Nadir Shah. True, after he was assassinated their position sharply deteriorated, and they fell into dependence upon the newly established Karabagh khanate (Ioannisian 1947: 15-17).

Until the 19th century, Persian held high status in Azerbaijan: it was the language of belles-lettres, and the most renowned local poets, like Nizami (1141-1209), wrote their poems in Persian. Even Abbas Kuli Bakikhanov, who is regarded as the first Azeri historian, composed his work in Persian. At the same time, under the Safavids poetry was cultivated in Turkic as well (Altstadt 1992: 12). In the beginning of the 19th century, the region became an apple of discord between Russia and Iran. As a result of military campaigns, it was annexed by Russia, and the Russian-Iranian border was established at the Arax River, by the Turkmanchai treaty of 1828. Over the course of the 19th century, the Russian authorities changed internal administrative borders in Transcaucasia several times. Initially, provinces coincided with the former khanates. Then, in 1841 all Transcaucasia was divided between the Georgian-Imeretian (with its center in Tbilisi) and the Caspian (with its center in Shemakha) provinces. Yelisavetpol' (the former Ganja) and Nakhjivan

were included in the former. In 1846, a new administrative division was introduced that was based on the four provinces – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Shemakha and Derbent – which were added with Yerevan in 1849 (at this time it included Nakhjivan). After Shemakha was destroyed by an earthquake in 1859, the center of Shemakha province was moved to Baku and its name was changed. While introducing all these administrative changes, the authorities respected neither ethnic composition nor historically established borders (Altstadt 1992: 18).

At the same time, impetuous processes during the 19th century caused tremendous ethno-demographic changes. Several regions of Azerbaijan (Karabagh, Yelisavetpol', Shemakha) witnessed a full flow of Armenian immigrants in the late 1820s. According to the national census of 1897, Turkic-speakers accounted for more than the half population of Baku (60 percent) and Yelisavetpol' (62 percent) provinces. However, in the former case, the second most numerous were Russians and the third were Armenians. The reverse situation was observed in the Yelisavetpol' province where the number of Armenians was only half that of the Turkic-speakers. Although the Turkic-speakers dominated in numbers in Baku, the number of Russians and Armenians taken together was higher there. In the Shusha and Zangezur areas, Armenians successfully competed with Turkic-speakers in numbers: their number was slightly higher in the Shusha, and slightly lower in Zangezur. At the same time, Turkic-speakers accounted for a substantial population segment in Yerevan province (37 percent against 53 percent Armenians) (Altstadt 1992: 28-30).

Various ethnic groups occupied different professional niches. Russians had decisive dominance in provincial and municipal administration and in the military; many of them were also employed by banks and legal offices. On their side, Armenians were prosperous merchants and oil industrialists. Landlords and businessmen made up the bulk of the rich Turkic-speakers. However, peasants made up the great majority of the Turkic-speaking population, and they were small tradesmen in urban areas. Local administration was also vested in the Turkic-speakers (Altstadt 1992: 31).

Political discrimination and economic competition were the basis for tense relationships between the Turkic-speakers and the Armenians. This resulted in bloody clashes that involved five administrative units of Yerevan and Yelisavetpol' provinces during 1905. At that time, 128 Armenian and 158 Turkic villages were completely destroyed. Instructively, at that time a debate had already broken out in the mass media that focused on who ran the local territories in the early days, Armenians or Turkic-speakers, and who had the right to establish their own state there (Altstadt 1992: 40-42). We shall see further on how this discourse affected the versions of ethnogenesis developed by both Armenian and Azeri scholars during the Soviet era.

The cultural renaissance observed in Azerbaijan in the late 19th – very early 20th centuries was a strong evidence of the emergence of the Azeri nation (Akhmedov 1983). By the mid-19th century, Mirza Kazimbek had invented a



literary Turkic language that was introduced as the language of instruction at school. The dramatist, Mirza Feth Ali Akhundov, began to compose plays in this language. In the very late 1870s, the first Turkic newspaper began to be published; it was the beginning of the Turkic mass media. The paper was run by the Sunni Muslims who, following the ideas of the Crimean Tatar intellectual, Ismail Gasparali, (Gasprinsky), oriented themselves toward the Ottoman Empire and advocated pan-Turkism. At the beginning of the 20th century, literate people began to call themselves Turks. They were still unsure whether they needed their own literary language and the development of their own nation, or if cultural-linguistic issues might be resolved at the basis of pan-Turkism. Many of them were adherents of the secularization and westernization that was the direct result of the rapid modernization of Azerbaijan (Swietochowski 1991: 57-61; Altstadt 1992: 51-54).

The introduction of a wide network of public schools was appreciated by the local elite, but it was dissatisfied with having Turkic used for instruction only in primary schools. Indeed, professional education at the higher levels was dominated by Russian. This resulted in shrinkage of mother tongue usage and threatened with Russification in the future. Even Azeri socialists shared this apprehension and suggested that two languages of instruction had to be used simultaneously at school (Altstadt 1992: 55-56).

The Russian authorities established strict control over the mullahs, in the hope that as a result they would strengthen their power over the Muslim population in general. By doing that, they overestimated Islam, which failed to provide mullahs with as much influence over the flock as was the case with Christianity (Altstadt 1992: 57-61). Moreover, the young Azeri nationalism, although it respected traditional faith, linked its own future with the resolution of mainly political and social problems rather than with Islam (Akhmedov 1983: 194 ff.; Altstadt 1992: 61, 64). In the view of A. Altstadt, there was no all-embracing fanatic pan-Turkism. True, some authors wrote of the unity of all Turks, but they bore in mind the unity of the Turks of northern and southern Azerbaijan most of all. Furthermore, they talked of intellectual and cultural rather than political unity. Many Azeris did not want to be incorporated into the uniform Turanian state that the Ottoman minister of war, Enver-pasha, was dreaming of (Altstadt 1992: 70, 76, 90. But see Swietochowski 1991: 59).

The formation of the Azeri nation followed two lines that were connected with external political orientations. The conservative branch that emphasized the religious life looked to Iran, and the liberals were more disposed to friendship with the Ottoman Empire. Yet, very soon it became clear that those were vain hopes, and the Azeri elite attempted to make an alliance with the Kazan' Tatar jadids. In general, the liberal Azeri elite cultivated anti-clerical attitudes (Akhmedov 1983: 194 ff.; Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1984: 33). Azeri democrats believed that national self-awareness was based most of all on a common language and the idea of Motherland, and had nothing to do with Muslim consciousness (Akhmedov 1983: 198-200).

The center of the Azeri national movement was located in Yelisavetpol', whereas Baku was a cosmopolitan city. In 1917, this resulted in Russians and Armenians seizing power in Baku, having pushed aside the "Musavat" Azeri nationalist party; at the same time, a new local administration was made up of Azeri federalists and members of the "Tashnaktsutiun" Armenian nationalist party in Yelisavetpol' (Altstadt 1992: 79-80). At that time, the Azeri elite still supported the federalist project: at the first Congress of Caucasian Muslims held in Baku on April 15-20, 1917, representatives of various Azeri political parties voted for the organization of new Russia on "territorial-federal principles". This was also the Azeri position at the All-Russian Congress of Muslims in May 1917 (Altstadt 1992: 81).

In the meantime, the October revolution of 1917, the beginning of civil war in Russia and the demand for their own independent relationships with the Ottoman Empire in 1918 made the Azeris revise these plans. An independent Transcaucasian Federation emerged in April 1918, and by the end of May, it had already broken into three new independent states - Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Altstadt 1992: 87). The establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan opened a new era for the Azeri people. The declaration of its sovereignty contained the term the "Azeri people", although this meant the entire population of Azerbaijan (Altstadt 1992: 89), whereas for the Turkic-speaking segment the term the "Azeri Turks" was used.

The contested territories made up one of the most serious problems for the new state. Azerbaijan claimed the lands of Nakhjivan, Zangezur (former Siunik) and Karabagh that were regarded by the Armenians as their own. Interestingly, a Russian-born official brought forward these claims on behalf of Azerbaijan (Shchepotiev 1990; Altstadt 1992: 92, 94). This was clear evidence of the lack of appropriate well-trained politicians among the Azeris themselves. The Azeris were aware of this problem, and Baku University was established in 1919 in order to train the local elite.

However, independence did not last very long. On April 27, 1920, Baku was occupied by Bolshevik troops, and the Soviet of the People's Commissars, with Nariman Narimanov as its head, was established there. True, the introduction of Soviet power was by no means an easy project. The Bolsheviks who sought support mainly among Russians and Armenians enjoyed great influence only in Baku, which was regarded by the Azeris as a pro-Russian city. They spent two months seizing Yelisavetpol', the stronghold of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, and putting down resistance in other areas. Only in mid-1920 was Soviet power finally established in Azerbaijan.

In 1922-1936, Azerbaijan was part of the Transcaucasian Federation, established in order to arrest the development of nationalism in separate republics. This was especially important for Azerbaijan where, as in the pre-revolutionary days, political power was still in the hands of Russians and Armenians, and the Azeris were unsatisfied with that (Altstadt 1992: 122-124).

In order to struggle against pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, the Bolsheviks reformed the alphabet: in 1924, the Arabic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet, and in 1937, it was changed to Cyrillic. On the one hand, this divorced the Azeris from their cultural heritage, which was being treated by the Soviet bureaucracy as a *threatening source of religious, bourgeois and nationalist ideas*; on the other hand, it made for the successful integration of the Azeris into the Russian culture and facilitated their Russification (Simon 1991: 45; Altstadt 1992: 124-125). This was much easier to accomplish since the Azeris were separated quite a bit from their compatriots, across national borders (Simon 1991: 154).

Simultaneously, ethnic minorities suffered persecutions in Azerbaijan. After Soviet power was established, the Iranian-speaking Talyshes, who lived in southeast Azerbaijan were dreaming of the restoration of the Talysh Mugan' Republic, declared in the summer of 1919 and brutally ruined by Ottoman troops. In 1936-1938, Talysh nationalists were exiled to Siberia, and Talysh schools were closed. Broadcasting in Talysh was abolished, and the Talyshes were deprived of their mass media in general. Since that time, the Talyshes have been pressed to identify themselves with the Azeris (Abduragimov 1995: 605).

Having seized Azerbaijan, the Bolsheviks inherited a territorial dispute that was rooted in what happened in the early 19th century. The Karabagh khanate was annexed by Russia after the first Russian-Iranian war of 1813 and was included into Yelisavetpol' province. The Yerevan and the Nakhjivan khanates were the reward for the second war of 1828. They were immediately transformed into an Armenian province, where Muslims accounted up to 80 percent of the population. In those days, Russia did its best to rouse the Armenian migrants of Iran and Ottoman Empire to resettle to southern Transcaucasia. As a result, the number of Armenians there was growing very fast and by 1850, Yerevan province was established, which included Nakhjivan (Altstadt 1992: 100).

After independent Armenia was established in 1918, it claimed the western half of the former Yelisavetpol' province (including Karabagh), the Kars region and part of Tiflis province. On its side, Azerbaijan considered Karabagh, Zangezur and Nakhjivan its own lands. Despite some attempts to resolve this issue through peaceful negotiations, in 1918-1920 all of these territories were involved in bloody clashes between the Armenian and Azeri troops (Altstadt 1992: 102-105). A development in Karabagh was especially complex. Initially, in September 1918 the All-Karabagh Conference accepted Azerbaijan rule. However, brutal actions of the newly appointed Governor-General, Kh. Beg Sultanov (van der Leeuw 2000: 152), forced local residents to revise their decision, and in February 1919 a new All-Karabagh Conference proclaimed unification with Armenia. Yet, in August 1919 Karabagh accepted a status of semi-autonomy within Azerbaijan (Sarkisyanz 1975: 224).

The new independent states failed to resolve the matter in general, and the Bolsheviks had to get into the dispute. Initially, Nakhjivan was declared a Soviet Socialist Republic, since it had a special relationship with Azerbaijan. Then, in

order to express sympathy with Soviet Armenia, the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee (Revkom) wanted to recognize its sovereignty over Zangezur and Nakhjivan. However, a referendum held in Nakhjivan in 1921 demonstrated that 90 percent of the local population were willing to join Azerbaijan. This was supported by the Turkish nationalists, led by Mustafa Kemal. As a result, a *special paragraph* in the Soviet-Turkish treaty of 1921 spoke of Azerbaijan sovereignty over Nakhjivan. The leaders of the then Caucasian government (Kavbureau) agreed with that. The issue of Karabagh was much more difficult. It was discussed by Kavbureau on July 4, 1921, with the participation of representatives from all the Transcaucasian republics. The majority voted for the transmission of Karabagh to Armenia, despite all the protests of Narimanov. Yet, the next day the decision was revised in favor of Azerbaijan (Altstadt 1992: 116-118).

In the end of 1922, in order to make a final decision on the Karabagh issue, which kept provoking bloody clashes, a special Commission was established in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CC CPA). The result of its activity was the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region (NKAR) in November 1924. Armenian was granted special status there, and measures were taken to provide local Armenians with everything they needed to develop their school system and promote their cultural development. Initially, the NKAR had a joint border with Armenia, but that connection was lost by the 1930s, after new administrative reforms (Altstadt 1992: 126-127).

The new Soviet Constitution of 1936 put an end to the Transcaucasian Federation. Now, all three Transcaucasian republics were admitted to the USSR quite independently and each could deal with the center without any mediator. At the same time, whatever was read in official documents, real politics were developing along a different line, colored by purges and persecutions. They commenced in Azerbaijan under S. Kirov in the early 1920s (Ashnin, Alpatov 2000) and were continued by Mir Djafar Baghirov (1896-1956) in the late 1930s through very early 1950s (van der Leeuw 2000: 125-128). His career began in the secret police, after which he was appointed the leader of the Azerbaijan Communist Party and the Chairman of the Soviet People's Commissariat (Sovnarkom) (in 1933-1953). The era of great terror began in Azerbaijan in 1933 and lasted until the war. All the former Communist and Soviet elite was charged with Trotskism and bourgeois nationalism and was physically eliminated. Although Narimanov died in Moscow in 1925 and his remains were buried in the Kremlin wall, he also was denounced as a "bourgeois nationalist" in 1937-1938. A heavy blow was dealt to Azeri intellectuals as well (Ashnin, Alpatov 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2001; Altstadt 1992: 132-150; van der Leeuw 2000: 127-128).

Religious matters did not disappear. Muslim rituals and festivals began to be attacked in 1924. In the 1920s, these campaigns were restricted to anti-religious propaganda and criticism. In 1935-1938, the authorities closed many Sunni and Shia mosques (Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1984: 38-39).

Yet, however strong was the blow dealt to Azeri political and cultural activists

in the 1930s, at that time the ruling elite was drastically changed in Azerbaijan: under Baghirov, Azeri officials replaced their Russian, Armenian and Jewish counterparts (Furman 1994: 152). During World War II, one could observe the revival of the national culture. Indeed, fiction and historical literature were mobilized to stir patriotic feelings, and the attitude towards Islam became less hostile. Some mosques were reopened, and Haji Mullah Aghalizade was appointed the head of the Shi'a Muslims. He was the leading sheikh at the time of independence (Altstadt 1992: 154-155). During the 1954-1964 decade, a new campaign took place, and all the mosques were closed once again (Lemerrier-Quellejey 1984: 39). In the view of some western scholars, this hardly affected religious orientations due to the Shi'a tradition of the *taqiya*: the legal right to apostasy in case of extreme need, which is balanced by an inner profession of faith (Lemerrier-Quellejey 1984: 48). However, divorce from canonical Islam for decades and the clear trend to secularization demonstrated by the Azeri intellectuals had their own cost. By the end of the 20th century, the Muslim tradition in Azerbaijan was highly weakened. Azeri culture and identity also suffered heavy losses due to pan-Turkic persecutions. In particular, in 1951 a campaign against the Azeri epic, *Dede Korkut*, was launched, attacking it for both "pan-Islamism" and "pan-Turkism" (Altstadt 1992: 171).

Many of these campaigns were closely connected with the name of Baghirov. That is why the Azeris felt relieved after he was dismissed from all his positions in July 1953, charged with having close connections with Beryia and with anti-Soviet activity, and executed by a firing squad in April 1956 (Altstadt 1992: 161-162).

In 1954-1959, the First secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, I. D. Mustafaev, promoted the development of Azeri culture and education. In 1958, education reform was proposed by Moscow, including the free choice of the language of instruction in schools. Despite their discontent, the local republican governments were pressed to include this point in their school reform programs. Azerbaijan was one of only a few republics that refused to obey (Simon 1991: 246-248). As a result, Mustafaev was accused of nationalism and removed from office (Altstadt 1992: 166). Yet, Azerbaijanization was growing in the republic. By the mid-1960s, the Azeris accounted for 61 percent of all Party members. Their share increased proportionally in the administration, albeit all the key positions were still occupied by Russians and Armenians (Altstadt 1992: 168).

In the 1950s, the Azeri population began growing very fast. By the end of the 1970s, the urban population (53 percent) overweighed the rural one for the first time in history. Baku, in particular, witnessed tremendous changes: more than 1.5 million people lived there, i.e. a quarter of the overall population of the republic. In the 1960s-1980s, the population of Azerbaijan in general increased in numbers from 3.7 million to 6.8 million persons. In contrast to Armenians, the great bulk of the Azeris tended to stay within the republic, and there was not any substantial Azeri Diaspora in the USSR. One of the reasons was probably that Shi'a Islam made the Azeris feel uncomfortable even in other Soviet Muslim republics. Instead, the share

of the Azeris in the overall republican population increased rapidly: in the 1970s it had grown from 67 percent to 78 percent. This was the result of not only natural population growth but also of the steady emigration of Russians and Armenians, which turned into a mass movement in the 1970s-1980s. The relative importance of all these communities changed, and rapid Azerbaijanization took place (Lemerrier-Quellejey 1984: 40-41; Altstadt 1992: 165, 184; Swietochowski 1995: 181-182).

At the same time, the industrial growth of Azerbaijan was arrested, and in the 1950s-1970s, it seemed backward in comparison with other Soviet republics. The contrast with Georgia and Armenia was especially instructive, where the average income was growing almost twice as fast as in neighboring Azerbaijan. As a result, the living standard was much lower in Azerbaijan than elsewhere in Transcaucasia. At the same time, due to the oil industry, the contribution of Azerbaijan to USSR development was much higher than what it received back from the center. As a result, the fast growth of the population and its indigenization did not correspond to the infrastructure, which looked less advanced in comparison with other regions of the country (Swietochowski 1995: 179-181)<sup>16</sup>.

In 1969-1982, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was headed by Heydar Aliiev, the former chief of the KGB, who dated his career at this organization to 1941 (Karaulov 1990: 248)<sup>17</sup>. He made radical changes in the composition of the bureaucracy and ever since, all the administrative and Party elite (except the second secretary of the Communist Party, whose position was always to be held by a Russian) were of Azeri origin (Swietochowski 1995: 183). As a rule, they were relatives, as Aliiev's staff policy appreciated local kin connections. This policy evidently reflected the Azeri attitude towards identity being focused on place of birth and kinship relations. Clanship prevailed over national unity, and this explains, on the face of it, the odd fact that none of the changes has affected language policy (Furman 1994: 150, 153). Intensive education in Russian continued, and more and more Azeris began to consider Russian their second native language. All of this engendered the grievance of the intellectual elite – the poets and writers recalled the national roots, native landscapes, sources of their native Turkic tongue and pre-Muslim past (Altstadt 1992: 186-191).

The latter became especially important, since with the growth of literacy and historical knowledge the past became the basic source of Azeri identity. Historians began to look back to remote periods such as Caucasian Albania and the Middle Ages, attempting to identify their own ancestors and their great deeds in those places and times. Albanian and Persian rulers and poets began to be identified with the Azeris. In the late 1950s – early 1960s, the three-volume "History of Azerbaijan" was published, in which the ancient population of Media-Atropatene was represented as the foundation for the formation of the Azeri people, and Turkification was dated to the 4th – 6th centuries A.D. Historians began to study extensively the history of the medieval states in the Azerbaijan territory. All these states were interpreted as being "Azeri" (Altstadt 1992: 173-174)<sup>18</sup>.

Freedom of speech came to Azerbaijan only after Heydar Aliiev was dismissed



in 1987 from the position of first deputy chairman of the USSR Soviet of Ministers. At that very time, the Armenians began to discuss publicly the previously taboo Karabagh theme. The first petition on that issue, signed by hundreds of thousands of Armenians, was sent to Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1987 (Chorbajian, Donabedian, Mutaian 1994: 148). In November 1987, after a speech by the Academician A. G. Aganbegian in Paris, the Karabagh issue assumed a high profile in the world media. This was echoed in the regional media as well. Aganbegian stated that Karabagh was the "historical territory of Armenia". His opponents, though – the national poet of Azerbaijan and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR, B. M. Vakhbazarov, and the chairman of the Department of the Azerbaijan history of Azerbaijan State University, S. S. Aliyarov – claimed in their "Open Letter" that Karabagh was an integral part of Caucasian Albania. They said its population was the foundation for the formation of the Azeri people. They cited the Karabagh khanate run by the Turks, and emphasized that the mass settlement of the region by Armenians occurred at the initiative of Russian authorities after 1828. The letter stated that the territorial issue had already been resolved in the early 1920s, and it made no sense to come back to it once again. The letter was first published in "Azerbaijan" magazine in February 1988, and, later on, was extensively referred to by Azeri intellectuals, who used it for anti-Armenian propaganda (Vakhbazarov, Aliyarov 1988. For that see Altstadt 1992: 195-196).

In February 1988, a mass Armenian movement was born in Armenia and NKAR<sup>19</sup>. The situation has greatly exacerbated after the Armenian pogrom in Sumgait of February 27-29, 1988, in which Azeri refugees of Armenia took an active part. Then a mass exodus of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azeris from Armenia commenced. In the summer, the Supreme Soviets of both republics exchanged angry statements: Armenians demanded that the NKAR should join Armenia, and the Azeris protested against the violation of the borders of a sovereign republic and suggested the improvement of socio-economic conditions within the NKAR. On July 12, the Regional Soviet of the NKAR declared the breakaway of the Azerbaijan SSR. After that, Moscow had to establish a special commission, headed by A. N. Volsky, but these actions were immediately called pro-Armenian by the Azeris (Altstadt 1992: 196-199).

On November 12, 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR decided that Azerbaijan should retain sovereignty over Nagorno Karabagh. From late November, mass meetings were organized in various areas of Azerbaijan and especially in Baku. Some of the orators demanded the protection of the natural environment from pollution, some of them called for the establishment of a People's Front. The meeting in the central square of Baku lasted until December 4, when people were forced by the police to leave the place. A state of emergency was maintained in various regions of Azerbaijan for several months. In the meantime, more than 140 thousand refugees had poured into Azerbaijan by the end of 1988, which presented a grave problem to the authorities (Altstadt 1992: 200-203). On January 12, 1989, a

new decision was made in the center to introduce direct rule by Moscow over the NKAR.

In the spring of 1989, the Azerbaijan People's Front (APF) was created, and Azerbaijan authorities officially recognized it in October. It was headed by Baku intellectuals who put their greatest emphasis on social and cultural issues. The historian, A. G. Aliyev (Elchibey, 1948-2000), who was continuously prosecuted by the Soviet authorities for nationalism, was elected its first president<sup>20</sup>. The People's Front advocated the extension of Azerbaijan sovereignty within the USSR, the establishment of true democracy – including protection of human rights, protection of the natural environment, and guarantees for the unrestricted development of the cultures and languages of all ethnic groups (Altstadt 1992: 205). In the meantime, armed clashes began between the Armenian and Azeri communities in the NKAR. Gorbachev's decree of November 28, 1989, demanding the restoration of order, did not meet a positive response on any side.

At the same time, historic literature became very important, both publicly and politically. Numerous pamphlets on Karabagh history were published, as well as volumes of historic documents. Pre-revolutionary anti-Armenian pamphlets by such authors as the Russian chauvinist Velichko were reprinted in Baku as well. Azeri authors emphasized that Karabagh was the Motherland of Azeri music and poetry, and that many Azeri writers, poets, singers and musicians had been born there. This was the background for the revival of national culture and values. Interest in the all-Turkic past was growing increasingly intense, and Azeri nationalists recalled pan-Turkism. Significantly, this lively discourse entirely ignored religious issues. True, Islam continued to play an important role in domestic life, but it was not a factor in political discussions (Altstadt 1992: 207-209).

On December 1, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR declared the NKAR an integral part of the "United Republic of Armenia". In response, the Azeri commission of the NKAR was established on December 4 to supersede that of Volsky. Armed clashes continued to occur in Karabagh, and, in the end of December, anti-Communist meetings commenced in Nakhjivan, Djelalabad, and Lenkoran'. On December 31, 1989, an excited crowd led by the leader of the local branch of the APF, Nemat Panakhly, destroyed boundary constructions along the entire 70 km section of the Soviet-Iranian border and opened a direct path to Iranian Azerbaijan. There were calls for the unification of the northern and southern Azerbaijanians (Altstadt 1992: 211-212; Gafarly 1999).

On January 6-7, 1990, the APF conference was held in Baku, whose declarations encroached upon the prerogatives of the CPA and the SS AzSSR. Soon after, the local APF branch took power at Lenkoran' by its own hand. On January 13-14, 1990, bloody clashes occurred between Azeris and Armenians in Baku, which cost several dozen lives. On January 20, Soviet regular troops were brought to Baku with instructions to have done with the APF. Several hundred casualties were the result, and many leaders of the APF were arrested (for details, see Altstadt 1992: 213-219).

The January events in Baku marked a turning point in the history of Azerbaijan – trust in the center was undermined forever in Azeri eyes, and the Azeri Communists were in an uneasy position. The authority of the APF had grown. Under these conditions, the CPA AzSSR attempted to change its slogans, and borrowed many points from the APF nationalist program. The election of the first president of Azerbaijan was held with these slogans filling the air, and the First secretary of the CPA AzSSR, Ayaz Mutalibov, won the election. Meanwhile, after January 1990 the APF shifted to a more radical position; it now picked up anti-Communist slogans and made the achievement of independence its main political goal. It also demanded the abolition of the NKAR, for the sake of state integrity (Altstadt 1992: 220-225).

The rapid escalation of the Karabagh conflict caused the downfall of President Mutalibov, and new elections on July 7, 1992, granted victory to the democrat, Elchibey. At the same time, his romantic ideas about pan-Turkism and the unification of both Azerbaijan did not respect the ongoing political process. They irritated both former Communist apparatchiks, who still maintained power and resisted the transition to the market economy, and the extreme rightists who called for decisive actions in Karabagh. Meanwhile, Elchibey's chief competitor, the former Communist leader, Heydar Aliiev, was strengthening his position in his native Nakhjivan. In the end of 1992, he established the New Azerbaijani Party (Yeni Azerbaijan) whose program emphasized a transition to a market economy and the protection of the rights of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan. By mid-summer 1993, economic collapse and military defeat in Karabagh put an end to this confrontation. On June 15, the Azerbaijani parliament elected Heydar Aliiev as its leader, and on June 18 Elchibey voluntarily left office and took refuge in Nakhjivan (Goldenberg 1994: 119-126).

In the meantime, the Azerbaijani political ship sprang a second leak after Karabagh; the Talyshes, who lived in the southwest Caspian Sea area around Lenkoran' and Astary, revolted. During the Soviet era the Talyshes were forcefully impacted by intensive Turkification, which caused them to develop separatist sentiments. Perestroika gave birth to illusions about the possibility of positive changes. The Talyshes began to issue their own newspapers, the cultural association "Avesta" emerged, and the Talysh National Party was established, aimed at the restoration of Talysh autonomy. The leaders of the Lenkoran' branch of the ANF, Colonel Ali Akram Hummatov and the poet Ali Nasir, included a demand for a Talysh Autonomous Republic into the ANF program. After Elchibey, who emphasized a pan-Turkic attitude, came to power, Hummatov broke off relations with the ANF and headed the Talysh movement. When the military-political environment deteriorated in May-June 1993, Hummatov and his followers took decisive action and on June 21 they declared the establishment of the Talysh Mugan Republic. On August 7, the People's Mejlis held in Lenkoran' approved this. However, by August 24 the Talysh movement was suppressed, their leaders were arrested, and the Party for the Equality of the Azerbaijani peoples (the former

Talysh National Party) was dissolved (Abduragimov 1995: 604-605; Goldenberg 1994: 128; van der Leeuw 2000: 180). Nonetheless, some Azeri experts warn that the "Talysh factor" might work in the future, under unstable political conditions (Mamedov 2000: 36).

## CHAPTER 8

### THE SEARCH FOR HISTORICAL CONCEPTS, AND MAJOR POLITICS

Having come into being, a new state has to appeal to history in order to legitimize its right to exist, somehow showing it has deep roots and a continuous historical tradition. Azerbaijan did not fail to follow this common path. Since its birth, the historians in the new state persistently demonstrated their restless interest in the early and medieval history of Azerbaijan, searching for the roots of both the nation and its statehood (Altstadt 1992: 173-174).

At first, the history of Azerbaijan was referred to mainly to achieve pragmatic goals dealing with the establishment of state borders. That issue already had a high profile in the spring of 1918, just after the Transcaucasian Federation was dissolved. In order to claim contested territories, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan referred to historical evidence. At that time, its officer, A. Shchepotiev, put forward the following arguments. He identified the "Azerbaijani Turks" with the Turkic-speaking population in general and traced their genealogy to the Seljuqs. Thus, he had no doubt that their ancestors were newcomers in the eastern Transcaucasia in the 11th century and that they forced out the former inhabitants, who spoke some North Caucasian language (he called them the Lezghins, keeping in mind the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania). While emphasizing Islam, and Turkic less, Shchepotiev depicted a pattern of continuous settlement by a "culturally-economically-domestically homogeneous Muslim population" from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea (he included the Iranian-speaking Kurds and Tats, and Georgian-speaking Ajars and Ingiloi in this) who were separated by Armenian enclaves into eastern and western parts. He complained that, in order to weaken the Turkic-Muslim influence in the Caucasus, the Russian authorities, on the one hand, included some Muslim areas into Christian provinces and other administrative units, and on the other hand, resettled Christians (most of all Armenians) where Muslim Turks had formerly lived. Instead, he seemed to appreciate the former Persian influence as if the latter almost made all the Transcaucasian and Daghestani territories a homogeneous "cultural unity".

On this basis he came to the following conclusion: "The territory inhabited by the Azeri people together with closely linked small pockets of Kurdish, Persian, Ajar, Ingiloi and highland, in particular, Lezghin elements characterized by the same domestic, intellectual, religious, and cultural levels of lifestyle, is restricted

geographically mainly in the following way: to the east by the Caspian Sea, to the North by the eastern hilly flanks of the Daghestani Mountains in the Derbent direction, in the Middle Caucasus by the middle of the Caucasus ridge, spurs of the Shirak (Kara-Dara) mountains and Kura River canyons between Tiflis and the Karayaz steppe, in the northwest by the Trialeti range, Atskhur range and the Black Sea". He treated all the aforementioned boundaries as "natural borders" that must include a uniform state, based on an ethnographic and historical entity. He excluded only the Armenian population of the Yerevan region, putting it outside the outlined "natural borders" (Shchepotiev 1990: 43-45)<sup>21</sup>. Having claimed territories in neighboring Armenia and Georgia, Shchepotiev quite purposefully identified the Turks with the Muslims and made no distinctions between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims.

This trick made it possible to claim the Ajaria, Akhaltsikhe (Meskheta) and Akhalkalaki (Djavakheti) regions of Georgia, populated by Muslims. Indeed, in 1918 local inhabitants demonstrated anti-Georgian attitudes and even made an attempt to establish a Muslim republic of the southwestern Caucasus in mid-1918, which would embrace the Kars region, the Artvin unit of the Batumi region and the Akhaltsikhe unit of Tiflis province. This arbitrary state was soon demolished by British and Georgian troops (Shchepotiev 1990: 58-59). This, at first sight insignificant historical event left a deep scar in Georgian memory, and later played a big role in the life of the Meskhetaian Turks. It is instructive that Shchepotiev used the definition "Azerbaijani Turks" for the Turkic-speaking population of Azerbaijan. Besides, he referred to their transhumance as a factor in the demand for highland seasonal pastures to be included in the territory of the sovereign state – a factor that would come to play a crucial role in the Karabagh conflict. In his report, Karabagh was listed among other "indigenous Turkic territories", and its Alpine meadows were declared an integral part of the Turkic subsistence economy. Shchepotiev recognized that Armenian settlements had flourished there before the Turks have arrived, but he maintained that after the transhumance system had been introduced almost all the Armenians had left. In his view, the return of the Armenians was the result of the generous politics of the local khans in the 18th century and, even more, of the Russian incentive which resulted in the installation of a Christian population here in the early 19th century. While pretending to base his position on reliable demographic data, Shchepotiev in fact manipulated them: he opposed the Armenians not just to the Turks but to the Muslims in general, which increased the number of the latter with the addition of the Kurds. At the same time, he reduced the share of the Karabagh Armenians, while arguing that seasonal Armenian workers from southern Russia were illegally included into their number by the census. Moreover, when he talked about the first Turkic migration into Karabagh he claimed that the Turks had forced out the "Lezghins" (i.e. Albanians. V. Sh.), rather than the Armenians (Shchepotiev 1990: 47, 54-56). This argument dealing with the ethnic identity of the pre-Turkic population of Caucasian Albania would be fated to serve as a key issue of Armenian-Azeri historical discourse

during the Soviet era (Saroyan 1996: 406-407).

One of Shchepotiev's main arguments read that "reference to historical rights from earlier centuries, when ethnic composition was strikingly different, is incorrect". He cited what had occurred in the eastern part of Kakheti, where radical ethnic changes had been observed since the 15th century. First, the Lezghins invaded the area, and then the Iranians devastated it. As a result, the majority of the Georgians were pushed to the west; those who stayed were converted to Islam, becoming the foundation population of contemporary Ingiloi. Then the Lezghins and Turks became the dominant majority. Thus, while emphasizing that the region was populated mainly by Muslims, Shchepotiev rejected any Georgian claims to its territories. His arguments against Armenian territorial claims were the same (Shchepotiev 1990: 48-49, 59-60). That is why in this particular case he chose to ignore references to early history. At the same time, early history was precisely what both Georgians and Armenians treated as decisive in their arguments. Moreover, while calling Armenians recent newcomers in some areas of eastern Transcaucasia, Shchepotiev himself had to refer to a much earlier past, when the Turks were the dominant population there (Shchepotiev 1990: 54-55).

Thus, history was used in an instrumental way by politicians in the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. Yet, despite the establishment of Baku University, a local modern historical school was not created during that brief period of time. This mission was passed on to the Soviet epoch, and it had to start almost from the very beginning. Indeed, modern local historians were lacking in Azerbaijan before 1917 (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 4). Some archaeological investigations were carried out in pre-revolutionary Azerbaijan, but they were irregular. Only graves were studied; general knowledge of early cultures and their chronology was non-existent and the Azeris themselves did not take part in these studies (Passek, Latynin 1926).

Changes came about in the early 1920s. Initially, the Oriental Faculty of Azerbaijan State University was the main center for the study of the history of Azerbaijan, conducted mainly through investigation of early chronicles. At the time of the Democratic Republic, Museum of the Native Land (Istiglal) was established, which was later renamed the Museum of History of the Peoples of Azerbaijan. It was based initially on archaeological materials collected in the 1870s by the Society of Admirers of Caucasian Archaeology, and brought to Baku from Tbilisi just after the revolution. It is worth noting that in the last Soviet decades they preferred to begin the Museum's genealogy from the "Muzekskurs" – museum-excursion department, established at Narkompros (the Ministry of Education) of the Azerbaijan SSR in June 1920 (Azizbekova 1973). In 1923, an Archaeological Committee was established also in Baku at Narkompros; in 1927 it was reorganized into the Azerbaijani Committee for the Protection of Art and Historical Monuments (Azkomtaris, and later on – AzTsUOP) (Klimov et al. 1940: 67; Djafarzade 1945: 126). In 1921-1922, there was an attempt to establish a separate Institute of Oriental Studies that included the Archaeological Society, but this project failed for lack of



appropriate specialists.

In fact, the Society for the Exploration and Study of Azerbaijan (SESA) proved to be the main center for the study of history, archaeology and ethnography in Azerbaijan. It was established in Baku at Narkompros in May 1923 through the initiative of a local Party functionary, a member of the Control Commission of the CC CPA, A. R. Zifel'dt-Simumiagi (Khalilov 1985)<sup>22</sup>. The SESA included, in particular, an ethnographic section that was to carry out philological, ethnographic and archaeological studies. In September 1924, the SESA organized the First All-Azerbaijani Congress of Local Studies, which was a great success. Yet, after that, SESA activity decreased, especially after May 1925, when it was placed under the authority of the Azerbaijan government, which demanded it study mainly contemporary issues (Zifel'dt 1925: 107-110). A successful new period commenced in the late 1920s, when Academician I. I. Meshchaninov began to collaborate with the SESA. The SESA has played a significant role in the development of the historical profession in Azerbaijan. In October 1929, it was granted the status of the Azerbaijani State Research Institute, and in 1932 the Azerbaijani unit of the Transcaucasian branch of the AN SSSR was established on its foundation, and this included the Department of History, Ethnography and Archaeology. In 1935, this Department was reorganized into the Institute of History, Ethnography, Archaeology and Literature in the Azerbaijan branch of the AN SSSR. Finally, a separate Institute of History of the Azerbaijan branch of the AN SSSR was established, after a new reorganization in 1939 (Klimov et al. 1940: 67; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1965: 3; Buniatov 1982: 53-54; Sumbatzade 1987: 78).

At various times, well-known Soviet scholars (N. A. Samoilovich, V. V. Bartold, I. I. Meshchaninov) collaborated with the SESA, but Azeris were in the minority there. This obviously affected the nature of academic projects. In respect to history, the SESA focused on the most ancient and early medieval periods; Muslim history was far from popular. For example, the Academician Meshchaninov was most interested in the Urartian period, and recommended that the Azeris study cuneiform in order to search for traces of Urartian raids in the lands between the Kura and Arax Rivers, and carry out archaeological investigations. Basing his conclusions on very scant cuneiform records, he assumed that a high culture developed in the southern parts of Azerbaijan during the Urartian era: urban life flourished, palaces and temples were erected. All of this, he believed, was accomplished by local inhabitants speaking East-Caucasian languages close to that of the Udiins (Meshchaninov 1925). In May-June 1926, he headed small-scale archaeological investigations in Nagorny Karabagh and Nakhjivan. Although he did not find any cuneiform documents there, he was very enthusiastic and promoted the emergence of archaeology in Azerbaijan (Meshchaninov 1926; Sumbatzade 1987: 83-84). In particular, the first Azeri archaeologist and ethnographer, A. Alekperov, and a future well-known archaeologist, then a student, I. Djafarzade, began their scholarly careers in his archaeological team in 1926 (Meshchaninov 1927a: 105).

In the Soviet era, the first volume of the general history of Azerbaijan was

completed by Rashidbek Izmailov. It came out in Azeri in Baku in 1923 and covered all the epochs beginning with the earliest and continuing up to the beginning of the 20th century. The book was a mere compilation, but this was not the main reason why it proved to be unacceptable to the Soviet authorities in Azerbaijan. Its worst feature was that the author ignored the Marxist idea of the class struggle, was sympathetic with the pan-Turkic attitude and justified the policies of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 9).

The reliance of the Soviet bureaucracy on local Azeri historians was undermined. In the 1920s, Russian scholars played a major role in the development of history, archaeology and ethnography in Azerbaijan, and they were the tutors of the future local professionals. In order to train students, the School of Azerbaijan Studies was established at the SESA.

In general, during the 1920s a very simplified version of the history of Azerbaijan was widespread in Soviet popular literature. A brief review of this history, which was presented in the popular series "Our Union", read that the country was a *tasty morsel of territory that was persistently contested by the mighty neighboring states*. The natives were represented as primitive, weak and helpless people who suffered subjugation by aliens more frequently than not. Their fate was miserable: sometimes they were slaughtered by Turkic nomads, sometimes they were Turkified, and only a few managed to find refuge somewhere in the hills (Bialetskii et al. 1929b: 8-13).

Needless to say, the Azeris were less than satisfied with this drastically cut and highly simplified view of their past. The republican authorities did their best to recruit well-trained specialists to study and to teach local history. In the beginning of the 1920s, well known Russian scholars, including the Academician V. V. Bartold, were giving lecture courses in the history of Azerbaijan in Azerbaijan University and other Baku schools. Professor Ye. A. Pakhomov was one of those whose lectures given at the Baku Institute of Public Education were issued as a separate booklet. In his lectures, Pakhomov emphasized the extremely complicated ethnic composition of the republic, which had developed over many centuries. He demonstrated that the territory of the future republic had witnessed many mass invasions and resettlements, and language and religion replacements, which had caused identity changes. Albanians who adopted Christianity turned into Armenians, and Persians who shifted to Turkic identified themselves with the Turks.

Pakhomov located Albania north of the Kura River and represented it as a weak state, dependent now on Rome, and now on Persia. Albania grew in importance only under the Sussanians, who made it a stronghold against the northern steppe nomads. Yet, Albania was unable to avoid nomadic invasions, and was gradually infiltrated by Turkic tribes that in the long term brought about the dominance of Turkic speech there. However, that was a long slow process and it had not ended even by the 11th century, when the Seljuq Turks ran the country.

Quite the opposite, while being highly affected by the Persian culture, the Seljuqs occupied themselves with the promotion of Persian. Really rapid Turkification took place only during the Mongol period, when the great bulk of the population shifted to Turkic language. Yet, even at that time, due to its complex ethnic, religious and social composition, the country retained its multi-lingual nature. Only in the 16th century under the Safavi Dynasty was Persian finally forced out by Turkic. Nonetheless, the author pointed out, the eastern Caspian Sea region never underwent complete population replacement; regardless of the language and cultural shifts the indigenous inhabitants kept experiencing in their own land (Pakhomov 1923: 9-21).

Even more influential in Baku were two courses on the history of Azerbaijan (one a brief history and the other one more extensive) completed by the Russian historian and archaeologist, V. M. Sysoev (Sysoev 1925a, 1925b). He treated the history of Azerbaijan not as an ethnic history but mainly as the history of various political bodies that differed from each other in language and cultural traditions<sup>23</sup>.

Meanwhile, the very term "Azerbaijan" provided good opportunities to deepen the local past and construct an historical continuity. Sysoev remarked that the earliest inhabitants of Azerbaijan, the Caspians, were included in the Persian Empire under King Cyrus, and even earlier they were mentioned in the Urartians inscriptions by the names Etiuns (Udins?) and Uluani (Albanians?). Sysoev was aware that in respect to their language, the early Albanians differed from the Turks and were related to some Caucasian highlanders; yet, it was not clear to whom in particular. Nonetheless, their state was situated in the territory of Azerbaijan. Referring to the then known archaeological data, Sysoev located the Albanian culture in the southwestern part of Soviet Azerbaijan, between the Kura River and the Armenian border (Sysoev 1925b: 29).

In Sysoev's books, Azerbaijan was a political and geographical rather than an ethnic concept. Like Pakhomov, he demonstrated that language shifts had occurred several times there during its history: initially Arranian (Albanian) language was popular, as it developed side by side with Persian; then, Arabic became the state language; and with the dominance of the Seljuqs in the 11th – 12th centuries Turkic gradually won over. That was no wonder, since the Caspian lowland served as a permanent corridor over which various groups used to move from north to south and vice-versa. In medieval times, Turkic was used by the general public, Arabic dominated in the religious sphere, the monophysite Armenians spoke Armenian, and the highlanders retained their own vernaculars (Sysoev 1925a: 34-35, 1925b: 78. Cf. Pakhomov 1923: 18). At the same time, the complex history of Azerbaijan provided unrestricted resources for manipulation of historical data what will be discussed further on.

Suffice it to say here that one beneficial field for that sort of activity was the history of Caucasian Albania, with its highly heterogeneous population and its fluctuating frontiers. This was clearly demonstrated by the Academician A. Ye. Krymsky, who worked in Kiev. He located Caucasian Albania on both sides of the

Lower Kura River. The Armenians called it "Agvan" ("Alvank"), and the Persians and Arabs – "Arran". Greco-Roman authors associated the Albanian Kingdom with only the left bank of the Kura River, and included its right bank in the Armenian state. Yet, it was unclear to Krymsky when precisely the Albanian dynasty spread its jurisdiction to the right bank of the Kura River – in the end of the 1st century A.D. or only in the Sussanian era, perhaps in the 5th century when the united Armenian Kingdom disintegrated. The former Armenian power over Artsakh, Utik and Paytakaran was recorded by Movses Kagankatvatsi in his "History of the Agvans" (10th century) and by "Armenian geography" at the end of the 7th century. During Sussanian times, the Albanian state not only covered both banks of the Kura River but also had already moved its capital to the right bank. At that time, the name "Alban" became associated mainly with the right bank of the river. For the Arabs at the very end of the 1st Millennium A.D. the term "Arran" had a broad meaning and covered extensive territory between Derbent and Tiflis. True, some of them used the term "both Arrans", bearing in mind that there were left and right bank portions. Later on, the term "Arran" was associated only with the right bank of the river, and the left bank was now called Shirvan (Krymsky 1934: 289-295). Although Krymsky's view did not avoid some minor errors, his general approach was developed to their benefit by contemporary scholars (for example, see Novosel'tsev 1979; 1991).

The history of the Christian Church in Albania was no less complex. It is generally thought that the Albanian King Urnair introduced Christianity there in the 4th century. However, Byzantine Orthodoxy was adopted on the left bank of the Kura River, and Armenian-Gregorian monophysitism was widespread on the right bank to the extent that in the 6th century the Agvanian catholicos attempted to banish the Orthodox beliefs as "heresy". Later on, ca. 700 A.D., the Albanian-Armenian Church council of the right bank of the Kura River condemned the Orthodox Church, which held a strong position on the left bank (Krymsky 1934: 294-295, 299).

Whereas the history of Albania was of no more than academic interest to Krymsky, it had quite a different import in Soviet Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani Marxist ethnography that emerged in the republic at the turn of the 1930s made the first attempt to nationalize the history of the Albanians. Being based on the ideas of the Academician Marr<sup>24</sup>, young Azeri Marxists were advocating the principle of autochthonism. They argued that ethnic groups that were developing in a uniform natural environment and in close contact with each other were fated to integrate into a uniform "historical entity". They maintained that the Kurds, Turks and Armenians of Karabagh were an example of such an entity. Coming out against Armenian and Turkic nationalism, they recommended forgetting the search for ancestors somewhere in the Altai Mountains or on the banks of the Lake Van. No, they argued, both peoples are of local Karabagh origin and share the same culture (Aleperov, Vartapetov 1932: 191-192). At the same time, they did all they could to avoid discussing the issue of the crucial language and cultural differences between

these peoples, let alone the reasons of those differences. Evidently, a new Utopia of harmonious brotherhood of all peoples was building; and one had to sacrifice real cultural differences and ethnic authenticity for the sake of that.

A. K. Alekperov (1885-1937), the first Soviet Azeri archaeologist and ethnographer, was one of these young authors. He was born in Baku, became an orphan at an early age, and was trained at Baku High School and the Kiev Commercial Institute. Finally, in 1926, he graduated from the Oriental Department of the Historical-Philological Faculty of Azerbaijan State University. The prominent Soviet scholars, V. V. Bartold, N. Ya. Marr, and I. I. Meshchaninov were among his teachers. They not only aroused his interest in both the remote past and the traditional culture of Azerbaijan, but they also taught him to respect ethnic minorities. Since 1919, Alekperov had occupied himself with local studies, and five years later he became one of the most active members of the SESA and a permanent participant in the archaeological and ethnographic studies organized by the latter. In 1927-1928, he collaborated with the Museum of the History of the Peoples of Azerbaijan. In 1937, he was appointed the chairman of the Department of the History of Material Culture at the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Alekperov 1960: 5-6; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 15, 27). However, he did not occupy this position very long; he was soon arrested and shot to death.

Following the spirit of the times, Alekperov came out against great-power chauvinism and nationalism. He was by no means fascinated by the pan-Turkic idea. He believed that it was highly erroneous to argue for the arrival of some "Turks with pure blood" as if they had brought about high culture in Transcaucasia. No, he maintained, there was already a highly developed local culture in Azerbaijan before the arrival of the Turks. Agvaniia, one of the earliest states in Transcaucasia, had emerged there, and had been built up by the indigenous inhabitants. The Turks, he said, had infiltrated Azerbaijan over the centuries, merging with the natives. That was how, by the 14th - 15th centuries, an Azeri population had emerged which integrated remnants of Iranian and Arab tribes. That is why their culture was very heterogeneous; an issue that has to be the object of special studies (Alekperov 1960: 75-77). It is easy to see that Alekperov based his views on the autochthonist approach that was popular in contemporary Soviet scholarship. This approach had governed Azerbaijani scholarship ever since.

The Marxist view of the ethnogenesis of the Azeri people was developed as a response to the pan-Turkic attitude fashionable in Azerbaijan in the 1920s. The latter was promoted especially by the All-Union Turkological Congress held in Baku in early 1926. At the Congress, the leading Soviet specialists rehabilitated such terms as "Turks" and "Turk-Tatars". Azeri intellectuals began to think of the establishment of a "Turkic-Tatar" Research Institute and a Union of "Turkic-Tatar" poets, and even of an International Bureau of Turkology under the aegis of the USSR. They called for the introduction of Turkic education (Choban-zade 1925). In brief, the emergence of Turkic republics within the USSR and a Turkological

Congress, let alone the successful development of neighboring Turkey, made for the fast growth of pan-Turkic identity.

All of this gradually began to alarm the Soviet bureaucracy, which was afraid of Turkic nationalism. They were watching with growing anxiety for the flourishing of pan-Turkic ideas among Turkic émigrés abroad (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 9). One such concept was advocated by Mohammed Amin Rasulzade (1884-1955), a former "Musavat" leader, who, while in Turkey, completed an essay on the origins of the Azeri people. It was published in Istanbul in 1928. Its author put into question the idea then popular in Turkey about the autochthonous formation of the Turkish people in the territory of early Asia Minor and Transcaucasia. Instead, he described numerous migrations of Turkic nomads from the Asiatic steppes, that one by one flooded the Caucasus in the late 1st - beginning of the 2nd Millennium A.D. He put special emphasis on the Seljuq migration in the 11th century, when mass Turkification began. The process of Turkification continued for a few centuries and ended only in the time of the Mongols in the 13th - 14th centuries. During the Safavi period (1501-1722), new Turkic tribes arrived in Azerbaijan. In brief, in Rasulzade's view, the Turks played the crucial role in the formation of the Azeri people; Albanians were excluded from this process because they were Christians (Rasulzade 1990. For that see Astourian 1994: 62-63)<sup>25</sup>. The Soviet Azeris could not accept this concept because first, it stressed their Turkic origins and thus made them helpless before the campaigns against pan-Turkism launched in the USSR, and second, it depicted them as recent migrants, thus depriving them of the first-settler argument that they needed so much against the territorial claims of the Armenians and the Iranians.

As a result of the struggle against pan-Turkism and pan-Islamism, the terms "Turks" and "Islam" had already become unpopular in the USSR by the end of the 1920s, and if they were used, it was only with negative connotations. Now these terms were associated with reactionary bourgeois ideology and attempts to dissolve Azeri authenticity in a Turkic sea governed by the Turkish people (Alekperov 1960: 74-75). During the period from 1925 to 1940, about 100 archaeological and ethnographic studies were carried out, 70 of them during the last five years before World War II. Archaeological investigations were focused on the prehistoric, early historic and early medieval past. Only a few of them dealt with the Muslim period (studies of mosques, palaces, and the famous palace of the Shirvan Shahs in Baku). Interestingly, their investigators managed to avoid such terms as "Turks" and "Islam"; Muslim monuments were considered only as a valuable cultural heritage, and their religious importance was ignored (for example, see Guseinov 1943; Djafarzade 1945; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964).

## CHAPTER 9

### THE MEDIAN TEMPTATION AND SOVIET PATRIOTISM

In 1934, the Historical Faculty was opened at Azerbaijan State University (ASU) and its first graduates received diplomas in 1939. This occurred against a background of important political changes. In 1936, Azerbaijan was granted the status of a full Soviet Socialist Republic, and it became necessary for it to have its own distinct history, permitting it to distance itself, first from all the other Turks in order to avoid association with pan-Turkism, and second from Shi'a Iran in order to avoid the accusation of pan-Islamism. At the same time, in accordance with the Soviet doctrine being especially intolerant of "stranger-peoples", the Azeris did need the status of an indigenous people, but for that they had to prove their autochthonous origin. In a letter written in 1988, targeting Armenian territorial claims, the Azeri intellectuals themselves demonstrated what an important ethno-political meaning their view of ethnic history had for them. First, the emphasis on the autochthonous origin was their response to Armenian claims that the Azeris were by no means an "indigenous nation", second, their rich and substantially ancient historical tradition was used to encourage the position of Iranian Azeris, who had been deprived of any right to develop their language and culture. Indeed, the Azeris always felt that the attitude toward them as newcomers brought them under threat of losing their lands and being deported, as had occurred, for example, in 1948-1953 when quite a number of Azeris were removed from the territory of Armenia (Vahabzade, Aliyarov 1988)<sup>26</sup>.

In brief, Azerbaijan was in great need of its own history, and in 1940-1941 the Department of History of Azerbaijan was established and a course in the history of Azerbaijan was introduced to the curriculum of the Historical Faculty of the ASU (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 27). By that time, both aforementioned Iranian and Armenian factors had been conducive to rapid Azerbaijanization of historical heroes and historical political formations in the territory of Azerbaijan. In particular, in 1938 the 800-year anniversary of Nizami was celebrated, and he was declared a great Azeri poet (Istoriia 1939: 88-91). In fact, he was a Persian poet and that was no wonder, since the Persians accounted for the entire urban population in those days (Diakonov 1995: 731). This was recognized in all the encyclopedias published in Russia before the 1930s, and only in 1939 did the Big Soviet Encyclopedia called Nizami a "great Azeri poet" for the first time (Cf. Brokgauz,



Efron 1897: 58; Granat 1917: 195; BSE 1939: 94). In the 1940s the Safavi Dynasty became Azerbaijani rather than Turkic, let alone Iranian (Altstadt 1992: 159; Astourian 1994: 53).

In the late 1930s, the First Secretary of the CPA, M. D. Baghirov, ordered Azerbaijani historians to write a history of Azerbaijan which would represent the Azeri people as the true indigenous population and break them off from any Turkic roots (Aliiev 1999). Baghirov did not fail to point out that, despite of all the tribal movements that had occurred very frequently in the past, despite conquests and alien political rule, the Azeri people had managed to retain their national culture and native language (for example, see Baghirov 1950: 30). Under the threat of the coming Russification, this idea sounded very powerful. The task was formulated even more clearly by the 17th and 18th Congresses of the CPA held in 1949 and 1951. They required of Azeri historians that they "study such important problems of the history of the Azeri people as the history of Media, and the origins of the Azeri people" (Yampol'sky 1952: 164; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 37). To put it another way, Azerbaijani authorities approved the Azeri origin of the ancient Median population; and scholars had to search for appropriate arguments (Klimov et al. 1940: 68, 70; Yampol'sky 1952: 164-165; Ismailov 1954; Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 34, 39-40). On November 5, 1940, the meeting of the Presidium of the Azerbaijan branch of the USSR Academy of Sciences made a clear identification between the "early history of Azerbaijan" and the history of Media (Ob izuchenii 1940. For that see Diakonov 1995: 731; Sumbatzade 1987: 102, 109).

Thus, the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan branch of the AS USSR was obliged to work out a new concept of the history of Azerbaijan, although well-trained specialists were in very short supply (Diakonov 1995: 731). Yet the first version of the history of Azerbaijan was completed by the spring of 1939, and in May, it was discussed at a scholarly meeting of the Section on History and Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Its preliminary version came out in 1939, as the model for a textbook on the history of Azerbaijan for high schools. Its main ideas were that Azerbaijan had been continuously populated since the Stone Age, that the local tribes were by no means backward in relationship to their neighbors, that they fought courageously against all the unwelcome invaders and, despite temporary failures, always retained their sovereignty. Interestingly enough, Media and its role in the development of "early Azeri statehood" was still in low profile, the Albanian theme was almost neglected, and the local inhabitants were called the "Azerbaijanis", no matter what historical period was being discussed (Istoriia 1939). Thus, the authors identified the people by the region they lived in, and due to that, they felt no need for a special discussion of the formation of the Azeri people. They were also tolerant of the fact that the inhabitants of Artsakh shifted to Armenian, that the clergy wrote in Grabar and that the Seljuq invasion forced the native people to shift to Turkic (Istoriia 1939: 35-36, 72-74, 85). They were much more worried about Islam – they represented it as an alien faith and described the brave "Azeri" struggle against the Arab intruders (Istoriia 1939: 49-

51).

In fact, this volume was the first systematic representation of the history of Azerbaijan completed by Soviet Azerbaijan scholars. In the next revised edition, the authors referred to Mikhail I. Kalinin's speech at the meeting of Party activists held in Moscow in 1940. There he talked of Soviet patriotism and called for appreciation of the "roots of the early history of our people". He also said: "Soviet patriotism is the direct heir of their creative ancestors' activities". He taught them to find out their own historical genealogies and be proud of epic and historical heroes (Kalinin 1940: 4). Following that, the authors of the revised edition of the textbook argued that every Soviet patriot had to know the past of the Azeri people, beginning in the most ancient times (Istoriia 1941: 5).

That was a directive, and it maintained that by no means did the Azeri people emerge in the 19th or 20th centuries, that one had to search for their roots in the remote past and in the territory where they lived nowadays. The textbook emphasized the autochthonous origins of the Azeri people. In order to confirm those, the authors put forward the following arguments. First, they refused to identify the Azeri ancestors with any strangers, and, in contrast to the common Soviet view (for that, see Niessman 1987: 9), excluded language as a main characteristic of a people. It seemed much more important to them to appreciate ethnic territory, and the material and intellectual culture inherited from one's ancestors. Secondly, they devoted no less energy to turning down the role of religion in identity, and pointed out that the Azeris professed different religions before Islam. Finally, they argued that all the groups of newcomers whom Azerbaijan received throughout the centuries were numerically small, were less culturally advanced than the Azeris, and merged rapidly with the local inhabitants, without having any major effect on them. To put it other way, the Azeris were identified with the earliest population of the region, a people who did not change much throughout the centuries, and, thus were the Azeri people provided with eternal existence (Istoriia 1941: 17-18).

Who were the earliest Azeri ancestors, specifically? The authors identified them with the "Medes, Caspians, Albanians and other tribes who lived in the territory of Azerbaijan about three thousand years ago". They argued that the early Azeris surpassed the Persians in the level of their development, and were not much different from the Armenians and Georgians (Istoriia 1941: 8, 17, 21). In particular, the Albanian alphabet, introduced by Mesrob Mashtots (ca. 350-439/440) in the 5th century was called a genuine Azeri alphabet (Istoriia 1941: 42); in this way, the Azeris obtained a tradition of early writing that could compete with those both of Georgia and Armenia. The main messages of the textbook were first that the Soviet Azeris had nothing to learn from the Persians and no reason to grieve the loss of the Iranian cultural tradition. Indeed, the "early Azeri-Median culture had strongly and positively affected the development of the Persian, so-called, Achaemenian culture". In contrast, the Iranian state had only occupied itself with the destruction of the Azeri culture, later on. Second, the Azeris had no reason to have an

inferiority complex with respect to the Armenians and Georgians. Indeed, as the textbook stated, the state was formed among the early Azeris (i.e. Medes! V. Sh.) much earlier than among their ancestors, and Dejok, the king of Media was called the "first known king of Azerbaijan". Media was said to have been the most powerful state in the ancient Middle East (Istoriia 1941: 21, 23, 25, 27-28).

Thus, the Golden Age of the Azeri people was dated to the 1st Millennium B.C. Later on, a decline took place that was aggravated by the continuous encroachments of the Arabs, Seljuqs, Mongols and other invaders whose activities were painted only in black; there was no question of their making any positive cultural contribution; to the contrary, the intense permanent struggle of the Azeri people against them was emphasized. Persia was depicted as a most harmful agent that persistently attempted to subjugate Azerbaijan. However, the annexation by Russia was treated as a "minor evil" – that was the standard formula then adopted by all Soviet historians (for that, see Tillet 1969).

One of the major themes of the textbook was the courageous age-old Azeri struggle against various conquerors. This trend emerged in Azeri history writing, especially at the time of World War II, when historians were obliged to contribute to the patriotic education of the Soviet people (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1943, 1964: 35-36). Whereas before the war the mystic-religious movement of Babek (9th century) was interpreted with respect to the concept of class struggle as a peasant war against feudalism (Istoriia 1939: 59-66), now it was represented as a national liberation movement against Arab invaders (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1943: 20-27).

The name "Azerbaijan" was correctly related to the name of the Hellenistic ruler Atropat, but (!) following Marr, the authors derived his name from that of "some Azeri tribe" (Istoriia 1941: 31). As far as Nagorny Karabagh was concerned, they emphasized its close economic relationships with the lowlands of Azerbaijan (Istoriia 1941: 38), thus reproducing the very argument that had played a major role in the incorporation of Nagorny Karabagh into Soviet Azerbaijan in the early 1920s.

The next attempt to write down the history of Azerbaijan was made in 1945-1946 when, as we shall see further on, Soviet Azerbaijan was dreaming of its forthcoming unification with its Iranian counterpart. The new version of the "History of Azerbaijan" was completed by the same authors together with additional specialists from the Institute of History of the CPSU, who were responsible for chapters on the most recent history. This version was still based on the concept that the Azeri people were first of all formed out of the earliest inhabitants of eastern Transcaucasia and northwestern Iran, and second, although they had been affected by some more recent invaders (Scythians and others), the influence of the latter was of minor importance. What was new in this volume was the further attempt to extend Azeri history deeper into the past – for this time the Azeri ancestors were identified with the bearers of Bronze Age cultures in the territory of Azerbaijan (Ocherki 1946: 27). However, the main ancestors were still identified as the Medes, who were but complemented by the Caucasian Albanians, as if they had retained old Median traditions even after the latter were subjugated

by the Persians. Nothing was said of the Albanian language or the Albanian writing system, however, or of the role of Turkic or Iranian languages in medieval times. Instead, Nizami was called not only one of the greatest poets in the world, but an Azeri poet; one of his merits was that he knew of and wrote about Russia (Ocherki 1946: 65-67, 69-71)<sup>27</sup>.

In fact, both volumes in question focused mainly on political history; economic and cultural issues were discussed only in passing and rather formally; ethnic history was not covered at all; and all people who had ever lived in the territory of Azerbaijan were indiscriminately reckoned among the Azeris and contrasted with the Iranians. All of this was done despite the fact that the Medes were an Iranian-speaking people (for that, see Astourian 1994: 54). This autochthonous concept, that claimed all the territories of Azerbaijan including its Iranian region, was openly anti-Iranian and contained a special message in the 1940s. Indeed, after the annexation of extended territories in Europe, Stalin was seriously thinking of Soviet expansion southward. In question was not only the old problem of the straits providing access to the Mediterranean Sea, but also the appropriation of additional territories at the expense of Turkey and Iran (Kuniholm 1980; Chuev 1991: 55-56). The Soviet authorities did their best to recruit traditions of irredentism that manifested themselves from the beginning of the 20th century. Yet there were no academic reasons to confuse the early history of Caucasian Albania and southern Azerbaijan (Atropatene). In the early times as well as in the early medieval period, completely different populations lived there, who had nothing in common – be it culture, social relationships, or language (Novosel'tsev 1991: 197).

The Azeri democrats began to look to Iran quite early. In 1904-1905 the Muslim social-democratic "Hümmet" party was established in Baku. It not only enrolled immigrant workers from Iranian Azerbaijan but also formed a group of them that served as the basis on which the Iranian Communist Party (ICP) grew, later on (Altstadt 1992: 47-48).

In 1941-1946, during the period of the Soviet occupation of northern Iran, an intensive anti-Iranian propaganda campaign was launched there, and attempts were made to awaken Azeri self-awareness and develop an all-Azeri identity. The unification of Iranian Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan, and thus the appropriation of a substantial part of Iranian territory by the USSR, was on the agenda. In order to make their propaganda more effective, Soviet troops in Iran were recruited mainly from among the Azeris, who brought their families with them. It looked as if the "unification" of all the Azeris was coming, much like what had occurred in Byelorussia and the Ukraine in 1939. Gradually, the term "Greater Azerbaijan" became popular. The Azeri wing of the Iranian "Tudeh" people's party began to emphasize ethnic distinctions and the particular interests of the Azeris, and in August 1945 it openly claimed autonomy for southern Azerbaijan and state status for the Azeri language.

In September, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (DPA) was established in Tabriz. It consisted of only those Azeris who formerly collaborated with the ICP.

This party not only claimed autonomy, but also advocated the right of a nation to sovereignty, although, in their rhetoric, its leaders recognized the territorial integrity of Iran. On November 20, 1945, the Constituent Congress of the DPA pointed out that, while having its own history as well as language and cultural traditions, Azerbaijan had every reason to obtain autonomous political status, although without separation from Iran. However, the term "Azeri nation" that was used constantly by DPA leaders contrasted sharply with the official concept of an integrated Iranian nation (*mellat*). In December 1945, southern Azerbaijan was granted the requested autonomy, and it established its own government, the Mejlis. Immediately, reforms of a socialist and nationalist nature were implemented. One of these was the granting of Azeri language state status in the territory of Iranian Azerbaijan. Cultural ties between the two Azerbaijanians were developed, and the Tabriz media disseminated a positive and alluring image of the USSR. Native Azeri vernacular was artificially cleansed of Persian elements, and instead many Russian loan words were welcomed.

Thoughtful observers could not fail to notice that Baghirov personally controlled all the relationships between two Azerbaijanians. At that time, some key political leaders in Iranian Azerbaijan began to consider the perspective of unification with Soviet Azerbaijan. The Tabriz authorities demonstrated their anti-Iranian attitudes increasingly openly. Yet the USSR fell short of their expectations. Soviet troops left Iran in May 1946, and in December, the Iranian regular army was brought into Iranian Azerbaijan. After weak resistance, Azeri autonomy ceased to exist. *Its supporters found refuge in the Azerbaijan SSR. The state status of the Azeri language in southern Azerbaijan was abolished* (Kolarz 1952: 247; Niessman 1987: 31-35; Swietochowski 1995: 135-162).

All of these developments had a high profile in the Soviet media. At the end of 1945 – early 1946 the central media had been disseminating favorable information about Iranian Azerbaijan. In the late 1940s, a Soviet radio station situated in Transcaucasia called for an Iranian Azeri revolt against the Shah. Interestingly, his power was represented as a "foreign yoke". This was the term that had been used in Soviet textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan, to describe the long Iranian presence in Transcaucasia. In 1947-1950, Soviet Azeri writers and poets wrote about the unity of an Azeri nation that was artificially divided by the Arax River. Their works were frequently highly praised, which demonstrated what a significant role the pan-Azeri issue played in Soviet external policy (Niessman 1987: 36-37, 42-45; Swietochowski 1995: 165-167). Yet, while analyzing all these events long afterwards, the Soviet Azeri historians avoided discussing the crucial role of the Soviet Union (for example, see Nuriev 1988).

In Iran, the "Azeri issue" was seen quite differently; national unity (*mellat*) was identified with the religious community that embraced all Shi'as, regardless of language or ethnic origins. Until recently, only Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians were considered minorities there (Tapper 1989: 234, 237). The Azeri distinctions were explained with reference to the Mongol conquest, which had caused the

Turkification of the former Iranians. The Soviet policy aimed at building the Azeri nation was treated there as an "imperialist intrigue" stirring up Azeri irredentism in order to annex part of the Iranian territory (Niessman 1987: 12; Swietochowski 1995: 192; Croissant 1998: 61). Iranian scholars remarked that inhabitants of Atropatene, and some of northern Azerbaijan, spoke Iranian, and that Atropatene itself was always a part of Parthia and had never been independent. Some of them argued that the local inhabitants often assimilated the Turkic-speaking newcomers. They maintained that the Persians had ruled permanently over backward Turkic tribes. An extensive Turkification of Azerbaijan was associated with the Seljuqs of the 11th century (for that, see Fazily 1964; Motika 1991: 585; Astourian 1994: 57). There is no question that none of this would satisfy the Azeris, who could not but perceive the Iranian view as a clear manifestation of pan-Iranism (Fazily 1964, 1970, 1984; Aliev 1985).

In Iran, they had a term for large linguistic groups like the Azeris (*qoum*), but it had a special meaning closely linked with genetic origins (Tapper 1989: 237). That is why, in order to manifest themselves as a distinct group, the Azeris of Iran were in need of their own view of ethnogenesis, which the scholars of Soviet Azerbaijan were ready to provide.

Indeed, the belief in the early and continuous unity of the northern and southern Azerbaijanians, not only in political and territorial, but also in ethnic terms, became the basis on which all the main Azeri works of Azeri ethnogenesis were built up. As in many other Soviet republics, the end of the Stalin era witnessed major shifts in the historical profession in Azerbaijan. In 1954, a conference took place at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, where they condemned the distortions of history during Baghirov's time (Altstadt 1992: 171). This was especially timely because the extensive study of Median history carried out by I. M. Diakonov on behalf of the Baku Institute of History (Ismailov 1954) revealed the dubiousness of the former idea of close relations between the Azeri ancestors and the Medes (Diakonov 1995: 731).

As a result, historians were given a new order to re-write the "History of Azerbaijan". This three-volume book came out in Baku in 1958-1962. Its first volume dealt with all the earlier periods, up to the annexation of Azerbaijan by Russia, and the team of authors included all the major specialists at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR: Academician I. A. Guseinov, and also Z. I. Ibragimov, A. N. Guliev, Ye. A. Tokarzhevskii, M. Kh. Sharifly and M. M. Efendiev. There were no archaeologists among them, although the volume began with the Palaeolithic epoch. At the same time, the reader was informed that the volume was reviewed by all the major research centers of the Soviet Union where they studied the history of the Caucasus; and the best Soviet historians took part in the review.

What was the content of this volume; what were the authors fascinated with and what was omitted? Already in the first pages, the authors pointed out that Azerbaijan was one of the earliest centers of human civilization, that statehood



emerged there in the very early days, that the Azeri people had developed a high original culture and that for centuries they had struggled for freedom and independence against foreign invaders. Northern and southern Azerbaijanians were considered the same entity, and the joining of the former with Russia was called a progressive historical act (Guseinov 1958: VII). At the same time, the volume focused mainly on the history of northern Azerbaijan, i.e. the territory that was the basis of the Azerbaijan SSR.

Southern Azerbaijan was of interest only because early states had developed there in the early 1st Millennium B.C. These included Manna, established in the 9th century B.C. by the highland tribes of Lullubi and Guti, and Media, one of the most powerful states in the Middle East in the 7th – 6th centuries B.C. In the Hellenistic time, a new state emerged there – Media Atropatene, or just Atropatene, which was regarded by the authors as the restoration of the local state tradition. While pointing out that the name of contemporary Azerbaijan derived from the name of this state, the authors put all these early political entities into a continuous line and considered them successive stages of the development of Azeri statehood (Guseinov 1958: 44). All of this was needed to demonstrate the deep historical roots of the latter and to represent the Azeri people as the bearers of a very early political tradition.

Moreover, although they recognized that Atropatene was situated south of the Arax River, the authors “discovered” its strong gravitation toward the “northern Azeri territories”, to Albania, as if the former was related to the latter both ethnically and culturally. In order to prove this relatedness, the authors opposed the local language (called “Azeri”) to Persian (Guseinov 1958: 48-49). The reader also remained ignorant of the fact that both of these languages belonged to the Iranian group of languages and had nothing to do with the Nakh-Daghestani languages of Caucasian Albania. One might also doubt the idea of intensive direct contacts between Atropatene and Albania, because, as the textbook stated, the Albanian tribes lived north of the Kura River, and Atropatene was situated south of the Arax River. True, several pages later, the authors corrected this error and maintained that Albania lay “behind the Arax River” (Guseinov 1958: 28, 48, 50). All this reasoning helped them to argue that a new people was created in the territory of *Atropatene that served as the basis for the development of the future Azeri people* (Guseinov 1958: 49).

Caucasian Albania was another early state that attracted the authors’ attention. While avoiding discussion of the quite obscure issue of its location, the authors localized it within very wide limits from the Terek River in the north to the Lower Kura and Arax Rivers in the south. They depicted Caucasian Albania as a very rich region, where a state had emerged in the 1st century B.C. that was continuously developing until the very end of the 4th century, when Albania was for a century subjugated by Sasanian Iran. The authors included the right side of the Kura River (Utik, Artsakh and Paytakaran regions) in Albania without hesitation. They mentioned its subordination to the Armenian kingdom only in passing as though it was a less important episode. At the same time, they recognized that the population

of Artsakh (Karabagh) had already been Armenized by the beginning of the 1st Millennium A.D. (Guseinov 1958: 50-82).

The authors did not fail to note that the Albanian writing system was invented in the beginning of the 5th century, but they completely ignored the role of the Armenian enlightener, Mesrob Mashtots, in that event (Guseinov 1958: 101). Later on, some Azeri authors went so far as to reject his participation in the invention of the Albanian alphabet and, in order to prove that, referred to A. G. Perikhanian (for example, see Mamedova 1986: 7; Buniatov 1987c: 118). At the same time, Perikhanian put forward the hypothesis that Mesrob Mashtots made an Albanian named Benjamin his assistant, and taught him how one could create an alphabet. She demonstrated clearly that when the Albanian alphabet was developed it was very much affected by the Armenian model. Thus, she had no doubt that Mesrob Mashtots did take part in this project (Perikhanian 1966: 127-133). To put it differently, the authors of the textbook did their best to demonstrate the originality and independence of the Albanian state and to play down Armenian influence there.

How did the authors view the formation of the Azeri language? They recognized the major role of the Seljuq conquest of the 11th century, which had caused the mass migration of the Turkic-speaking nomads. At the same time, they viewed the Seljuqs as an alien force that caused new hardship and deprivations for the local population. That is why the authors emphasized the struggle of the local groups for freedom and appreciated the collapse of the Seljuq Empire, which made it possible to restore Azeri statehood once again. It is true, the textbook stated, that Seljuq rule started the widespread use of Turkic language that leveled the former language differences between the north and south Azerbaijanians. However, only language replacement took place; the population was still the same. In this way the Azeri people were provided with the status of an indigenous people, whose ancestors nonetheless spoke different languages. Hence, primordial connections with the lands of Caucasian Albania and Atropatene proved to be much more important factors than language affiliation, although the authors recognized that the emergence of linguistic unity led to the formation of the Azeri people (Guseinov 1958: 138-141, 171-172).

The book in question served as the model for a new school textbook that came out in 1960. All the chapters on history before the end of the 19th century were completed by the Academician A. S. Sumbatzade. The tendency to identify the early Azeri state tradition with the kingdoms of Manna and Media Atropatene was even more visible. Compared to them, the image of Media was less colorful. Once again, the independence of both Atropatene and Caucasian Albania was stressed. The latter was depicted as covering an extended territory from the Great Caucasus range in the north to the Arax River in the south, including the right bank of the Kura River. As in the academic publication, the role of Mesrob Mashtots was ignored, and the medieval chronicler, Moses of Kalankatui, who wrote in Armenian, was presented as an “Albanian chronicler”. Earlier, the author mentioned pre-Seljuq Turkic migrations, but recognized that Turkic language has won the final victory

only in the 11th – 12th centuries. On the one hand, the role of Turkic language in the consolidation of the local population was also recognized, but, on the other hand, biological, cultural and historical continuity, rooted in the very remote local past, was emphasized. This seemed sufficient to the author, who did not go deeper into the issue of the formation of the Azeri people (Istoriia 1960). The paragraph on the “great Azeri poet” was supplemented by a portrait of Nizami Ganjevi, drawn by the artist, G. Khalykov, in the 1940s. Although an authentic portrait of the poet did not exist, in accordance with Muslim norms, the portrait in question met Baghirov’s requirements, and has ever since been reproduced in all Azeri textbooks<sup>28</sup>). Similar ideas were accepted in another textbook, published in 1969 by the Department of History of Azerbaijan in Azerbaijan State University and intended for external and night school students (Kaziev et al. 1969).

Thus, as Audrey Altstadt put it, the “History of Azerbaijan” was an “uneven but useful history, which established the ‘new orthodoxy’ for contemporary and subsequent scholarly publications” (Altstadt 1992: 173). Until as recently as the early 1990s, this publication retained its importance as the main course in the history of Azerbaijan, and its general ideas were perceived as instructions and a call for action. Since that time, the “Median roots” of the Azeri have lost their luster. Instead, Manna was praised as the earliest state in the territory of Azerbaijan; Media Atropatene and Caucasian Albania were glorified, for they created the basis for the formation of an Azeri people; and the early medieval Turks were appreciated as the agency that endowed these people with the Turkic language.

## CHAPTER 10

### BETWEEN MEDIA, CAUCASIAN ALBANIA AND THE TURKIC WORLD: THIRST FOR A NEW VIEW

The intentional playing down of the role of Turkic language, characteristic for the “History of Azerbaijan”, was the result of Stalin’s struggle against pan-Turkism. Scholars still remembered how – quite recently – Baghirov called for an intensive struggle against pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism (Baghirov 1950: 71). A resolution carried by a united scholarly conference, held in Baku in 1954 and gathering specialists from all the Transcaucasian republics, still contained a paragraph aimed at the struggle against pan-Turkism, pan-Iranism and pan-Islamism (Reshenie 1957: 857). However, with the growth of liberalism from the end of the 1950s, this factor was losing its former importance, and Turkic-speaking scholars began to be more attracted to their mother tongue. In the 1950s – 1960s, one of the most active in this field was Z. I. Yampol’sky, a researcher affiliated with the Institute of History and Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. He took part in the completion of many textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan, including those already mentioned. His views were first very sensitive to the changing ethno-political environment, and second made a significant contribution to the formation of the revisionist stream among Azeri historians in the 1970s – 1980s. That is why the evolution of his views is of major interest here<sup>29</sup>).

It makes sense to distinguish between two periods in the evolution of Yampol’sky’s views, dividing them in the mid-1960s. During the first period, his main task seemed to be first, the confirmation of the early unity of the population of Azerbaijan, and second, the isolation of the local people from their neighbors, especially the Iranians and Armenians. In the second period, he placed more emphasis on the local roots of Turkic language in the region. Yampol’sky was not a linguist; however, old place and tribal names as well as some other linguistic issues were at the core of his constructions. Since he was not aware of the methodology used by specialists working with these materials, he relied on his own nationalist attitudes, and tried to resolve disputable issues from the viewpoint of Azeri patriotism. To take but one case, he interpreted the name Atropat as a common noun, and without any serious reasons assumed that it was linked to the Zoroastrian clergy. He also translated the name “Azerbaijan” as “place of the fire god”, and at the same time did his best to separate it from the Iranian language (Yampol’sky 1949b: 4, 1955a; Azerli, Musevi, Yampol’sky 1974)<sup>30</sup>). True, that was not an original

idea of his; he was following Marr, who was the first to revise the traditional explanation of the term "Azerbaijan" (Cf. Marr 1926: 156; Istoriia 1939: 20)<sup>31</sup>.

Initially, Yampol'sky strictly followed the line designated by the Party bosses and developed the idea of the Median, Atropatenian, and Albanian ancestry of the Azeris. True, he recognized that all these early groups spoke different languages, and Turkic was out of question (Yampol'sky 1957: 129-130). Moreover, while following Marr in his attack on Indo-European studies, and relating them to imperialism and Eurocentrism, Yampol'sky was inclined to separate the Median language from the Iranian (Yampol'sky 1949a: 37). At the same time, he protested against the association of the Albanians with the Turkic-speaking population and identified them as the Yaphetides (Yampol'sky 1949a: 2). However, after Stalin's death and Baghirov's dismissal, when the political climate relaxed, Yampol'sky gradually began to revise this concept.

He agreed that in the early days there were two political bodies in the territory of the future Azerbaijan – Media Atropatene in the south and Albania in the north. However, while analyzing the locations of various tribes mentioned there by the classical authors, he maintained that the same tribal names were commonly listed in both the north and south. Having avoided discussing their language (or languages), he claimed that all of them might speak the same language, which he called "proto-Median" (Yampol'sky 1954). He emphatically objected to the classification of this language within the Iranian group. He also insisted that in the remote past there was no question of Armenian being spoken in the territory of the future Azerbaijan. He knew that there was a distinct language with its own writing system in Caucasian Albania, but he omitted mentioning North Caucasian relations to this particular language (but see Yampol'sky 1956: 98); instead, he discovered the term "Azerbaijani language" in an Arab manuscript of the 10th century (Yampol'sky 1955b). He also discovered some ethnic group called the "Atropateans" among the Medes and constructed the "Atropatean, or Azerian (early Azeri) people" from that.

He was aware that linguists include Median in the Iranian group; still he did his best to look for similar roots in Azeri, and at the same time, tried to push the history of Turkic language in eastern Transcaucasia and the adjacent areas of Iran far back into the past. He referred to the well-known Soviet linguist, S. Ye. Malov, who in the early 1950s, following Marr's ideas, argued that the Turks lived in eastern Europe from incredibly early times. Malov dated this to "much earlier than the 5th century B.C." and maintained that even at that time the Turks occupied the same regions that they live in nowadays (Malov 1952). Following Malov, and also in accordance with the line of the textbooks on the history of Azerbaijan discussed above, Yampol'sky argued that the various groups of newcomers who infiltrated east Transcaucasia in the past were numerically small (he went so far as to make demographic calculations!) and were unable to affect the local population or their culture. True, he left open the issue of whether the indigenous inhabitants were Turkic-speakers from the very beginning or shifted to the language of the newcomers. Yet, he considered it important to dissociate himself publicly from pan-

Turkism and pan-Iranism (Yampol'sky 1956). That was not an easy task, for his ideas about some indigenous Turkic-speaking environment in the Middle East were quite similar to what was being said by contemporary Turkish scholars. In particular, some of the latter did their best to prove that the Urartians, Hittites and other local peoples were Turanians, i.e. Turks (for that, see Zulalian 1970: 14-15, 19-38).

Finally, the last piece in this early set of Yampol'sky's articles stated that over the last 2,500 years there had been no significant ethnic changes at all at the territory of southeast Transcaucasia and northern Iran. *Invasions by the Scythians, Romans, Khazars, and Arabs had no effect on the bulk of the native inhabitants, who retained their language and cultural distinctions.* For this time, Yampol'sky warned against careless treatment of ethnic names – the "name of a tribe and its real ethnic composition may not coincide in different historical periods and in different countries". The conclusion was that, despite 3,000 years of drastic changes, the contemporary Azeris were the direct ethnic descendants of both the Media Atropatene and Albanian populations (Yampol'sky 1962). A few years later, Yampol'sky wrote the same of Caspiana, situated in the lowlands of Azerbaijan in the early past, and hinted that early "Caspians" might be the ancestors of the Azeri people (Yampol'sky 1971).

Since the mid-1960s, the Turkic theme had sounded louder and louder in Yampol'sky's works. Now, he discussed the incredibly distant past of the Turks in general, and in the southeast Transcaucasian and north Iranian regions in particular (Yampol'sky 1966). He recalled some ethnic names ("Turcae", "Tyrcae") mentioned by the classical authors, such as Pliny the Elder and Pomponius Mela, and remarked that their sounds were reminiscent of the Turkic world; he had referred to these names in some of his earlier articles, but without any comment (Yampol'sky 1954: 106)<sup>32</sup>. It seems it was sufficient for him to maintain that Turks were already living in eastern Transcaucasia at the beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. Although he himself warned against the uncritical treatment of early tribal names, in this particular instance he referred to very obscure evidence from Pliny the Elder and Pomponius Mela, in order to state that they did know about the Turks in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea (Yampol'sky 1966, 1970a). Moreover, basing his conclusions on even more doubtful interpretation of tribal names, he ascribed this knowledge to Herodotus (Yampol'sky 1970b). It is worth noting that the similarities he discussed could be explained even more easily by an error made by a medieval copyist (replacing the Greek "J" with the Latin "T" in the term "Jyrkai"). In the meantime, Yampol'sky went even further and constructed a powerful religious center in southern Azerbaijan, headed by some Atropatae, and hinted broadly that their language had nothing to do with Iranian and, instead, was quite close to Azeri (Azerli, Musevi, Yampol'sky 1974).

Instructively, Yampol'sky's views not only found benevolent acceptance in Azerbaijan but were even represented in the all-Soviet reference book, the Soviet Historical Encyclopedia. In his entry there, Yampol'sky identified early Albanian



tribes with the bearers of an archaeological culture of so-called jug graves. He also depicted the dramatic history of their state and culture, and represented the Albanians as the ancestors not only of the Azeri people, but also of the Nagorny Karabagh Armenians, some of the Daghestanis and some of the Georgians of Kakheti. It is also instructive to note what he omitted. He avoided discussing the dates of the emergence of the Albanian Kingdom and the beginning of the Turkification of its population. It is obvious that he expected these dates to be much earlier than scholars commonly believed they were. Indeed, some contemporary Azeri scholars did their best to push the dates far back into the past. Yampol'sky described the flourishing of literature and schooling in Albania after the original alphabet had been introduced; but he totally ignored the name of Mesrob Mashtots. This had become common among Azeri scholars, as we have already seen. Finally, his entry was supplemented by a map, which included the right bank of the Kura River (Utik, Artsakh) in the Caucasian Albania of the 2nd century B.C. (Yampol'sky 1961), although there was no Albanian state in those days.

It is easy to notice that Yampol'sky's concept was very close to the ideas of the Azeri émigré Mirza Bala, a former member of the United Party of "Musavat" and one of the "Turkic Federalists". This activist had published a pamphlet in Ankara in 1951 in which he called the Arsacid Dynasty that ruled in early Albania and Armenia descendants of the Central Asian Sakae. He associated the latter with the Hunns and provided them with the Turkic language. This is how the early population of the region between the Kura and Arax Rivers became Turkic, as though they were the true builders of the early states in southern and southeastern Transcaucasia. Mirza Bala did his best to demonstrate continuity between Media, Atropatene, Albania and modern Azerbaijan. He included Utik, Artsakh, Sisakene and other lands on the right bank of the Kura River in Albania. In his view, these lands had nothing to do with the Armenians (Bala 1989. For that, see also Astourian 1994: 65-66).

In the meantime, the absolute numbers of Turkic people in the USSR was growing; by 1960 there were 25 million, and they were the second most numerous group, after the Slavic peoples. Turkic intellectuals had grown in numbers, and there was a school of professional historians among the Azeris once again. In 1945, there were only 18 researchers on the staff of the Institute of History, and by 1958, their number had increased to 69. By 1965 there were 109 staff members. In 1945, there were only three Candidates in History among them (including I. A. Guseinov, then the director of the Institute). In 1958 there was one Doctor of History and six Candidates in History, and by 1965 there were eight Doctors, and there were 54 Candidates (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1965: 5). Moreover, in 1958 the former Department of the History of the Foreign Orient had broken away from the Institute and was granted status as a separate Institute of Oriental Studies in the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR (Buniatov 1982: 54). This was already a strong team of specialists, who were able to develop and advocate their own views on the history of the Azeri people. True, historical training was still less than perfect.

Initially, people were hired quite casually, whose only advantage was their party membership and social origin (Diakonov 1995: 731).

At the same time, all of this provided the Turkic elite with new reasons and chances to manifest their cultural and social demands. In the scholarly sphere, this was expressed through demands for more intensive development of Turkic studies. This strategy was only somewhat successful, and the new all-Union magazine, "Soviet Turkology", was issued in Baku starting in 1970. In its very first issue the editor-in-chief, the well-known Azeri philologist, Academician M. Sh. Shiraliev, claimed that the Turkic homeland was situated in western Asia rather than in Central Asia as was commonly believed, and that very early the Turks had spread across the vast region between the Ural River and western Europe. True, in order to secure himself from accusations of pan-Turkism, he called for separate studies on the cultural distinctions among various Turkic ethnic groups (Shiraliev, Asadullaev 1970). This signal was interpreted quite correctly. A new cycle of discussions of the origins and homeland of the Azeri people commenced. More and more Azeri scholars depicted their own remote ancestors as the earliest Turks in the world, who retained their original lands; indeed, the Turks were unhesitatingly called indigenous inhabitants.

Since the 1960s, more Azeri scholars argued that the Turkification of eastern Transcaucasia was associated with the Hunns and somewhat later by the influence of the Turkic khanate. Assumptions about early Turkic waves stirred up the imagination of local researchers (for example, see Guseinov 1962).

Thus, in the 1950s – 1960s, new discoveries in early and medieval history were observed in Azerbaijan that had a lot to do with the strengthening of the Azeri identity under the rapid growth of the Azeri population, the development of urbanization and resistance to Russification. Not only historians but also writers were encouraged by all these processes. Whereas the historians attracted the writers' attention with new topics and new historical heroes, the writers were able to represent them in a way that was still unsafe for historians because of more severe censorship control. The early history of the Turks was an especially ripe field with far-reaching promises. While looking back to the early Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions and the legacy of the early Turkic states, the Turkic writers argued that their ancestors were the founders of very early civilizations and bearers of a very old tradition of writing. All of this was of crucial importance to securing and maintaining ethnic identity under the intensive modernization that had started in the 1960s and endangered the Turkic ethnic groups with heavy cultural and language losses (Altstadt 1991: 73-76, 1992: 174).

Meanwhile, in the 1960s – 1970s Azeri scholars split into three factions. In respect to the general approach toward Azeri ethnogenesis all of them shared the autochthonist concept. Some of them, a small but very influential group of "conservatives", still identified the Azeri ancestors with the pre-Turkic population of Azerbaijan (the "Albanian concept") and insisted that intensive Turkification took place only in the 11th – 12th centuries. Others, the "moderate revisionists",

agreed only with the first part of this approach and did their best to move the process of Turkification to a much earlier date. Still others, "the radical revisionists", argued that the Azeri ancestors were Turkic-speakers from the very beginning. In this respect, they restored the Academician Marr's view, which located the Turkic homeland in the Mediterranean region and the Near East. It is obvious that all three factions were eager to turn the Azeri people into a true *indigenous population and to oppose them to the Iranian invaders. At the same time*, since being related to the Turkic world stopped being a criminal characteristic, the revisionists made great efforts to emphasize those ties, albeit without any move toward turning down the autochthonist approach.

The well-known Azeri historians of earlier periods, the Academician Ziya M. Buniatov and the expert in dead languages, Igrar G. Aliev, were the leaders of the "conservatives". Igrar G. Aliev (born in 1924) has succeeded in graduating from the Historical Faculty of Azerbaijan State University in 1945; in 1949 he defended his candidate thesis on the history of Media and by the end of the 1940s had already been appointed the Chairman of the Department of Early History at the Baku Institute of History, where he held this position for 40 years. After a four-year scholarship at the Leningrad Division of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, where he was supervised by the Academician V. V. Struve and some other prominent Soviet Assyriologists, in 1960 Aliev defended his doctoral thesis, based on his monograph, "History of Media", at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow. From 1978 on, Aliev was the Director of the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR; in 1981-1984 he acted as the Academician-Secretary of the Division of History, Economy, Philosophy and Law at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, headed the *Toponymic Commission at the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR*, was a member of the State Committee for awards in the field of science and technology, and, finally, was a member of the Nizami Commission. Simultaneously, he taught at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institute. In 1979, he was awarded the honorary title of Distinguished Scholar of Azerbaijan, and in 1980 was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. Aliev was one of the chief authors of the one-volume textbook "History of Azerbaijan", published in 1979 and republished as a revised edition in 1994 (Abbasov 1999).

Aliev focused on the history of early Media and on Iranian history; he was one of those who developed the concept of the crucial role of the Medes in Azeri ethnogenesis (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 39-40; Astourian 1994: 55). His seminal monograph on the history of Media was completed by 1956 and was a response to the call of the Azerbaijan authorities to provide arguments in favor of the autochthonous formation of the Azeri people. Although there were only a few historical documents on Median history, he accomplished this task quite successfully. His views were based on the idea of an unbroken continuity in population and culture in the territory of Azerbaijan from the earliest times. True, Aliev recognized the role of migrations and language shifts, but, in his view, the

local inhabitants always made up the dominant majority and represented the driving force of the historical process – the "autochthonous in language population was in some areas the dominant one in cultural terms until the late classical period" (Aliev 1960: 17). He put special emphasis on the highland part of Media – called Atropatene – where he located the center of the historical continuity. There, the "Azerian Iranian-speaking people" had taken shape by the first centuries A.D., biologically linked with the local tribes (Aliev 1960: 39-40, 111). At the same time, he stressed the early ethno-cultural unity of the northwestern parts of Iran with the southwestern part of the Caspian region where related tribes lived from the end of the 1st Millennium B.C. to the beginning of the 1st Millennium A.D., who were classified within the "Caucasian-Hurrian" group in terms of language. They were the truly indigenous inhabitants of the Lake Urmia region, in the view of Aliev (Aliev 1960: 65-67, 71).

Adjacent to them he constructed an "Elamic-Caspian" ethnic conglomerate, occupying all the western regions of Iran from the 3rd Millennium B.C. until the early 1st Millennium A.D., i.e. before Iranization took place. Moreover, he insisted that even after the arrival of the Iranian-speaking tribes, the great bulk of the Median population was still made up of indigenous inhabitants speaking their former pre-Iranian languages (Aliev 1960: 84, 90-91, 99-107). In brief, he believed that a homogeneous population survived there across thousands years, and, despite late language replacements, it secured its distinct cultural features and made up a substantial part of the Azeri people (Aliev 1960: 90-91, 112-113). The cultural argument played a crucial role in his construction: indeed, Aliev assumed that, since the Iranian newcomers were nomads, they lacked sufficient skills to construct the outstanding pieces of Median architecture. The latter was possible only for local *craftsmen with a sedentary life-style* (Aliev 1960: 206). *It was these ideas that were appreciated by the Azeri proponents of the autochthonous approach.*

It is worth noting that on Aliev's lips the term "early Azeri (drevneazerbajjansky)" referred only to a territory and lacked any linguistic associations. It turned out that the Atropatenians, who spoke "early Azeri", in fact, spoke a language of Iranian stock, and that in the Middle Ages "early Azeri (drevneazerbajjanskaia)" speech was still articulated in Azeri that was of Iranian origin. At the same time, Aliev did his best to isolate it from Iranian proper and to relate it to Talysh (Aliev 1960: 11; Aliev 1989c: 27-28).

One more important point in Aliev's perspective was the early polities in Azerbaijan territory that were needed to provide Azeri statehood with very long historical roots. Aliev called the Manna Kingdom of the 8th century B.C. the first large state in the territory of northwestern Iran, that preceded the Media of the 7th – 6th centuries B.C. (Aliev 1960: 176-184). In comparison with the concept prevalent at the turn of the 1950s, Aliev made some corrections and did not insist that the Azeris originated from the Medes (Ibragimov, Tokarzhevsky 1964: 59-60).

In Aliev's view, the crucial role in the formation of the future Azeris was played partly by the "Median-Atropatenian people" who were the native inhabitants

and partly by Iranian newcomers in the 1st Millennium B.C. to the territory of Media Atropatene (Aliev 1960: 113). This issue was so much important for him that in the 1980s he carried out a special study of Media Atropatene's history. He represented it as an independent state flourishing in northwestern Iran from the end of the 4th century B.C. and throughout the Hellenistic period. In the course of time, an ethnic merger of the descendants of the numerous earlier tribes (Guti, Lullubi, Hurrites, Mannei, and others) with the Medes occurred. In Aliev's view, this process was of extraordinary importance: first, the name of Atarpatakan appeared that was the basis for the term Azerbaijan; second, the Iranian-speaking Atropatakaneans were among the direct ancestors of the contemporary Azeris, who had lost Iranian and shifted to Turkic during the medieval period (Aliev 1989c: 3-4). Paraphrasing the first Russian chronicle, Aliev wrote: "from Atarpatakan... the land of Azerbaijan originated" (Aliev 1989c: 32). Instructively, at this time Aliev had already based his arguments on the Soviet theory of ethnos and recognized that a language was one of the most important markers of ethnos, and that its replacement caused the loss of a former ethnic identity (Aliev 1989c: 24). He was not embarrassed though, and kept insisting on ethnic continuity beginning with the earliest local inhabitants. Yet he remarked that the Median ethnic element occupied the leading position in the Kingdom of Atropatene and that it literally swallowed up the entire preceding local population. To put it another way, a completely new ethnic entity emerged in Atropatene, which, nonetheless, inherited a lot from the indigenous population (Aliev 1988c, 1989c: 30-31, 41-42). In fact, Aliev came back to the "Median" concept of the formation of the Azeri people. Indeed, he assumed that the "Atropatenian ethnos" was directly descended from the Medes, who introduced it to the Indo-European world.

In brief, Aliev believed that the Azeri people emerged in the territory of Azerbaijan in the course of the long and complex process of the development of local tribes from Atropatene and Caucasian Albania – the Mannei, Caspians, Medes, and Albanians, who spoke different languages, in particular, North Caucasian (the Albanians) and Iranian (the Medes). Only in the Middle Ages, after they integrated several waves of steppe nomads, did they shift to Turkic. Aliev placed special emphasis on the fact that this concept was consciously aimed at "bourgeois ideas of pan-Turkism" (Aliev 1988a: 59-62). That is why he was especially irritated with less-professional revisionist concepts, and, as we shall see further on, he invested a lot of energy in struggling against them.

Another well-known Azeri historian, the Academician Ziya M. Buniatov (1921-1997), was an even more consistent proponent of the "Albanian concept". He began to study the origins of the Azeri people at that time when the Median concept was already in decline. That is why, while being an adherent of the autochthonist approach, Buniatov associated the direct Azeri ancestors with the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania. These views of his affected the Azeri historical profession for decades. Buniatov himself was an expert on the early medieval period and did a lot to prove that the Azeri people had Albanian roots. He was born in the provincial

Azerbaijan town of Astara and hardly dreamed of pursuing the profession of historian. After graduation from high school, he was trained at the Baku infantry school (1939-1941), and proved a brave officer during World War II. For his deeds, he was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union, with numerous orders and medals. In 1945-1946, he served as assistant to the military commandant in one of the areas in Soviet-occupied Berlin. Being transferred to the reserves, he studied at the prestigious Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in 1946-1950. After graduation, he was a post-graduate student there under the tutelage of the well-known Soviet specialist in Arabic studies, Ye. A. Beliaev. In 1954, he defended his candidate's thesis, which dealt with Italian imperialism in Africa. After coming back to Baku, for ten years (1954-1964) he was affiliated with the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. Then, in 1964, he moved to the newly established Institute of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR. There he was the chairman of the department, and since 1981 almost without a break he was the director of the Institute. At the beginning of perestroika, it seemed that his time as director was over, but in 1988, he was elected director by the staff of the Institute. After 1970, Buniatov was the editor-in-chief of the chief journal in humanities in Azerbaijan – "Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR, a series in history, philosophy and law". His made a fast-moving career. In 1967, he became a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR; in 1976, he became an Academician; in 1980, he was awarded the State Prize of Azerbaijan for his book, "The State of Atabegs in Azerbaijan"; and in 1982, he was awarded the honorary title of distinguished scholar of Azerbaijan. Thus, Buniatov was able to seriously affect the development of the humanities in Azerbaijan, and the Azerbaijan authorities had to reckon with him (Kargamanov 1981; Zulalova 1988: 7-36).

When Azerbaijan had a chance to demonstrate its scholarly achievements and to show off its outstanding contemporaries, this honor was more often than not vested on Academician Buniatov. For example, this occurred in 1982, when the newspaper "Pravda" organized a public showing of the intellectual resources of various republics on the occasion of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the USSR. The Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences found it reasonable to provide "Pravda" with a picture of Buniatov, accompanied by all his high titles (Abdullaev 1982). True, his glory came primarily of his military feats – there was no other Academician in the USSR who was a Hero of the Soviet Union (Zubkov 1985a, 1985b).

The Institute of the Peoples of the Near and Middle East focused mainly on the study of Turkey and Iran, and was very politically important. Yet, since the very late 1950s, Buniatov's interests were shifting to the medieval history of Azerbaijan, and only ten years after his defense of his candidate thesis, he defended a doctoral thesis that dealt with "Azerbaijan in the 7th – 9th centuries", marking an important step in the development of the profession of history in Azerbaijan (Zulalova 1988: 7-36).



It is worth noting that Buniatov's career developed not without problems. Sometimes he was attacked for his inordinate sympathy with the Turkic theme. Thus, in 1971 together with some other Azeri historians (M. Ismailov, S. Alijarov) he was accused by the First Secretary of the CPA, Heydar Aliiev, of deviation from the Party line, romanticization of the past and concessions to "bourgeois falsifiers" (Aliiev 1971: 3). Thoughtful people knew that the pan-Turkic concepts were the target, although they were not named openly. In those days all of these charges constituted a grave warning and could have had far-reaching consequences for those accused. It is also true that Aliiev's attack was probably a routine speech made to please his Moscow bosses. Instructively, he avoided mentioning "bourgeois nationalism" in his long speech. The historians he accused not only retained all their positions, but also kept developing concepts that were hardly compatible with Soviet internationalism. One cannot help assuming that they had the moral support of the Azerbaijani authorities.

Years passed before close relationships between Buniatov and Aliiev received strong confirmation. Since 1993 Heydar Aliiev came to power in an independent Azerbaijan, and Buniatov became one of the founders of the "New Azerbaijan" pro-presidential political party, a member of its leadership and a deputy in the new parliament of Azerbaijan. He was assassinated in February 1997 in obscure circumstances (Useinov 1997).

In 1965, Buniatov published a monograph entitled "Azerbaijan in the 7th – 9th centuries", which became an important reference book for many Azeri scholars who studied the early medieval period and the formation of the Azeri people. One editor of the book was Yampol'sky, whose ideas were very influential on contemporary Azeri scholarship especially as concerned Azeri ethnogenesis. For example, his ideas were echoed in the book by Aliiev analyzed above. However, Buniatov was actually the first Azeri researcher to focus directly on ethnogenetic issues rather than on socio-political history. He extended the term "Azerbaijan" to early *Caucasian Albania and other medieval states developed in northern Azerbaijan*. Another remarkable feature of his book was that it clearly demonstrated the Azeri disposition to identify themselves most of all according to their place of birth rather than in reference to their language or culture. This approach manifested itself in Buniatov's attitude towards the medieval local cultural activists who, he argued, associated themselves mainly with their native areas (Buniatov 1965a: 9, 11).

Buniatov's book strongly advocated an idea, tempting to the Azeri authors, that the "indigenous Turks" lived in Azerbaijan, long before the Seljuqs arrived. Buniatov associated those early Turks with the waves of Hunns, Sabirs and Khazars, and maintained that Turkification had already commenced in the 4th – 5th centuries (Buniatov 1965a: 179-182).

Buniatov had no doubt that the Islamized and Turkified Albanians were Azeri ancestors. In his view, the Karabagh Armenians were also the descendants of those Albanians, but in this case *Armenized and converted to monophysiticism*. Moreover, he did his best to prove that the Albanians adopted Christianity much

earlier than the Armenians did (Buniatov 1965a: 97-100). To put it another way, as the American historian Robert H. Hewsen remarked, this concept actually derived both the Azeris and the Karabagh Armenians from the same ancestors, which was in perfect accordance with the Soviet adjustment of the rapprochement and merger of various ethnic groups, and in fact approved the assimilation of the Armenian minority by the Azeris. Hewsen also noticed the potential for Azeri claims to lands of the Armenian SSR (Hewsen 1982: 28).

Being guided by a patriotic approach, Buniatov reproduced the Azeri argument, already common at those days, that a leader of a religious-mystical movement in the 9th century, Babek, a native of northwestern Iran, was a hero of the Azeri people (cf. Buniatov 1965a: 236-269, and Guseinov 1958: 118-124). Having claimed that, Buniatov failed to mention that Babek spoke Persian, and ignored the witnesses of contemporaries who called him the "Persian" (Buniatov 1965a: 334, 337)<sup>33</sup>.

Yet, the wide spread of Persian in medieval Azeri politics and states did not hold back Buniatov. Indeed, as we already know, Azeri was by no means viewed an important identity factor by Azeri authors. Buniatov made it clear that the Seljuq sultans were illiterate, they relied on Persian assistants, and that was why all documents and business letters were completed in Persian. Moreover, he even recognized that Persian was the mother tongue of the Shirvan elite, and it was in this language that marvelous verses were composed at the Shirvan-Shah court. Yet, he used to speak of the "Persian speakers", rather than the Persian poets, and constructed a "Shirvan group in the Azeri poetic school" for them. He considered Nizami Ganjevi the greatest of them (Buniatov 1978: 225-230, 1991: 26-30). He listed Mkhitar Gosh, Vanakan and Kirakos Gandzaketsi among his contemporaries, without mentioning that they wrote in Armenian and identified themselves with the Armenians. There was no problem for Buniatov here, and he called them Azeris without reserve. Yet, it is well known that, for example, Mkhitar Gosh dreamed of the restoration of a united Armenian state (for that, see Safarian 1989).

In the meantime, in the 1970s – 1980s, Aliiev's and Buniatov's concepts looked obsolete to young Azeri scholars, and intellectual thought was undergoing a crisis. The revisionist approach seemed more tempting, it had the allure of a fresh view and especially of the ability to feed the nationalist idea. That is why, although the fundamental volumes on the history of Azerbaijan which came out in the 1970s – 1980s followed Aliiev's views, he was losing supporters over the course of time. One of his few supporters was A. S. Sumbatzade. In his works, Azerbaijan was becoming an everlasting body. It was naturally developing from a long, continuous evolutionary process that had started in the Palaeolithic (an Early Palaeolithic cave of Azykh, the earliest human site in the USSR, discovered in 1965, was referred to). The author pointed out proudly that Azerbaijan was one of the west Asian regions where a settled life had commenced, farming was invented, and the first cities emerged. He wrote of the "statehood of Azerbaijan" as if it had been known since the beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. To put it other way, a country with the



name of "Azerbaijan" and its territory made up the core of his concept. According to Sumbatzade, Manna, flourishing in northwestern Iran in the 9th – 7th centuries B.C., was one of the first Azeri states. He populated it with Guti and Lullubi, who spoke some languages of North Caucasian stock or, probably, even Elamic. He did emphasize that they had no relations with neighboring Iranian-speaking Media, and even after they had been subjugated by the latter, Iranization did not occur there. They were still not Iranized by the Parthian period. Only the Sussanians introduced a substantial Iranian element there. Yet, following Aliev, Sumbatzade pointed that, although the "Azeri" language was of Iranian stock, it was quite different from the Persian (Sumbatzade 1979, 1990: 33-35, 47-49). We shall see further on that this intentional dissociation of the Persian world was closely connected with the current political situation.

At the same time, Sumbatzade attached more importance to the Albanians and argued that the "history of Caucasian Albania is the history of Soviet Azerbaijan". Daghestan was excluded from the latter (Sumbatzade 1990: 54-56) which made a problem for the Daghestani historians who were also inclined to derive their ancestors from Caucasian Albania. He did not recognize the Armenization of the Albanian population from the right bank of the Kura River, either, and referred to the Udins, who had maintained their original Albanian language until very recently (Sumbatzade 1990: 54-56). The author did not seem to notice that this argument might be used against the Turkification of the Albanians with no less success.

At the same time, Sumbatzade came out against the revisionist tendency to push Turkic history in the Caspian Sea region far back into the past, and defended the orthodox view that the Turks had arrived from the Asian hinterlands. Yet, he agreed that over the course of the 1st Millennium A.D. the Caspian region was frequently invaded by waves of Turkic nomads and maintained that, as a result, Azerbaijan was a Turkic country from the remote past (Sumbatzade 1990: 78-91).

Sumbatzade made sharp distinctions among ethnicity, culture and language. He argued that "in respect to ethnic affiliation the Azeris are related to the earliest inhabitants of the country – the Mannei, Atropatenians and Albanians, but in their language they are certainly a Turkic-speaking people" (Sumbatzade 1990: 5). He claimed further on that the "Azeri people had formed in the course of mixing: a merger between, on the one hand, the indigenous population of the country originating from the Guti-Lullubi tribes, the Mannei, Atropatenians and Albanians, and, on the other hand, migrants, most of all the Turkic-speaking tribes whose language had won the final victory" (Sumbatzade 1990: 10). He recognized that some Turkic groups had infiltrated the Caspian lowland corridor beginning with the Hunn invasion (2nd century A.D.), but was stuck to the idea that Turkic language became widespread only after the 11th -13th centuries A.D. Yet, even after that date, Turkic was popular only among commoners, and the literary tradition was represented initially by Arabic, then by Persian (Sumbatzade 1990: 130-131, 149).

Moreover, in his view, the Azeri ancestors had to change their language a few times: it occurred in southern Azerbaijan twice (first they shifted to Iranian "Azeri"

and then to "Turki"), and in northern Azerbaijan – once (they shifted from Albanian to Turkic) (Sumbatzade 1990: 17). Thus, Sumbatzade's approach clearly adhered to the main goal of the "conservative" view – to secure the territory of all Azerbaijan for the Azeris through their identification with the earliest inhabitants. The Iranians who carried out the Iranization of southern Azerbaijan were presented as the main enemies.

That is why it seemed very important for the Azeris to isolate themselves from their Iranian heritage. They were already less fascinated with Media. The Manna inhabitants seemed to be much more promising ancestors. First, the state of Manna emerged earlier than Media did and was able to compete with other contemporary states of the Middle East. Second, its founders were linguistically related to the indigenous Caucasian people, including Caucasian Albania. Third, it played an important role in the consolidation of previously separate local tribes. Fourth, it happened that the Iranian-speaking nomads who had arrived from the north did not affect its population in any significant way. All these arguments were discussed in a book by S. M. Kashkai that focused on the Manna kingdom (Kashkai 1977). Thus, the autochthonous concept of the Azeri people's formation was given an important new link. The adherents of this concept obtained an additional argument for their claims, that the "language and the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan did not change much" for thousands of years (Gukasian 1981: 124).

Yet, this concept had its own faults. For example, it was unclear how one could relate Manna to Atropatene and Caucasian Albania if there was a big chronological gap between them. The Chairman of the Department of Architectural Constructions at the Azerbaijan Engineer-Constructing Institute, D. A. Akhundov, attempted to resolve this problem. He not only emphasized the Albanian roots of the Azeris, but also tried to push them back to the past, constructing a pre-Albanian state of Caspiana. He identified its population with the Caspians as if they occupied all the Caucasus in the very early days, and then merged with the Albanians and were incorporated into Caucasian Albania. Moreover, he also constructed some "Albanian-Aryan" people who have actually never existed, and depicted a pattern of unbroken cultural continuity from the Neolithic up to the Middle Ages. While referring to quite questionable sources and his own equivocal assumptions, Akhundov presented Azerbaijan as a wealthy country with cities already by the beginning of the 1st Millennium B.C. and ascribed the monumental fortifications erected by the Sussanians to the creative activity of the local inhabitants<sup>34</sup>). His fantasy went so far as to remove the capital of Caucasian Albania to the place where contemporary Baku is situated, and to identify the Apsheron peninsula with Aryana Vedj, the legendary country of the Avesta Aryans (Akhundov 1986: 6, 60-64, 122, 130). Should one wonder after that that he constructed an early urban civilization in Nakhjivan at the beginning of the 2nd Millennium B.C. (Akhundov 1986: 181-202)? In brief, he did his best to first, represent the Albanians as the direct ancestors of the contemporary Azeris, and second, to draw an unbroken continuity between the Albanians and the earliest local cultures, then to represent the Albanians as the

founders of one of the first civilizations on Earth.

## CHAPTER 11

### REVISIONISTS: THE PAN-TURKIC ASSAULT

As we can already see, the "conservatives" were less interested in the problem of language replacement, because for them cultural and biological features were the main characteristics of a people. If these features demonstrated continuity, language shift seemed to be of subsidiary importance and could not affect the nature of the people.

The language issue played a much more important role for the "revisionists". For them, loyalty to the Turkic language meant the strengthening of the relationships with the Turkic world and, most of all, with Turkey, where they were searching for support in case of emergency. That is why they did their best to push Turkic as deep as possible into the Azerbaijan past. The "revisionist school" began to take shape in Azerbaijan by the turn of the 1960s (Geibullaev 1991: 50). As one of its leaders, the historian S. S. Alijarov, explained later on, the school emerged in response to attempts to downplay the role of the Turkic legacy and to impose Iranian ancestors, represented by the Medes, on the Azeris (for that, see Sumbatzade 1987: 102, 133; Astourian 1994: 54). Indeed, under Stalin, when pan-Turkism and Islam were presented as the bitter enemies of the Soviet Union, Turkic and Muslim studies were by no means inspired and were treated as unsafe. It is no accident that for decades, Azeri archeology focused on the prehistoric and early medieval past; the study of Turkic and Muslim monuments was avoided. By inertia, this tendency was still there even in the 1950s – 1960s, after the political climate had relaxed. All of this led to dissatisfaction and irritation among those Azeris who were willing to be proud of their glorious Turkic ancestors and identified themselves with the Muslim culture.

All of this contributed to the development of revisionism within Azeri scholarship. The "revisionists" made every effort to reduce the role of the Seljuq conquest to a less-important event and, at the same time, to push the appearance of the Turkic ethnic groups in southeast Transcaucasia deep into the past or even to represent them as true indigenous inhabitants. As we already know, this sort of publication came out even in the 1960s. Sometimes they found space even in the prestigious journals of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR (for example, see Yusifov 1961: 26, note 12; Rzaev 1965; Gukasian 1968b: 118-121; Azerli 1974). It is worth noting that the most radical pan-Turkic views were published only in Azeri. To give only one example, in his article, R. Gurban extensively

referred to the pan-Turkic historical heritage and the glory of the early Turks. Being fascinated with some highly questionable etymologies, he tried to prove that the term "Azerbaijan" was coined in a genuinely Turkic environment (Gurban 1968).

In the 1980s, these ideas were not only picked up by science-fiction writers, but also began to infiltrate university textbooks and the academic productions of Azeri scholars. In particular, they were appreciated by the editorial board of the magazine, "Elm ve həyat" (Science and Life) published by the Association "Znanie" (Knowledge) of the Azerbaijan SSR. Sometimes these views were disseminated by the magazine, "Azerbaijan", the organ of the Union of Writers of the Azerbaijan SSR, and by some Baku newspapers. They were even published by the academic "Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR" which was evidence that powerful forces supported the "revisionists".

Even highly emotional, albeit belated, interventions made by such influential figures as the Academician Ziya M. Buniatov, and professor Igrar G. Aliev (Buniatov 1986b; 1987a; 1988; Buniatov, Neimatova 1985; Aliev 1986a; 1988a: 59-68; 1989a; 1990b) were unable to effectively combat "revisionists". Yet, the attitudes of these scholars towards "revisionism" were hardly consistent. Indeed, as we already know, the former ran the "Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR", and the latter let the revisionists organize regular meetings in his office. Moreover, in his book, "History of Media" Aliev explored some very dubious linguistic reconstructions and, as it was put by his reviewers, demonstrated poor knowledge of the methodology of contemporary historical linguistics (Melikishvili et al. 1962). In the 1960s, Buniatov was among those who started the search for the early Turks in the territory of Azerbaijan, but in 1986 he turned round and emphatically argued against the idea of the Turks in early Azerbaijan and against Turkification during the pre-Seljuq period (Buniatov 1987a: 125-126). Moreover, he now not only confirmed that the first mass Turkic (Seljuq) resettlement in the territory of Azerbaijan took place in the 11th century, but insisted that almost the entire population of Shirvan, from Derbent to the Lower Kura River, spoke Iranian even in the early 13th century. He concluded that the process of the Turkification of Shirvan had lasted until the establishment of Soviet power (Buniatov 1986c; 1990b).

The reason for the coordinated intervention of both these influential Azeri historians against the revisionists was quite simple. It was preceded by a signal from Moscow, when the Academician-secretary of the Division of History of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Sergei L. Tikhvinsky, spoke out harshly against the struggle between the national historical schools for a "cultural heritage" (Tikhvinsky 1986: 10-11). In particular, he was taking aim at pushing early Turkic history into the unwarrantably remote past. Naturally, as an official figure, Tikhvinsky spoke not in his own name but also on behalf of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and local scholars were accustomed to reckoning with that. Moreover, in the mid-1980s, national and ethnic problems drew the attention of the XXVII Congress of the CPSU, which took alarm concerning the growth of ethnocentrism

and the romanticizing of the past; at that time they once again began to talk of nationalism and chauvinism (Novosel'tsev 1985; Bromley 1986: 84-85).

As we already know, Buniatov himself put a powerful spur to the search for earlier traces of Turks in the territory of Azerbaijan. Even well trained Azeri researchers followed him, carrying on the task (Sumbatzade 1987: 134). For example, an expert in the early medieval history of Azerbaijan, S. B. Ashurbeily, wrote not only of the early waves of Turkic nomads which flooded Azerbaijan in the early medieval period, but even of some earlier Turks, as though they had lived there before the Hunn arrival. She also spoke of intensive Turkification in the 6th - 8th centuries as though Turkic had become widespread among the Albanians (Ashurbeily 1967: 62-65, 1983: 21-24, 61-67, 1988: 231-232). In his turn, the historian of the arts, N. I. Rzaev, also described the arrival of the Oghuz Turks in Azerbaijan and their active participation in the local cultural process, beginning from at least the first centuries A.D. (Rzaev 1976: 183, 194). Similar views were developed by the philologist, M. Seidov, who attempted to connect the early Turks with the composition of the Iranian Avesta and even of Sumerian epics (Seidov 1983). There is no question that the evidence at hand was hardly sufficient for those far-reaching conclusions.

Nonetheless, the idea of early Turkification gradually began to infiltrate school textbooks. For example, a textbook on the history of Azerbaijan was published by Azerbaijan State University in 1969. There they argued that mass migrations of Turkic-speaking Hunns and Khazars into the territory of Azerbaijan had already occurred by the 5th - 7th centuries. An Arab author of the 7th century was referred to as if he called Azerbaijan a "Turkic country". The textbook maintained that the process of consolidation of the Turkic-speaking Azeri people was successfully developed on the eve of the Arab conquest and that it was finally completed in the 11th - 12th centuries, when the Oghuz and Seljuqs arrived (Kaziev et al. 1969: 9-10, 17). At the same time, the authors did not explain how that could be consistent with the dominance of Arabic in the liturgy and Persian in clerical work and belles-lettres. Instead, they did indeed note that there was already a literature in Azeri in the 13th - 15th centuries, and that "dozens of poets of the brotherly Armenian people" took part in composing it (Kaziev et al. 1969: 18-19).

The "radical revisionists" went even further. One of the first Azeri revisionists, the philologist V. L. Gukasian, based his views on the assumption of mass Turkification of early medieval Albania, which became a commonplace in Azeri historical publications. Thus, he argued that a huge wave of Turkic newcomers was observed in Caucasian Albania in the 7th century. In his view, there were already numerous "Turkic-speaking groups" there by that time, who played a crucial role in that Turkic was adopted by the bulk of the population (he avoided discussing which particular Turkic dialect was in question, though). In order to prove that, he looked for Turkic loan words in early medieval Armenian and Georgian chronicles. He also maintained that there was a Turkic population in Georgian territory in the late 1st Millennium A.D. and that the Turks predominated in Kartli, i.e. in the heartland of



historical Georgia, in the 11th – 12th centuries. At that time Turkic affected Persian as well, he said (Gukasian 1978)<sup>35</sup>. Some authors "revealed" evidence of Turkic being used in Azerbaijan at the beginning of the Christian era in medieval Arabic manuscripts (Azerli 1974) or quite incautiously interpreted archaeological materials (Rzaev 1965).

Not only were they searching for earlier roots of a Turkic-speaking milieu; the roots of the Azeri culture in general and its connections with well-known or famous historical facts were on the agenda. Thus, a fashionable book of the 1980s read that the *Caspians of the classical authors were the earliest ancestors of the Azeris*<sup>36</sup>. It also said that they invented Zoroastrian rituals, that Baku was visited by the classical Romans, that a classical Greek city might have flourished in that area, and that in general Baku was a very old city that had possibly been built in the 1st Millennium B.C. (Veliev 1987).

A big role in the final formation of the "revisionist school" was played by a regular seminar on the ethnogenesis and formation of the Azeri people, which met at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR at the beginning of the 1980s. The papers presented at the seminar were published in the edited volume, "Towards the problem of the ethnogenesis of the Azeri people" (Baku, 1984), which served as a sort of revisionist manifesto (for that, see Nissman 1987: 10)<sup>37</sup>.

What was in that volume? One of the initiators of the project was the historian, S. S. Alijarov, a specialist in the history of the oil industry in the Baku region in the end of the 19th century. In many respects, he followed Yampol'sky and Gukasian. He once again referred to some cuneiform evidence of the presence of Turks, to supposedly Turkic place names in the classical literature, to early Turks in the territories of Georgia, Armenia and even in Sumer. He was thirsty for evidence of early mass occupation of Transcaucasia by the Turks, in order to prove the formation of the Azeri people in the 7th – 9th centuries, i.e., before the Seljuq arrival (Alijarov 1984). It is worth mentioning that Alijarov was the author of the chapters on the history of Azerbaijan before the 19th century in the aforementioned textbook, published by the Department of History of Azerbaijan of Azerbaijan State University (Kaziev et al. 1969).

Whereas Alijarov recognized the early Turkification of the Albanians, another author, Kemal Aliev, basing himself on the dubious manipulation of place names, did his best to prove that some Albanian tribes, in particular, the Utians, were Turkic-speakers from the very beginning, and that they represented the first wave of Turkic newcomers in Transcaucasia (Aliev 1984). The philologist, G. A. Geibullaev, went even further and identified all the Albanians as a Turkic-speaking population; he presented their "Arran language" as Turkic, and ascribed their early writing system to the Turks (Geibullaev 1984). The last point in this story was made by the physical anthropologist, R. M. Kasymova, who made every effort to trace the formation of the biological Azeri type from the Palaeolithic (Kasymova 1984).

Despite the poverty of the authors' arguments, the volume was a clear

manifestation of the appearance of a new concept of the formation of the Azeri people. Now, the latter must have spoken Turkic from the very beginning, rather than being only a genuinely indigenous people. To put it another way, Turkic and indigenous status finally got married. Thus, the Azeri people reentered the family of Turkic peoples. Neither Media nor Atropatene had anything to do with that, and they were not mentioned at all. All this excited the Azeri intellectuals, and the volume in question was considered an "important landmark in Azeri historical literature" (Mamedov 1990).

The volume had opened a Pandora's box, and the Azeri academic field was flooded with numerous pseudo-scholarly publications whose authors did their best, first to prove the incredibly deep roots of Turkic in the region, and second, to identify various ancient peoples with the Turks and to settle them over vast territories. Turkic appropriation of the remote past commenced. An Azeri linguist, A. Mamedov, argued strenuously for Sumerian-Turkic linguistic similarities (Mamedov 1984. For a criticism, see Aliev 1988a: 63-64). These were a subject of fascination for Turkic intellectuals, after the publication of the controversial novel "Az i ya", by the Kazakh poet, Oljas Suleimenov, in Alma-Ata in 1975 (for that, see Buniatov 1987). A foreign observer treated the latter as an "anti-scientific revival" with features of a "colonial revolt" (Diat 1984). This definition fits the school of the Azeri revisionists to no less extent, with the only difference that, in contrast to Suleimenov, its advocates were considered true scholars.

While perceiving perestroika as a call for the rejection of former dogmas, the revisionists rushed to revise all the established views, including those that had been well confirmed by generations of various scholars. Through Alijarov's lips, the revisionists maintained that the identification of the Iranian-speaking Medes with the Azeri ancestors was the heritage of Stalin's era, and one should totally turn it down (Alijarov 1988). The search for early Turkic-speakers in the Middle East seemed to be a promising alternative.

One of the most active revisionists, a specialist in Oriental studies and a professor at the Azerbaijan Pedagogical Institute, Yu. B. Yusifov, manifested lots of enthusiasm for this issue. He found Turkic-speakers in the Near East in the 3rd – 1st Millennia B.C., argued for the emergence of a Turkic Azeri language in the 3rd – 7th centuries, and for the completion of the Azeri people's formation in the 7th – 8th centuries. He did his best to represent the Azeris, speaking Turkic, as the true indigenous inhabitants who, for centuries, lived side by side with the Iranians (Yusifov 1987). Yusifov emphatically objected to the then common practice of identifying the Azeri ancestors with Media and Caucasian Albania natives who initially spoke Iranian and North Caucasian languages, and shifted to Turkic only under the Seljuqs. He referred to two place names, "Aratta" and "Ushkaia", identified them as Turkic without any reserve, and, as a result, argued that Turkic-speakers inhabited the Lake Urmia area from the Early Bronze Age (Yusifov 1987: 102, 1988a: 17-19)<sup>38</sup>. He demonstrated no less enthusiasm when he tried to revise the Scythian linguistic affiliation and endowed they were bilingual; in his view,

they were fluent in both Iranian and Turkic. Moreover, he claimed that they had arrived in Azerbaijan long before the 7th century B.C. (though there is no evidence of any Scythians there, then, at all! V. Sh.).

On this basis, he revised the linguistic affiliations of several well-known archaeological cultures. Now, not only the Scythian and the Andronovo cultures had to be filled with the Turkic elements, but even the Kura-Arax culture of the Early Bronze Age – widespread in Transcaucasia and northern areas of the Near East – was firmly connected with the “proto-Azeris” (Yusifov 1988a: 19-20, 1989b)<sup>39</sup>.

Whereas Yusifov tried to be cautious and wrote only of the “bilingualism” of the Scythians and some other related groups, the philologist, G. A. Geibullaev, listed all of them within a Turkic entity without any reserve. He maintained that until the 19th century, i.e., before Transcaucasia was annexed by Russia, both northern and southern Azerbaijan were inhabited by the same ethnic community, that the closely related Atropatenian and Albanian peoples had developed there from early times, and that they both had contributed to the Azeri people’s formation. He believed that the formation of the “Turkic-speaking Atropatenian people” took place in Media from the 4th century B.C. By the time that he began to write his book, the name “Atropatenian people”, unknown in the past, became so common in Azeri literature that Geibullaev considered it possible to go slightly further and to claim that the term “Atropatenians” was the self-definition of the Median inhabitants (Geibullaev 1991: 39-40. For a criticism, see Aliev 1988a: 65-66, 1989a: 92, 1990b). True, he recognized that Iranian-speaking “Azeris” lived there as well, but he insisted that the “proto-Turks” made up the bulk of the local population. This concept required no Turkification at all, since the indigenous people were declared to be Turks from the very beginning. Moreover, in contrast to what professional linguists taught, Geibullaev argued that Oghuz speech came to the Azerbaijan territory not with the arrival of the Oghuz people in the 11th century, but many centuries earlier – with the Hunns and Pechenegs (? V. Sh.).

While analyzing tribal and place names in the territory of Azerbaijan, the author based his views on quite arbitrary reasoning rather than thoughtful linguistic study. He used any scrap of archaeological, physical anthropological, or ethnographic data to prove that the Scythians, Sakae, Sarmatians, and early Media inhabitants were Turkic-speakers. Since archaeologists had defined the Scythian entity through cultural homogeneity, Geibullaev objected to the identification of an archaeological culture with an ethnic group. He assumed that a uniform culture could be an umbrella for different ethnic groups, and that a burial rite was not a reliable ethnic indicator (Geibullaev 1991: 284-285, 288). One would certainly agree that there are no rigid bonds between archaeological culture and ethnic group (Shnirelman 1993), but there are no good reasons to rely too much on retrospective methodology, either. Nonetheless, Geibullaev – armed with the latter – emphasized the cultural continuity between the steppe Scythian cultures and the later Turkic ones, and interpreted this as evidence of linguistic continuity (Geibullaev 1991: 291), despite the fact that Scythian is reliably identified as an Iranian language by

all the specialists. Thus, Geibullaev chose only those methodological tools that might help to confirm his highly ethnocentric concept, and threw away all the rest.

In the meantime, unscrupulousness and poverty of methodology caused serious disagreements among the revisionists themselves. Thus, whereas many of them were searching for a Turkic homeland for the Azeris where they live today, Geibullaev was quite positive that a homeland might be located in southern Siberia and the Altai Mountains (Geibullaev 1991: 308).

While demonstrating a skeptical attitude towards archaeology and historical linguistics, Geibullaev based his conclusions on very scarce data about place names, which could be interpreted quite differently. He revealed accidental lexical coincidences and, on this basis, made conclusions about early Turkic speech<sup>40</sup>. He relied completely on the testimony of early authors and avoided any criticism of historical sources. In contrast, he rejected other scholars’ views if they contradicted his own, and did not make any attempt to analyze their arguments. He accused his opponents of Eurocentrism, attachment to the “scholastic” Indo-European concept as if the latter never considered the achievements of Turkic studies. In this way, he swept aside any objections of his views as politicized and, thus, unjust (Geibullaev 1991: 9, 283, 288).

At the same time, he was by no means a purist himself. For example, this is how he explained why the Azeri people had come onto the scene long before the 11th century. Indeed, in this case the Iranian scholars would lose ground for considering Nizami and some other famous medieval cultural activists Persians (Geibullaev 1991: 48). Instructively, even the editor of his book, I. Babaev, had to say he considered the main points of his concept very disputable or even unconvincing, although he recognized the value of some of his etymologies (Geibullaev 1991: 3-7).

In the end of the 1980s, the revisionist views were summed up by two Azeri Doctors of Philology, E. Alibeizade and K. Veliev, specialists in the history of Azeri language and literature. They distinguished three periods in the history of the Azeri language – Sumerian, Scythian-Turkic and Turkic. In fact, they pushed the reader back to the pan-Turkic concepts of the Turkish authors of the 1930s – 1940s. They identified the Early Bronze Age Kura-Arax archaeological culture with a Turkic-speaking population, and called its territory the “true land of our ancestors of Sumerian-Turkic origins”. Would one be surprised that, after that, they ascribed the achievements of the Sumerian culture to the “early Azeris”, identified the “Epic of Gilgamesh” with the Azeri epic “Dede Korkud”, saw the early “Sumerians-Turks” resettled from Mesopotamia to the Yenisei River Valley, and then, turning them into the Scythians, sent them back to Transcaucasia through Central Asia? At the same time, with reference to Buniatov’s earlier publications, the authors maintained that Azerbaijan was populated by Turks long before the Arab conquest, and tried to impose Turkic ancestry on most of the early Azerbaijan inhabitants.

Quite paradoxically, combining both hyper-migrationist and hyper-autochthonist concepts, the authors stated that there were no grounds to speak of the

'non-indigenous' nature of the Azeris and their late "Turkification". Curiously, they presented their concept as an important contribution to the struggle against the "distortion of the past" that caused inter-ethnic hostility. Even more instructive was that their article had been published by the main organ of the CC CPA, the "Communists of Azerbaijan" magazine. This means that by the end of the 1980s the Azerbaijan Communist authorities had begun to demonstrate openly their sympathy with pan-Turkic ideas. It is no accident that the authors blamed the Soviet struggle against "pan-Turkism" and "pan-Islamism" as a legacy of the cult of personality that had to be discarded (Alibeizade, Veliev 1989).

Simultaneously, the newspaper "Youth of Azerbaijan", the organ of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Comsomol, published an article whose authors were irritated with I. Aliev's concept, as though it identified the Azeris with "Turkified Persians". The authors put into question the Iranian affiliation of the Medes and Atropatenians, and argued that separate Median and Atropatenian languages were but a fiction. They also doubted that the Medes, Atropatenians and Albanians might be any well-integrated ethnic communities. In their view, all of these were numerous tribes with different languages, including Turkic. It was just these Turkic-speakers, rather than any later Turkic nomads, who made up the core for the further development of the Azeri people (Balaev, Kambarov 1988).

The revisionist views became especially popular in the very late 1980s – early 1990s when they were encouraged by both APF and CPA leaders, who tried to recruit the same pan-Turkic slogans for their own benefit. They were disseminated by the major Azeri scholars, rather than merely by writers and journalists. For example, in the fall 1991, the popular magazine, "Vozrozhdenie" (Revival), advocated the following ideas. The Oghuz began to settle in Azerbaijan before the Christian era; they gave the names "Ich Oghuz" and "Dysh Oghuz" to early Atropatene and Caucasian Albania; the latter were unified within the same early state (Djamshidov 1991: 34-35); Zoroaster was of Azeri origin; and "Avesta" was composed in the land of ancient Azerbaijan (Kuli-Zade 1991: 29)<sup>41</sup>. Recently, the Azeri revisionist view of history is carving its way into western literature (for example, see van der Leeuw 2000).

In 1992, a candidate thesis was defended at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the author of which argued that the Russes who attacked the Shirvan cities in the 10th century were in fact Bulgars who had nothing to do with Kievan Rus. He identified a well-known medieval term, "Sakalab", with the "Turkic Bulgars" part of whom were those Russes (Aleperov 1992: 22-26). This is how contemporary Azeri scholars attempt to cleanse early medieval Transcaucasia of any associations with the Kievan Rus, and thus with Russia.

The revisionist school emerged at the time when interest in southern (Iranian) Azerbaijan revived once again in the Azerbaijan SSR. As in the 1960s, they had once again begun to talk in Baku of "Iranian Oriental despotism" and the "Iranian yoke", and of the great rulers of the Safavi dynasty who had united the whole

Turkic population within one and the same state. The attitude towards the Arabs changed: whereas they were represented as bloodthirsty conquerors in former days, now they were appreciated as those who had united northern and southern Azerbaijan for the first time, thus, laying the groundwork for Azeri consolidation into an integrated body (Sumbatzade 1987: 134). This idea seemed a fresh one, deserving further development. In 1978, Buniatov published the book, "The Atabeg State of Azerbaijan", dealing with the medieval state that embraced all the territories of both northern and southern Azerbaijan in pre-Mongol times (Buniatov 1978)<sup>42</sup>. This was evident from the map that supplemented the book; the map was so important that Buniatov republished it in 1991 (Buniatov 1991: 18-19). True, at the end of the 1970s all these ideas were available only to a narrow circle of Azeri intellectuals and were not intended for the general public.

The political and intellectual climate was changing across the border as well. Broadcasting in Azeri started in Iran, and this awakened the interest of that minority in its ethnic affiliation; the Turkic theme together with pan-Turkism assumed a high profile in southern Azerbaijan (Swietochowski 1995: 169, 171-172). All these changes were the result of the Iranian revolution, after which numerous newspapers, magazines, and books in Azeri began to be issued in various regions of Iran, where large pockets of Azeris lived. At that time, leaflets calling for the establishment of an Azerbaijan Islamic Republic were disseminated in Tabriz. In 1979-1981, Soviet propaganda aimed at Iran revived. It called for the free development of the Azeri language and spoke against pan-Iranism. Azeri writers from both sides of the border began to openly criticize the "feudal-bourgeois chauvinism" of the former regime (Nissman 1987: 47-50; Swietochowski 1995: 189-191; Nuriev 1988). Among the leaders of the Iranian revolution were Azeri intellectuals who believed that the process of democratization would result in the granting of a status of political autonomy to the Azeri provinces. Although the Azeri leaders did demonstrate their loyalty to Iran, they also promoted cultural and linguistic nationalism. The Azeri media emphasized the idea that every people (*xalk*) had the right to develop its own national (*milli*) culture, identity and language, and that, although the Azeris together with the Iranians participated in the building of the Iranian culture, they retained their own identity and culture (Shaffer 2000: 452-456).

In 1982, the Soviet propaganda began to use the irredentist slogan "one Azerbaijan", which meant that people of the same language and culture would unite earlier or later within one and the same state. Even Heydar Aliev took up this idea. In the meantime, being alarmed by the growth of Azeri nationalism, Iranian authorities began to abolish Azeri-language newspapers and magazines, and to persecute those politicians who demonstrated sympathy with Azeri claims. By the end of 1980, it became clear that the Azeri movement had once again suffered defeat in Iran. Since that time, Soviet Azeri writers manifested their special desire to treat both parts of Azerbaijan as one and the same body, and the Arax River as its "bleeding injury" (Nissman 1987: 69-77; Swietochowski 1995: 191-192). An



interest in the events in Iran in the mid-1940s was revived; in particular, what seemed important to Azeri intellectuals was how the local media awakened national self-awareness among the Iranian Azeris at that time (Mustafaev 1991). The theme turned out to be a hot one, and it is no accident that it was in 1980 that Buniatov was awarded the State Prize of Azerbaijan for his book, "The Atabeg State of Azerbaijan".

The pan-Azeri attitude was granted official support during perestroika, when nationalism was rapidly growing in Azerbaijan, they began to discuss issues of language and culture, and formerly forbidden terms like "nationalism" and "pan-Turkism" began to be fashionable once again. All this enjoyed the sympathy of the party bosses. Suffice it to note that the "Vatan" (Motherland) Association was established in the beginning of 1988, after a special decree of the CC CPA. It focused on the development of cultural relationships with Azeris abroad, especially in Iran (Gajiev, Djafarov 1988). In March 1991, the CC CPA decreed the erection of a memorial center dedicated to the epic "Dede Korkud", an important symbol of Azeri nationalism, glorifying early Oghuz feats and describing a uniform state embracing the lands of both northern and southern Azerbaijan (Djamshidov 1991: 33). As we know, the history of Atropatene had already become an integral part of the ethnogenetic myth in Soviet Azerbaijan. That is why the cultural history of Iranian Azerbaijan was presented in Baku museums as an inseparable part of the general history of Azerbaijan. In this way, the important grounds for Azeri identity were established, and this trend could not escape Iranian Azerbaijan, where a movement for the full rights of Azeris was growing (Shaffer 2000: 460, 468).

This political and intellectual climate was very favorable for the development of a revisionist school. It is reasonable to assume that the thirst for a Turkic homeland in Transcaucasia or the Middle East had a lot to do with Soviet Azerbaijan claims for the lands of southern Azerbaijan situated in Iran (Nissman 1987: 10). These romantic attitudes were especially promoted, in the very late 1980s, when Azeri nationalism was actively searching for its position in Azerbaijan society, and pan-Turkic ideas, with their political connotations, seemed very tempting (Goldenberg 1994: 57). Just after its establishment, the APF considered the rapprochement of both Azerbaijanians one of its most crucial goals. In 1988-1989, the APF organized several meetings in Nakhjivan, where they discussed the issue of regular communications between people of northern and southern Azerbaijan, but the local authorities were less willing to meet these demands (Korchagin 1990). An APF program of 1989 recommended the strengthening of economic and cultural relationships with Iranian Azerbaijan, although a revision of the state borders was out of question (Altstadt 1992: 205). At the same time, when the frontier installations at the Soviet-Iranian border were destroyed by a crowd in December 1989, people following the leaders of the local Nakhjivan branch of the APF demanded unification with Iranian Azerbaijan (Korchagin 1990; Gafarly 1999). This slogan was supported by Azeri Academicians, who compared the division of Azerbaijan with that of Vietnam or Korea and treated it as an artificial and unjust

situation.

Thus, it is no accident that the ideas of the "revisionist school" were shared by the APF leader A. Elchibey (Astourian 1994: 62), who openly oriented himself to Turkey, promoted Turkic nationalism and used to refer to the great Turkic heritage in his public speeches (Furman 1993: 22, 1994: 156, 164). For example, Elchibey wrote a positive afterword for the above mentioned article by Mirza Bala, published in the "Azerbaijan" magazine (A. Aliev 1989). In order to impose Turkic identity on the Azeris, Elchibey changed the name of the language from "Azeri" to "Turkic" and got this approved by the Azerbaijan parliament, Milli-Majles (Stupishin 1999: 7). At the same time, he was quite negative towards Iran, and at the beginning of 1992 called upon the Iranian Azeris to unite with their northern brothers in order to establish "Greater Azerbaijan" (Goldenberg 1994: 121; Croissant 1998: 83). Meanwhile, the majority of the Iranian Azeris do not share all these ideas, and demonstrated double loyalty – Azeri and Iranian (Swietochowski 1995: 199-200, 202-203, 209; Shaffer 2000: 471). Heydar Aliiev, who replaced Elchibey as the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, avoided irritating Iran and tried to maintain friendly relations with it (Goldenberg 1994: 57, 123). At the same time, he shared his predecessor's pan-Turkic attitude and represented Turkey as the second homeland of the Azeris (Stupishin 1999: 7). He openly demonstrated all of this during his successful visit to Turkey in the end of October 1998.

In the meantime, the emergence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the fall of 1991 and TV program reception from Turkey from 1992 stirred up Azeri nationalism in Iran once again. The image of the "Turks" had changed: instead of backward peasants, they were presented now as a well-trained, prosperous population. At the same time, the Azeri self-designation was undergoing change; the term "Azeri" was coming to replace the former "Turks". In 1990, Tabriz University students demanded an upgrade of the status of Azeri, and in 1993 the Azeri delegates in the Iranian Majles united in order to defend the rights of the Azeris to promote their native language. Finally, sixty leading Azeri intellectuals called on president Khatami in 1998 to extend both the cultural and linguistic rights of the Iranian Azeris; while doing that, they referred to the Republic of Azerbaijan. Over the last ten years, relationships between both Azerbaijanians have kept on strengthening. The Iranian Azeris support the Republic of Azerbaijan in its dramatic conflict with Armenia for Nagorny Karabagh. In addition, direct business contacts have been established between the Republic of Azerbaijan and those provinces of Iran populated by the Azeris.

At the same time, the process of rapprochement is not developing as smoothly as the Azeri nationalists expected. The first contacts have already confused both sides by demonstrating the significant cultural and religious differences between them. The "northerners" were struck by the loyalty to Islam of the "southerners", and treated them as incorrigible conservatives, and the "southerners" were shocked with what they interpreted as a high level of Russification among the "northerners". Each side presents itself as more civilized than the other (Shaffer 2000: 461-470).



Thus, the pan-Turkic project of the Azeri democratic romantics turned out to fit poorly the much more complicated reality.

## CHAPTER 12

### THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE "CONSERVATIVES" AND THE "REVISIONISTS", AND SCHOOL EDUCATION

Pan-Turkic ideas by no means fascinated Igrar G. Aliev, who was already the Director of the Baku Institute of History by that time. He treated all the concepts of the "revisionist school" as amateur views and emphasized that, as a rule, the scholars who put them forward and advocate them were incompetent in dead languages and/or far from the historical profession. He demonstrated that the affiliation of Scythian with Iranian was well-established: the names of gods, kings, distinct tribes and areas, as well as customs, rituals, and mythology – all of these together with about 200 Scythian words – had convincing Iranian parallels. On the other hand, there was no linguistic evidence at all of any Turkic presence, even minor, among the Scythians. As concerned the would-be "Turkic" inscription from the Issyk mound (Kazakhstan) of the Scythian period, which was the common point of reference for the "revisionists", Aliev remarked that similar inscriptions were well known in the vast territories from Kazakhstan to Afghanistan and were, certainly, part of the early Iranian world. He had no difficulty with another "revisionist" argument, that the Byzantines used the name "Scythians" extensively to refer to the Turkic tribes of the east European steppes; indeed, for the Byzantines this name had already lost its ethnic connotations, they traditionally used it for any nomads, and not only for those!

Aliev emphatically objected to any identification of early inhabitants of Media, Atropatene and Caucasian Albania with the Turks. He provided convincing evidence of an Iranian affiliation of the Median and Atropatenian languages, advocated his own suggestion of the existence of an Atropatenian people, and indignantly rejected the assumption that the "Median issue" was imposed on the Azeris by Stalin. He treated revisionist activity as a pernicious attempt to isolate the Azeri past from the Median-Atropatenian milieu and, thus, to break their cultural continuity. Indeed, it is the latter, he taught, that provides the Azeris with a unique chance to consider themselves heirs of both early local culture and the culture of the Iranian world! Finally, he warned against hasty and incautious identifications of ethnic/tribal names with language and ethnic affiliation (Aliev 1986a, 1988a, 1989a, 1989c: 33-34, 1990. Also see Buniatov 1987<sup>43</sup>). Yet, as we can see, this latter argument allowed him to reject the data that contradicted the chosen concept, which was advantageously used by the revisionists themselves!

While analyzing the "revisionist" constructions, Aliev demonstrated their methodological poverty and inexperience in the field of study. He had every kind of reason to treat many of them as amateurs, and explained their faults with "poor professional training". To put it other way, in respect to this phenomenon he used an internal approach from within scholarship and avoided considering the socio-political context of their activity. It was unsafe to discuss the latter, and therefore Aliev acknowledged honestly that it was "difficult for him to disclose all the reasons for the aforementioned... faults of the historical-philological works". Yet, he made the reader aware of those reasons: "it was highly tempting when the point of a misunderstood national feeling was at stake, such as the problem of the Turks in early Azerbaijan, for many people to lose their reason". Moreover, he recognized that the importance of the issue in question went far beyond the narrow framework of the academic field: "the study of the ethnic history of any people is of great interest, and not only cognitive, it is important from the point of real politics" (Aliev 1988a: 59, 66, 68. Also see Aliev 1990; Buniatov 1988). The Soviet scholar was not able to go deeper into that, for it took him off into politics, which threatened him with serious problems. That is why an "externalist" approach towards a scholarly field was impossible in the USSR during recent decades, although a Soviet scholar has introduced this approach (for that, see Graham 1998: 164).

All of this affected the fate of Aliev himself, for in the end of the 1980s he was simultaneously attacked by the newspaper "Youth of Azerbaijan", and the popular journal, "Azerbaijan". The cause for that was a delay in the publication of a 9-volume "History of Azerbaijan": the project had been started by the staff of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1971, but it was still not completed by the turn of the 1990s. A writer in the newspaper "Youth of Azerbaijan", referred to the Azeris' poor knowledge of their own history, the lack or the poor quality of textbooks in history and to the worthlessness of the historical concepts, which made up the core of the 3-volume edition from the late 1950s (Agaev 1988).

After that, the aforementioned article by A. Balaev and I. Kambarov was published. It depicted a depressing climate at the Baku Institute of History – the reigning factions, the conjuncture, the conformism, the lack of freedom of discussion, the habit of labeling opponents, the poor development of archaeological and ethnographic studies, and even cases of falsification of history of the Azeri people. The authors claimed this was all the responsibility of the Director of the Institute, I. Aliev (Balaev, Kambarov 1988).

In response, Aliev referred to the complexity of the task and promised that the first volume of the new "History of Azerbaijan" would come out very soon. Unsatisfied with his explanation, the newspaper arranged a wide discussion that, on the one hand, revealed the great public interest in the publication of the series, and on the other hand confirmed that bad trends developed at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR and, in particular, at the Institute of History. It is curious that

the majority of those participating in the discussion were far from the historical profession (13 of 25 persons), and five of the twelve historians who took part were affiliated with the Institute of History. Seven of the participants openly defended revisionism and demonstrated great interest in the problem of the "early Turks" in Azerbaijan. This approach was not shared by the Institute staff, and three of them agreed with Aliev, to the extent that they said ethnogenetic issues should be discussed by specialists rather than by the general public, and that the revisionist approach demonstrated non-professionalism and simplification based on a "misunderstood patriotism". Moreover, the revisionists were accused that, while having every chance to discuss and publish their ideas without any restrictions, they proved to be unable to put forward any consistent concept of Azeri ethnogenesis (for example, see Namazov 1988; Djafarov 1988; Yunusov 1988).

At the same time, these participants in the discussion also criticized the unfavorable climate at the Institute – the stifled feelings, the gerontocracy, the lack of free discussions, the inability or unwillingness of the directorship to organize effective creative activities (Mamedova 1988; Namazov 1988). They also argued that school textbooks were out of date and that the importance of the history of Azerbaijan was underestimated in schools (Yunusova 1988). In brief, one of the hottest issues concerned Azeri youth – their education, employment and scholarly careers. Indeed, in those days the newspaper published an article by a well-known Azeri historian who recognized that the leaders of Azeri science were too old, that it was by no means easy for younger people to develop a career, and that over the last decades the effectiveness of the Institute of History had declined (Ismailov 1988).

All of these arguments revealed the true reason for the attacks against Aliev: at the end of the 1980s, elections of the directors of academic institutes had to be arranged for the first time in the history of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The revisionists, who represented the younger generation of Azeri historians, were preparing the ground for a victorious battle for the directorship and other promising positions. True, at that time they failed, and the discussions in "Youth of Azerbaijan" ceased.

Then the revisionists chose the popular Turkic language journal, "Azerbaijan", and the newspaper with the same name as their new battlefield. While representing the revisionists' constructions as recently discovered final truths, one of the authors attacked Aliev as if the latter had distorted history to hide valuable information about a local Turkic homeland in Transcaucasia. Aliev was charged with having political faults as well – sympathy with pan-Iranism, participation in the Soviet policy of the de-nationalization of peoples and even assisting those who had turned the Azeri ancestors into "newcomers-assimilators" and treated them as "unwelcome guests". As an example of his distortion of history, the author cited Aliev's opinion that the term "Azerbaijan" derived from "Atropatene" and that the latter was connected with the name Atropat. The author argued that all of these were incorrect, and that Atropat had never existed at all, as Yampol'sky had demonstrated (sic! V. Sh.). Instead, the author did his best to prove that "Avesta" was composed by Turks

who lived near Lake Urmia<sup>44</sup>). The only point that the author shared with Aliev was that ethnogenetic studies were "important in real politics" (Mamedov 1990). Another writer on this subject in the "Azerbaijan" newspaper also blamed Aliev for underestimating the Turks' role in Caucasian Albania, and accused him of Eurocentrism and "pan-Indo-Europeanism" (Khachyly 1989).

The aspiration of one of those authors to put Bactriana close to Lake Urmia and make it a Turkic state was very similar to the ideas of Mirza Bala who, forty years before that, tried to call Parthia a Turkic state (Bala 1989). It is no accident that his ideas were appreciated by the same Baku "Azerbaijan" journal at the end of the 1980s. It is also worth recalling that the afterword of this out of date article was written by Elchibey. He paid special attention to the pre-Islamic Turkic religion of Tengrianism, associated the name "Alban" with it, included an early history of Azerbaijan in the general history of the Turkic world and hinted that Caucasian Albania also played a part in this history (Aliev 1989. For that, also see Astourian 1994: 66-67).

The same ideas were advocated by the abovementioned historian, Alijarov, in "Azerbaijan" journal in 1988. However, he went even further. Not only did he treat "Alban" as a Turkic word, but did his best to isolate the population of Caucasian Albania from its North Caucasian roots, and he called it "part of the Oghuz ethnos" (for that, see Astourian 1994: 65). Yet, in articles published in the West he omitted this argument. There, he pointed out that the majority of the Albanians were Turkified to the extent that they made up the basis of the Azeri people. True, he agreed that the Armenians had incorporated another segment. At the same time, he emphasized the existence of a political continuity that stretched from the Albanian Kingdom to the Safavi Empire and then on to the Karabagh Khanate. He also argued that no independent Armenian state had ever existed in Transcaucasia (Vahabzade, Aliyarov 1988; Alijarly 1996: 117-118).

Nonetheless, until the very beginning of the 1990s, the mainstream of the Azeri academic world and Azeri education still put forth Aliev's and Buniatov's concepts. They were the basis of the popular volume, "History of Azerbaijan", completed by the Institute of History. This was first published in 1979 and was republished in a slightly revised edition in 1994. The chapter on the early history of Azerbaijan was written by Aliev. In general, it reproduced his view of the deep historical roots of Azeri statehood as though there was unbroken political continuity from the very early 1st Millennium B.C. He also pointed to the crucial importance of local Caucasian ethnic elements in the formation of the Azeri people, and especially emphasized the "Atropatenian Median people" with their Iranian language, who were in fact at the roots of the early Azeri state and culture. Caucasian Albania was another no less important component of this development, and it was localized within Soviet Azerbaijan and southern Daghestan. Instructively, in this regard the author especially noted that all of the right bank of the Kura River Basin was included (Guliev 1979: 23-42). What was new in Aliev's publication was his idea of very early polities ("countries") in northwestern Iran on

the eve of the 1st Millennium B.C. (Guliev 1979: 23-24). In his former works, Aliev had been more careful and warned against uncritical interpretation of the terms "countries" and "kings" known from Assyrian sources as evidence of true statehood (Aliev 1960: 40-42, 170-172). Yet, even Aliev's quite cautious earlier approach to the "countries" was criticized by the reviewers, who remarked that the scarce information at hand made it absolutely impossible to interpret the nature of those "countries" (Melikishvili et al. 1962: 126, 131)<sup>45</sup>.

The next chapter, on Caucasian Albania, followed Buniatov's views. The independent status of the Albanian Kingdom, throughout the early medieval period until the Arab invasion was advocated. The Sussanian dominance in the mid-1st Millennium A.D. was recognized but considered nominal and brief. In particular, while mentioning the construction of strong fortifications under the Sussanians, the author especially emphasized that they were built by local people. Not only kings, but also the highest priests of Caucasian Albania were claimed to be local and quite independent. There was no question of a role for the Armenian Church. It was maintained that the Albanian writing system was invented in the beginning of the 5th century, by the "Albanians, Benjamin and Jeremy"; there was no place for Mesrob Mashtots there. Instead, it was argued that there was an extensive Albanian literature and that the famous "History of the Albanians" was initially completed in Albanian, although only a copy "translated into Armenian" survived. The right bank of the Kura River Basin was unreservedly included in Albanian lands and populated by the Albanians alone. Armenian participation in the local life was totally ignored (Guliev 1979: 49-53). The completion of the Azeri people's formation was related to the spread of Oghuz in the 11th - 12th centuries; yet, it was maintained that the local inhabitants were more advanced in cultural terms than the Seljuq nomads, and that they assimilated the latter rather than vice-versa. Thus, despite all the language replacements, ultimately the Azeris turned out to be the direct descendants of the local early inhabitants, and the autochthonist concept celebrated its victory (Guliev 1979: 63).

The same views were the basis of a secondary school textbook on the history of Azerbaijan that was republished many times in the 1970s - 1980s. True, some Armenian participation in the formation of the population and culture of the region was recognized in that text. It was also mentioned that from time to time Artsakh was ruled by the Armenian kings and that Armenian migrants resettled there, and merged with the local inhabitants. The name of Mesrob Mashtots was mentioned, but it was said that he "put in order" the Albanian alphabet rather than invented it. At the same time, the author of the "History of the Albanians", Moses of Kalankatui, was called the Albanian chronicler. In order to prove that Albanian literature existed, the textbook was supplemented by a drawing of an early medieval Albanian inscription on a clay lamp that had been discovered in Mingechaur (Guliev 1972: 20, 27). In respect to the formation of the Azeri people, the textbook insisted that local inhabitants played the major role in that. True, it was recognized that Turkic was introduced by numerous waves of nomadic people. It was also said,

however, that they brought about nothing positive; quite the opposite, they were persistently associated with destruction and subjugation. Only the descendants of the early indigenous people were represented as the bearers of a higher culture: they assimilated the newcomers, and language replacement was by no means associated with any shift in population (Guliev 1972: 25, 38-39, 44-45).

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Thus, the continuing anti-religious struggle, on the one hand, and Soviet suspicions towards the Turks, on the other, excluded both Islam and Turkic from those resources the Azeris might use in order to shape their identity. That is why they emphasized so much their links with the territory. Indeed, that was the only ground left for their claims to authenticity; this puzzled the Armenian scholars, though (for example, see Mnatsakanian, Sevak 1967: 181; Melik-Oganjanian 1968: 171, 181-182; Ulubabian 188: 85). Moreover, being affected by Soviet internationalism, they initially tried to find the sort of ancestors who could move them closer to the Armenians, and discovered them in the early Iranian world (Medes). Yet, the events of the very late 1940s demonstrated that tensions still existed between the Armenians and the Azeris; it became clear that neither the former nor the latter were eager to become close relatives. Moreover, the Armenians persistently treated the Azeris as backward nomads and merciless conquerors, encroaching on the heritage of the earlier high civilizations (Ganalanian et al. 1978: 102). In the 1980s, this attitude was openly expressed and widely disseminated by some Armenian writers (Zoryi Balaian, most of all), and, naturally, this insulted the Azeris (for that, see Ismailov 1989: 6, 37. Also see Van der Leeuw 2000: 19). In response, they used the same rhetoric and represented the early Armenians as nomadic pastoralists who had occupied the Armenian plateau by force (Ismailov 1989: 39-40).

One more important factor was the existence of a large Azeri enclave in Iran, where the Azeri right to develop their language and culture had been greatly restricted for decades. Their leaders were looking to the North and expected support from there. This met sympathy in Soviet Azerbaijan, and the Azeri nationalists never lost hope for the unification of both Azerbaijan, especially because these expectations were from time to time artificially fed by Soviet foreign policy. This climate was unfavorable to the idea of Iranian-speaking ancestors, and it soon declined. Instead, open anti-Iranism was promoted, which pressed scholars to play down the important role of the Iranian cultural heritage in the formation of Azeri culture. During the Soviet era, all of the aforementioned factors made Azeri scholars put forward several conflicting theories of the formation of the Azeri people.

1. A theory that associated the Azeri ancestors with Media provided the Azeris with the desired past and paved the way for the appropriation

of the historical heritage of the early civilizations of the Middle East. At the same time, it isolated the southern Azeris from Iran, constructed a distinct community out of them and legitimized their claims for political autonomy. Furthermore, it opened a perspective, albeit illusory, of irredentism and unification of southern Azerbaijan with Soviet Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, despite all the contrivance of its authors, this theory provided the Azeris with Iranian-speaking ancestors, which was unacceptable for the reasons discussed above.

2. The Albanian theory provided the Soviet Azeris with the status of an indigenous ethnic group and also made them heirs of a very early culture. It also enriched them with historical arguments for claims to the Nagorny Karabakh lands.

Both theories intentionally isolated the Azeris from the Turkic world. Indeed, at first the Soviet authorities were quite suspicious about the Turks and several times used punitive measures against them. Second, the Soviet historical approach had formed a negative stereotype of the Turks as backward nomads who occupied themselves only with plundering raids and were unable to build a culture of their own; that was why they used to appropriate the cultures of other peoples. These views about the Turks were especially common among the Armenians and Georgians. Bearing all this in mind, Azeri scholars did their best to provide their people with different ancestors. They searched for them among settled farmers with early, well-advanced cultures. An attempt to distance themselves from the Turkish people who massacred the Armenians in 1915 also played an important role in this strategy.

At the same time, the image of the Turks began to lose its negative connotations with the increase of the Turkic population in the USSR, the growth of their educational status and the economic power of their republics, and the indigenization of the bureaucratic elites of those republics. The prestige of Turkic languages had grown as well. The negation by the Turkic scholars of their remote ancestors' Turkic language was perceived now with surprise and discontent. An obvious role in that was played by the primordialist attitude that reigned in the Soviet school during the most recent pre-perestroika decades, when the absolute value of a pure ethnic tradition was emphasized. Under the great pressure of Russification, implemented especially after 1950s, language shift began to be treated by the general public as something shameful, as treachery to the people's interest. This fervent attitude towards the mother tongue became one of the most important manifestations of the passive resistance of non-Russian ethnic groups to the processes of "rapprochement and



merger" that were highly advocated by Soviet officials in the 1960s – 1970s (Rakowska-Harmstone 1986: 251). In this environment the revisionist school became active in Azerbaijan, and the third theory of the formation of the Azeri people came onto the scene.

3. The Azeri revisionists kept emphasizing their early local cultural *heritage in order to claim indigenous status, and thus, the right to all the local territories, based on the traditional first settler principle*. At the same time, they gradually began to Turkify the early indigenous inhabitants. Thus, although they still insisted on a long Azeri cultural continuity rooted in Caucasian Albania, now the Albanians were converted into the Turkic-speaking population. Early nomads (Scythians, Sakae, and the like) who invaded the Caspian lowlands from time to time, also turned out to be Turkic-speakers and were included in the list of Azeri ancestors.

The simultaneous use of all these approaches was clear evidence that, as was once pointed by Ch. Lemerrier-Quelquejay (Lemerrier-Quelquejay 1984), the formation of the Azeri nation has not been completed yet. Indeed, the concepts in question and the struggle between them demonstrated that Azeri intellectuals were persistently searching for a solid basis for their identity. Some of them were dreaming of consolidation on a territorial basis, and they chiefly emphasized political and cultural continuity (the Median and Albanian theories). Others associated ethnicity with language affiliation, and were mostly attracted to pan-Turkic constructions.

The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan was no less important than its identity. Yet, it was threatened by the particular demands of ethnic minorities, the Armenians most of all. That is why the Azeri versions of the ethnogenesis of the Azeri people were so variable – each of them was aimed at its own target. The Median concept had to legitimize the unity of northern and southern Azerbaijan that was an especially hot issue in the 1940s, when the Soviet authorities were ready for the partition of Iran. The Albanian idea provided arguments for the territorial integrity of Soviet Azerbaijan and served to oppose the Armenian claims to the right side of the Kura River Basin. As concerned pan-Turkic constructions, they were aimed at the consolidation of the Azeris on the basis of language, and thus met the demands of the Soviet model of ethnic consolidation much better than the two other concepts. At the same time, the late arrival of Turkic-speakers to the region was their Achilles heel. That is why their authors did their best to push the Turkic presence in the region as far into the past as possible, even if this contradicted all the historical evidence at hand.

The tendency to keep pushing the history of Azerbaijan further back to the past continued in the 1990s, when Azerbaijan became an independent national state. In late 1998, the first two volumes of the 7-volume series, "History of

Azerbaijan", produced by the Institute of History, were finally published in Baku. In a report on that event, the newspaper, "Baku Worker" (January 14, 1999), argued: "Our scholars have proved with the help of irrefutable arguments based on new archaeological discoveries that Azerbaijan was one of the earliest regions of the world to be settled by humans and become a cultural center; our history is more than 1.5 million years old." Thus, the Azeri intellectuals do their best to prove the Azeris' indigenous status and to associate themselves with the territory of Azerbaijan, regardless of linguistic, religious and cultural factors. Ultimately, although the importance of all those factors was recognized, they were presented as the function of a territorial unity that was crucial for their development.

At the same time, while downplaying the role of language in shaping identity, the Azeri authors used the notion of local (territorial) loyalty, not only for themselves but also for their neighbors, and most of all the Armenians. Where the Armenians discovered an undoubted relationship based on a common language, the Azeris suspected a trick and manipulations because, as we know, they themselves emphasized mostly the place of birth and residence; at the same time, they downplayed language loyalty as something that was attendant and precarious. All of this expressed itself in opposite approaches to the identity issue, that were advocated by both sides in the course of the hot dispute that focused on the formation of the Nagorny Karabagh population.