

Historicity and Historical Ethnography of Azerbaijan: The 18th and 19th Century Caucasus at a Glance

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This article is a part of a larger research project on historical territories and the Turkic population of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, first published in 2015 as a monograph, "Azerbaijan and the Armenian question in the Caucasus" (**Азербайджан и армянский вопрос на Кавказе**). The author drew upon nearly 300 ancient, medieval, and modern sources describing Azerbaijan's territories in the Caucasus. This article presents the European and American sources from the 18th and early 19th centuries, describing the territory and the population of Azerbaijan in the Caucasus. The aim of this study is to show the historicity of Azerbaijan in regional politics and international relations during the aforementioned period.



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Introduction

For a long time, European and Russian scientific tradition accepted the view that the historical territories of Azerbaijan are located in Iran, and that in the South Caucasus, the definition “Azerbaijan” appeared only after the establishment of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic in 1918. Based on this rather shaky assertion, it was frequently concluded that Azerbaijan is an artificial political formation, historically unrelated to the Caucasus. In many textbooks, scientific works and articles published in various countries, Azerbaijani territories in the South Caucasus are often labeled part of “South Armenia” or Persia; or split into administrative units (Shirvan, Dagestan, Zakatala, Gazakh, Aran, Karabakh, Lenkoran and other). Such accounts clearly fail to take into consideration the fact that all of these administrative units were for many centuries united as part of Azerbaijan, covering large areas of the western coast of the Caspian Sea, Caucasus, and Western Asia. The willingness of parts of the scientific and political community to deny Azerbaijan’s historical existence on the geopolitical map of the region no doubt plays

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into the hands of Armenia, a country that has illegally occupied 20% of Azerbaijan’s territories since the beginning of the 1990s. The regrettable tendency in the academic community to ignore Azerbaijan’s historicity has been used by Armenia to justify the “liberation of the ancient Armenian lands.” The occupation and the distortion of history in defining the contemporary map of the South Caucasus makes it necessary to demonstrate to the flawed nature of this interpretation of the region’s political history.

As a response to such a tendency, this paper argues that the continuity of Azerbaijan’s borders within the South Caucasus can be traced back more than two thousand years. As part of a broader research project on historical territories of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus, this paper suggests – through studying European and American sources, writings and maps – that an initial examination of the territories, political role and ethnic composition of Azerbaijan during the 18th and 19th centuries clearly shows the historicity of the country. The paper accordingly offers a brief account of 18th and 19th century maps and writings on Azerbaijan produced by European academics and travelers.

Historicity of Azerbaijan

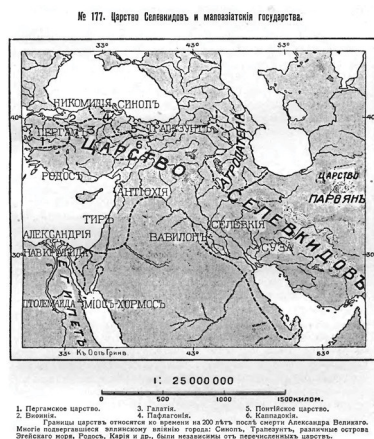
The Republic of Azerbaijan considers itself the spiritual heir to the great medieval oriental empires established by Azerbaijani rulers and khanates in the Caucasus, Asia Minor, the Middle East, and Central Asia over different historical periods. And historically, Azerbaijan's borders are considered to run from the Caucasian mountain ridge in the North (down to Derbent) to Central Iran in the South, from the Geycha Lake (now Sevan Lake in Armenia) and Urmia (north-west Iran) in the West, to the Caspian Sea in the East. In fact, international treaties signed by Russian emperors, Ottoman sultans, and Persian shahs had long recognized such territories as part of Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, this vast area continued to be considered as Azerbaijani territory until the surrounding empires turned the Caucasus into a battleground in the 18th and 19th centuries. Accordingly, the weakening and then the collapse of the Safavid Empire in 1774 led to a protracted battle between Russian, Ottoman, and European empires for the division of territories that had constituted the Empire. However, this process could not prevent the creation of the Azerbaijani Qajar Empire on the ruins of the Safavid state. Accordingly, following the signing of the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828, the historical Azerbaijan territories were divided between Russia and Qajar state. Indeed, it was in this very period (the 18th and 19th centuries) that the European scientific and political community began paying attention to the history, people, and political situation of the Caucasus and thus produced studies and writings in addition to maps and cartographies on political and ethnic composition of the Safavid and Qajar Empires.

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Jean Jacques Élisée Reclus, the 19th century French scientist, notes that the Atropatene-Azerbaijan territories spread as far as Dagestan, for example. Reclus presented a map of the region wherein the territories of Atropatene spread to the North Caucasus. The map (Figure №1) was published in two Russian pre-revolutionary books written by Reclus.¹

¹ Reclus J.E. (1908) The Earth and its inhabitants. St.Petersburg: P.P.Soykin's publishing house.

Figure №1



In his book “L’Homme et la terre” (“The Earth and its Inhabitants”), Reclus cited the works of ancient authors relating the Turkic population of Media and Azerbaijan. Reclus wrote “Herodotus in one of his history excerpts listing the six tribes (races) of Media. From interpretation of their names attempted by J. Oppert and Ch. Lenormant, it appears that two tribes named “Aryan” were of the same origin as Persian. Another four groups of tribes were the rural population of “Turanian” origin, divided into settled farmers and nomad herders.”²

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Western Asia in ancient times, attributing all the achievements to Persian influence. “Scholars until now could not tell the proportion of these two ethnic elements in mixed population of Media

2 Reclus J.E. (1906) The Earth and its inhabitants. Early man – ancient history. Vol.1. Translated from French by L.Schmidt. St.Petersburg: The Brockhaus and Efron publishing house, p. 394

but the fact of similarities in origin of Western European languages and Aryan language of Persians induce us under egoistic feelings to attribute to Aryans the leading role in Iranian plateau. At the same time we unwittingly set the highest premium on Persians not only in number but also in political meaning.”³

In another example, the famous Behistun inscription is a trilingual cuneiform text on a cliff at Mount Behistun (Bisutun) southwest of Ecbatana, between Kermanshah and Hamadan in Iran. This was carved on the order of Achaemenid King Darius I on the events of 523-521 B.C. European orientalists admit that one of the three languages used in the inscription was Turkic. Unfortunately, modern historians have not publicized this fact. In 1868, the Swedish scientist Eric Nustrem (1833-1897) wrote in his “Bible Dictionary”: “Starting from the reign of Darius the inscription written in three languages was preserved on the high Behistun rock at the western border of Media. The king was depicted there trampling the lying man probably Gaumata which pretended to be Smerdis. The inscription consists of 300 lines in Persian, Assyrian and Tatar languages (cuneiform).”⁴

It is important to note that Reclus counted nearly one hundred of cuneiform inscriptions in Armenia and Azerbaijan that were destroyed or moved to different countries. He also mentions that the lands of the Caucasus, Azerbaijan and present day Armenia were settled by Turkic people in ancient times. He specifically locates Armenia in Asia Minor, stating that Armenians moved to the South Caucasus from those areas. Furthermore, he writes that many different ethnicities call themselves “Armenians”, noting their relationship to the Armenian Gregorian church. Reclus also explained that in ancient times, Turkic people inhabited and ruled vast territories including present day Armenia.

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For instance, Reclus writes: “The name “Armenia” applied in ancient times apparently, to the south west of the country having this name nowadays. Herodotus knows “Armenians” only in the upper Euphrates near Phrygia and on mountains where from the river Halys starts. Consequently, movement of this nationality

3 Reclus J.E. (1906) The Earth and its inhabitants. Early man – ancient history. Vol.1. Translated from French by L.Schmidt. St.Petersburg: The Brockhaus and Efron publishing house, p. 395

4 Nustrem E. (2008) Bible dictionary. Translated from Swedish under the editorship of I.S. Swenson, Kiev, p. 168

(Armenians - R.H.) should happen in West to East direction and ended with their advent in the Aras valley.”⁵ “[...] people, who call themselves “Armenians” are Kurds and Jewish.”⁶

Therefore, as the above sources suggest, the spread of the Atropatene-Azerbaijan territories to the North Caucasus and its population with Turkic peoples is proven by ancient inscriptions and in archaeological findings. Thus the so-called scientific approaches of confining and reducing the heritage of the region to Persian people or to “ancient Armenians” are vague, biased, and mostly politically driven.

The human geography and ethnography of historical Azerbaijan

European authors and cartographers of the 18th and 19th centuries wrote that the territories of Azerbaijan covered a considerable part of South Caucasus, present Armenia, and also included Derbent in the north. They were confirmed also by medieval Arab and other sources. The map of the 18th century German cartographer Georg Matthäus Seutter (Figure №2) for example shows the territory of Azerbaijan covering the vast lands of the Southern Caucasus and present day Armenia, where the Erivan khanate was situated.⁷

Figure №2



5 Reclus J.E. (1906) The Earth and its inhabitants. Early man – ancient history. Vol.1. Translated from French by L.Schmidt. St.Petersburg: The Brockhaus and Efron publishing house, p. 452

6 Ibid, p. 453

7 Seutter's Map of Turkey (Ottoman Empire), Persia and Arabia (1730). Magni Turcarum Dominatoris Imperium per Europam, Asiam Et Africam, se extendens Regiones tam proprias, quan tributarias et clientelares ut et omnes Beglerbegatus sive Praefecturas Generales oculis sistens accuratissima cura delineatum per Matthaeum Seutter, S.C. Maj. Geogr. Aug., Atlas Novus. Matthaeo Seutter. (1730)

There are several different sources of information on Azerbaijan's division between the Russian and Qajar Empires under the 1828 Turkmenchay Treaty. An interesting source on the post-Russian annexation geography of Azerbaijan is the map drawn up by Thomas Gamaliel Bradford (1802-1887). In his book "A Comprehensive Atlas: Geographical, Historical & Commercial" (Boston, 1835), a map on "Persia, Arabia, Tartary, Afghanistan" (Figure №3) shows the territories of Azerbaijan encompassing present day Armenia and Yerevan.⁸ Thomas Bradford was indeed a reliable academic, as he was the junior editor of "Encyclopedia Americana", the first significant Encyclopedia of the USA and during his career he drew up several maps of United States and other countries.

Figure №3



In another example, the British "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge" (1826-1848) published the Encyclopedia "The penny cyclopedia" in 1838, which stated that the Muslim population of Karabakh exceeded the Armenian population by a factor of 10. The source also states that the mass movement of the Muslim population from Karabakh to Iran occurred, while simultaneously, Russia encouraged Armenians to settle in Karabakh. "The population of Karabagh, according to the official returns of 1832, consisted of 13,965 Mohammedan and 1491 Armenian families, besides some Nestorian Christians and Gypsies. This limited population may be ascribed to the frequent wars which have long desolated the province, and to the emigration to Persia of many Mohammedan

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⁸ Bradford, T. G (1835) 'Persia, Arabia, Tartary, Afghanistan' A comprehensive atlas geographical, historical & commercial. Boston: Ticknor, William Davis, p. 308.

families since its subjection to Russia, although many Armenians were induced by the Russian government, after the peace of Toorkmanchai peace accord between Russia and Qajar state, to emigrate from Persia to Karabagh.⁹ The British Society map, drawn up in 1835 and published in 1844, (Figure №4) depicted Azerbaijan as encompassing the current territories of the Armenian Republic.¹⁰

Figure №4



In his 1864 memorandum for the Royal Geographical Society, the British consul in Tabriz, Keith Abbott, described Azerbaijan: "The country known to the Persians as Azerbaijan is divided between them and Russia, the latter Power possessing about five-eighth of the whole, which may be roughly stated to cover an area of about 80,000 square miles, or about the size of Great Britain; 50,000 square miles are therefore about the extent of the division belonging to Russia, and 30,000 of that which remains to Persia. The Russian division is bounded on the north and north-east by the mountains of Caucasus, extending to the vicinity of Bakou (Baku) on the Caspian. On the west it has the provinces of Imeritia, Mingrelia, Gooriel, and Ahkhiska (now belonging to Russia); on the east it has the Caspian Sea, and on the south the Boundary is marked by the course of the River Arrass (Araxes) to near the 46th parallel of longitude, then by a conventional line across the plains of Moghan to the district of Talish, and by the small stream of Astura which flows to the Caspian through

9 Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. (1844) *Russia in Europe and Georgia. Caucasus, Circassia, Astrakhan, Georgia. Part IX.* Published under the superintendence of the Engraved by J. & C. Walker. London, published by Baldwin and Cradock, 47 Paternoster Row Augt. 1st. 1835. London: Chapman & Hall, p. 175

10 The penny cyclopedia of the Society for the diffusion of useful knowledge. (1828) London: ed. by G. Long

the latter country. In this area are contained the following territorial divisions: Georgia or Goorjistan, comprising Kakhetty, Kartaliny, Somekhetty, Kasakh; the Mohammedan countries of Eriwan, Nakhshewan, Karabagh, Ghenja, Shirwan, Shekky, Shamachy, Bakou, Koobeh, Salian and a portion of Talish.”¹¹ This memorandum shows that in the 1860s, the populations of Erivan, Nakhchivan and Karabakh were predominantly Muslim and Turkic, even after several thousands of Armenians from Iran and Turkey had settled there.

The British newspaper “The universal gazetteer” published an article stating that at the beginning of the 19th century, vast territories in Caucasus and especially the present Republic of Armenia, were located inside Azerbaijan: “Aiderbezan, or Azerbeyan, a fruitful province of Persia, situated at the west coast of the Caspian Sea, and having Georgia on the north. Its chief town [Aiderbezan] is Taurus. The climate is healthy, but cold”¹²

French orientalist Amable Louis Marie Michel Bréchillet Jourdain is another interesting source of information from the 19th century, the period when Russian expansion in the Caucasus and Azerbaijan began and resulted in the mass migration of Armenians to the region from Asia Minor and Middle East. Jourdain, whose work was published in 1814-1815, writes that “There are still Armenians in Adzerbadagan especially at Meragan, Urmiag, Salmas, Tavriysk, Karabagh and Erivan cantons. There estimated population not more than 60,000 people, which exceeds the any likelihood.”¹³

Amable Jourdain conceived Azerbaijan’s borders as encompassing large areas in Asia Minor and the South Caucasus. This included the whole of Karabakh and Erivan. According to his calculations, the Armenian population living in North and South Azerbaijan amounted to just over 60,000. Jourdain mainly lists Armenian populations in the Azerbaijani territories located in Iran. According to him in Karabakh and (which for that period also included territory of Zangezur province) Erivan Armenians were not more than 10-12 thousand. In the 1815 edition of

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11 Abbott, Keith E. (1863-1864) Extracts from a Memorandum on the Country of Azerbaijan, Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London, 8(6), pp. 275-279.

12 The universal gazetteer (1801) by John Walker, M.D, London (reprint – 1815), p. 25.

13 Vestnik Evropy (1815). A journal. Part 80. № 8. Jourdain Amable. La perse ou tableau de gouvernement, de la religion et de la litterature de cette empire, pp. 291-292.

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Victor Bérard (1864-1931), French Hellenist, archaeologist, politician, and diplomat is another writer who compiled important information about Azerbaijan. He became more famous after his translation of “Odyssey” by Homer into French. Bérard was a senator, later elected as a chief of the French Senate Committee on foreign affairs. Bérard left a huge volume of work devoted to Muslim and Turkic countries. In particular, in his work published in 1910 in Paris, “Révolutions de la Perse: les provinces, les peuples et le gouvernement du roi des rois”, he compiled unique materials about Azerbaijan and its territories, political-administrative system, population and its role in the geopolitics of the East. He notes in particular that during 8th century Azerbaijan and its Turkic population - termed “Azeries” - played an important role in the civilizational processes of the Islamic world. He compares the influence of Azerbaijan in Islamic civilization to the influence of Ancient Egypt on the ancient and antique world. Bérard mentions Azerbaijani territories in Caucasus, emphasizing the public and political domination of “Azeri-Turks”: “Azerbaijan and north-western provinces were for a long time loyal to the Qajars – this feeling doubled with Turanian relativity between Turkic Qajars and Turkic Azeries, which were the majority of settled population. These north-west provinces of (Azerbaijan - R.H.) were in some unity. To the north, its sphere of influence (Azerbaijan - R.H.) spread to the Caucasus from the subordinate provinces of Shirvan and Dagestan and vassal principalities - Georgia and Mingrelia.”¹⁵

Bérard continues, “Russian realignment of borders after 1828 took away from (Azerbaijan - R.H.) the northern lands and added them to Tbilisi (Russian possessions in Caucasus - R.H.), including the region to the north from Aras River. In the East, the Russians left only the strip of mountainous regions and the Caspian coast... Turkic language is used in the villages and the towns. Azerbaijan is Turkic country. This ‘Azeris Turkestan’ remains as

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 284-305.

¹⁵ Bérard V. (1910) *Revolutions de la Perse, les provinces, les peuples et le gouvernement du roi des rois*. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, pp. 154-155.

one of the piers of that Turkic-Tatarian bridge...’’¹⁶

In a final example, an extensive data on the history, territories and administrative structure of Azerbaijan was compiled in a 1919 article titled “La premieres republique musulmane: l’Azerbaedjan”. The article was published in Paris in the journal of *Revue du Monde Musulman*. The article states that, “There are two Azerbaijanians populated with Turkic people, with Persian culture and Shia Islam: Tabriz Azerbaijan in Persia and Baku Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia... During many centuries, Azerbaijan territories in Caucasus were limited by the Caspian Sea in the east, in south Persia, in the west with Turkey and Georgia and along the chain of high Caucasian mountains in the north. Azerbaijan consisted of independent khanates, Ganja, Erivan, Nakhchivan, Karabakh, Shaki, Shirvan, Talysh, Baku, Guba, etc. These territories were transferred by inheritance and ruled by sovereign khans. The legislation, court and administrative authority was joint, but (khanates) had a right to their own monetary system. Consequently, the foreign affairs were concentrated in hands of khans. In short, these khanates were sovereign in their activities and also had good relations with their neighbors.”¹⁷

In short, the European sources mentioned above provide a clear description of the territories of Azerbaijan in the Caucasus and its ethno-cultural composition. This suggests that contrary to Russian and Armenian history denialists, Azerbaijan historically included territories where the Republic of Armenia was later established.

Final remarks

For many centuries Azerbaijan was recorded as the major administrative, military, political, and territorial unit of the Caucasus. European sources provide a different perspective on the socio-political processes in the region, and reveal Russia’s role in organizing the mass settlement of Armenians in the Caucasus in the 19th century. What followed was the appropriation by Armenian immigrants of the rich spiritual, architectural and written heritage of the Christian people of the region, as well as the

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 164-165.

¹⁷ *Revue du Monde Musulman*, publiée par la mission scientifique du Maroc (1918-1919), Tome 36. La première république musulmane: l’Azerbaedjan. Paris: Editions Ernest Leroux, p. 230.

Azerbaijani people. In this way, Armenian immigrants were able to declare themselves as the ancient people of the Caucasus and make territorial claims upon four neighboring countries: Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Iran. Armenian propaganda is currently trying to prove that Azerbaijan and its state structures in the South Caucasus did not exist in the ancient history, and that the term “Azerbaijan” only appeared a hundred years ago on the map of the region.

This ideological appropriation of Azerbaijani heritage and history has become an open war by Armenia against Azerbaijan, ultimately leading to the occupation of nearly 20 percent of Azerbaijani territories and the expulsion of one million Azerbaijanis from their lands.