



## A Family Quarrel: Azerbaijani Historians against Soviet Iranologists

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## A Family Quarrel: Azerbaijani Historians against Soviet Iranologists

*Azerbaijani national history theory poses a challenge to the conventional history writing of Iran. Since 1937, Azerbaijani Soviet historians in Baku have constructed an Azerbaijani national history and identity based on the territorial definition of the nation. This approach was supported by Joseph Stalin. By the 1940s, this narrative incorporated various components hitherto exclusively known as “Iranian,” such as the Medes. Meanwhile, Soviet Iranologists and Orientalists, followers of the conventional Iranian narrative, tried to avoid controversy with the Azerbaijani claims, which secured political support at the highest level. When Stalin died in 1953, the Iranologists raised their voices, which caused controversy with political connotations. Using primary source materials, this article sheds light on the first round of discussions between Azerbaijani historians, constructors of their national history, and the Soviet Iranologists, the proponents of conventional Iranian history. The article also shows the limits of the Communist Party’s control over history writing and the hardships of accommodating contradictory interpretations of history within a multinational communist state.*

### Contested Narratives

In the first decades of the twentieth century, authoritarian “gardener states” populated Europe and actively sought to transform their subjects into tightly knit societies.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the changes on the European and Middle Eastern political map after the First World War, the number and influence of gardener states increased dramatically. The Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Ottoman, and Iranian imperial systems and identities collapsed after the war. Both the core territories and the distinctive peripheries of the former imperial systems were reorganized into nation-states. An impressive array of new states and regimes, including Turkey and Iran, launched vigorous campaigns to homogenize their identities and cultures in order to create harmonious societies and uniform nations. The homogenization efforts were not limited to contemporaneous values and definitions—they also reached well into the past. Although identities differed in content, they all centered on primordial and racial definitions of nation. However, today’s national paradigms do not always give us a clear picture of the past. Very often, tribal, regional, dynastic, imperial, or ecclesiastic figures or events from the past are contested among different national narratives. It may seem

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paradoxical, but a conflict between two national narratives deepens when their spatial or temporal proximities are close. Close proximity is unavoidable when a province of an imperial entity transforms into a distinct national entity. In the pre-national era, both north and the south of the Aras River (Shervan, Mughan, Qarabagh, and Azerbaijan) were provinces, akin to Lorestan or Khorasan of an all-Iranian imperial structure.<sup>2</sup> Following the Russian conquest of the Turkic-speaking regions in the South Caucasus in the nineteenth century, a thin layer of intelligentsia emerged in Baku and began discussing the characteristics of a distinct Azerbaijani identity. The Republic of Azerbaijan was established in May 1918 by the same elite. This short experience was abruptly halted when the Red Army occupied Transcaucasia in 1920/21. Subsequently, the Bolsheviks launched their modern, state-driven nation building projects in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. Contemporary Azerbaijanis are Turkic-speakers and their national history could be centered on a Turkic ethno-linguistic identity. Nevertheless, for reasons discussed elsewhere, the Bolsheviks did not prefer this solution.<sup>3</sup> The Azerbaijani national identity and historical narrative constructed after 1937 stressed the indigenous nature of the Azerbaijani people and was based on a territorial definition. The territorial approach found support at the highest level—from Joseph Stalin himself. The Bolsheviks in Azerbaijan were not the only “gardeners” in the region. More than a decade earlier in Iran, Shah Reza Pahlavi accelerated the construction of a modern Iranian national identity in the opposite direction: the Iranian model was based on an ethno-linguistic definition referring to the pre-historical Aryan race and Persian language. Since Azerbaijan gained independence in 1991 an array of figures, events, and territories has been contested by the two national narratives. In fact, the first skirmishes had already happened in the Soviet period. By the 1940s, Azerbaijani historians had already incorporated various figures and polities into their territorial identity narrative. Yet scholars in other republics of the Soviet Union did not always embrace the Azerbaijani version and instead preferred the conventional Iranian narrative. In other words, many Iranologists—Orientalists in the Soviet Union found themselves defending the national paradigm promoted in Iran; the discussion intensified in the relatively relaxed atmosphere of the Khrushchev years. This dispute shows how territorial and linguistic definitions of ethnogenesis can change the interpretation of the same past and construct differing histories. It also exemplifies a meandering conceptual reconstruction of a former province within an empire to a fatherland of a nation. In addition, the Azerbaijani–Iranian dispute that occurred in the Soviet Union half a century ago is an example of the limits of political control over history writing in a totalitarian regime and the difficulties of accommodating contradictory interpretations of history within a multinational communist state.

*Western Orientalists and Iranian Nation-builders: The First Occupants of the Past*

The constructors of the Iranian narrative had an enormous advantage because their timing coincided with the era when the Aryan race theory was popular in the

West. The Aryan theory is related to Sir William Jones' discovery in 1796 that Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit were connected and that they all originated from a common prehistoric tongue.<sup>4</sup> Other scholars later expanded the language family in question to include Armenian, Persian, and even Hittite. Gradually, the Aryan language family began to be associated with a particular race and culture. A popular mid-nineteenth century conception of the speakers of the prehistoric Aryan (or proto-Indo-European) language was a noble race of civilized, brilliant warriors and priests who marched from somewhere in Central Asia to Europe, and on their way they brought civilization to different corners of the world ranging from India and Mesopotamia (Sumerians) to Iran, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The confusion of language classification, race, and culture was a key element of this approach: those who spoke Indo-European languages were considered of Aryan racial descent. According to racial theories, racial traits were linked to cultural and behavioral characteristics, transmitted unaltered through generations, and social conditions could not improve the human condition.<sup>5</sup>

Western literature identified the ancestors of the Medians and Persians as the so-called early western Asian Aryan tribes. In fact, the link was claimed for the first time in the eighteenth century when Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron (1731–1806), a pioneer of Orientalism in France and the first publisher of the Avesta, made a connection between the name that Herodotus and Diodoros used for the Medes (Greek: *arioi*), a self-designation in the Avesta, and the country name Iran.<sup>6</sup> Another Orientalist, Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) whose research focused on the Pahlavi inscriptions and medallions of the Sassanid kings, came to the conclusion that Iran was the land of the Aryans.<sup>7</sup> Although Julius Oppert, a leading Orientalist, speculated about the struggle between the Turanian and Aryan elements in Media,<sup>8</sup> the Medians were generally considered an Aryan group who had arrived in western Iran following the great Aryan exodus from the Himalayas. Researchers attached exceptional importance to these tribes while at the same time ignoring the non-Indo-European elements became a common practice in Oriental studies. They diminished the existence and achievements of other ethnicities and considered the earlier, non-Aryan inhabitants of these lands incapable of independent historical development. The generally accepted view was that the earlier groups never gained political or cultural supremacy and did not contribute to the later system in any capacity. It was argued that the newly arrived superior Aryans drove the aborigines to the inaccessible valleys and mountains and founded a great culture in north-western Iran. That culture then flourished under the Achaemenids in the south and Media became a pure Aryan or Indo-European land.<sup>9</sup>

Once the nation-builders led by Reza Shah came to power in Iran, the state elite attempted to construct an Iranian national culture and identity. Their efforts centered on achieving geographical unity through a shared understanding of history as well as the dominance of the Persian language. Despite the great number of ethnicities intermixing in the area, the Iranian nation was presented as descended from the Aryan or Indo-European peoples who settled in Iran in prehistoric times. History textbooks published after 1924 covered the military accomplishments of ancient pre-Islamic Iranians as descendants of the Aryan stock. Special attention was given to racial differ-

ences, including an emphasis on the Iranians' privileged place as members of the Aryan or white race.<sup>10</sup>

Resurrected in a national form, the Medians and Persians had new and important political roles in twentieth century Iran. Unlike the legendary dynasties of Pishdadis and Keyans in the sacred texts of the Avesta and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, the Aryan race theory provided the Iranian nation-builders with a European "scientific truth." In the eyes of contemporaries, the race theory was a product of progressive European research and offered an objective interpretation of Iranian history and culture.<sup>11</sup> Thanks to archaeological excavations, the Medians and Persians were considered the first tangible episodes in this "scientific" ethno-linguistic narrative of Iranian national history.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the Pahlavi regime sought to secularize and westernize the country and struggled against strong clerical influence. In order to derive legitimacy from the past, the new narrative idolized the glories of pre-Islamic Iran,<sup>13</sup> and emphasized the clash between the Aryan (Iranian) and Semitic (Arab) worlds since the seventh century. Iran's pre-Islamic heritage was stressed in the national history curriculum for elementary and secondary schools.<sup>14</sup> The claims of pre-Islamic glory and conflict with Arab invaders were leveraged to present Islam as an alien faith imposed upon Iran by an inferior civilization. At the same time the regime was eager to adopt western ideas and lifestyle and the emphasis on their Aryan roots helped position Iranians as "the Europeans of Asia." Thus, the Medians and Persians provided the historical legitimacy essential for the indigenization of the westernization project. The ancient Aryan settlers also provided backing for the claim that the west of Iran had had a homogenous Indo-European population since time immemorial.<sup>15</sup> In sum, the Iranian vision of national history imported the western Orientalist concept and explained the ethnogenesis of the Iranian nation through racial and linguistic continuity in time.

#### *Azerbaijani National History Theory: The Last and Late Occupants of the Past*

While Shah Reza and his team were busy building an ethno-linguistic national identity, the officials in Soviet Azerbaijan launched an Azerbaijani nation-building project in 1937; their efforts were in the opposite direction, using territoriality as a basis. In other words, the continuity of the national history, an essential component of national identity, was established through spatial continuity. The first draft was prepared by three editors and one hundred copies were printed in 1939 for the historians, party leaders, and ideologists in Baku responsible for constructing a national history. The draft defined the Azerbaijani people as a mixture of autochthonous ethnicities within a given territory, which had been Turkified at later stages of history. This territorial definition incorporated various polities and figures, including the Medes, regardless of their conventional ethno-linguistic classifications of the time. Joseph Stalin was an ardent supporter of this idea and identified the Azerbaijani nation as "the obvious descendants of the great civilization of the Medes."<sup>16</sup> The incorporation of the Medes was in line with the territorial definition of the nation and it also pro-

vided primordially and a “golden age” for the Azerbaijani national identity and history.<sup>17</sup> This was an open challenge to the conventional Iranian narrative that western Orientalists had been advancing for a century and which Reza Shah utilized in Iran. Nevertheless, the Azerbaijani version had Stalin’s full support and became a tenet of the national narrative.<sup>18</sup> The historians in Baku continued their work and in 1941, two months before the German invasion of the USSR, *The History of Azerbaijan* was published.<sup>19</sup> The publication defined Azerbaijani national identity in spatial terms and put forward claims of primordially for Azerbaijanis. The text, for the first time, incorporated Medes as the great ancestors of the Azerbaijani nation from the first millennium BC, and explicitly pointed to Stalin as the source of this “scientific truth.”<sup>20</sup> Other chapters explained the foundation of the first mighty Azerbaijani state in antiquity and the heroic deeds of the “Azerbaijani Median” rulers. The “Fight [of Medes] against Persians” described the earliest clashes between Azerbaijani Medians and Persians, defined as the first episode in the centuries-long Azerbaijani struggle for freedom against the Persian yoke.<sup>21</sup> In order to embrace both sides of the Aras River, the text described Azerbaijanis as a mixture of “Medes, [Caucasian] Albanians, and descendants of the Caspians.”<sup>22</sup> The territorially defined Azerbaijani national identity reached back 2,500 years. Səməd Vurğun (1906–56), the famous Azerbaijani poet and a strong proponent of territorial identity from the beginning, wrote to his friend in 1937: “I have recently written a great epopee ‘Azerbaijan.’ Two thousand years of history of my fatherland are presented in this work.”<sup>23</sup> Three years later, in his speech on the heroic history of Azerbaijan at the Military–Political Academy in Moscow, Vurğun assured the audience that the “Azerbaijani nation has a history older than two thousand years. Its ancestors were the heroic Medians.”<sup>24</sup> In the years that followed, the Medians were placed within a greater territorial definition of Azerbaijani identity. This was a territorial construction that embraced the autochthonous tribes in Iranian and Soviet Azerbaijan before the arrival of Indo-Europeans as well as the Median tribes.<sup>25</sup>

Russian Iranologists of the early twentieth century, such as B.A. Turaev and V.V. Bartol’d, agreed with the Iranian–Aryan interpretation of their western colleagues. Writing about the Median state and its people, they argued that it had been an Aryan people and polity.<sup>26</sup> Soviet academics in Moscow and Leningrad initially followed this line but gradually distanced themselves from the Orientalist definition. V.V. Sturve defined the Medians as “Indo-Europeans” in 1934,<sup>27</sup> but as “a mixture of conquering Indo-European or Aryan tribes with the indigenous Japhetic tribes in north western Iran” in 1941.<sup>28</sup> In 1948 another Russian-Soviet Orientalist, V.I. Avdiev, preferred to avoid a clear definition of the Medians in his history of the ancient East and only referred to the Persians as Indo-European and Aryan.<sup>29</sup> After the war with Nazi Germany, it became politically more difficult to identify the Medians or even Persians as Aryan or Indo-European. In the 1953 edition of his book, Avdiev watered down his previous position thus: “the Persians in ancient times represented an extremely diverse mixture of tribes in both ethnic and cultural-historical terms.”<sup>30</sup> The Soviet Orientalists stepped back by keeping the role of the Medians obscure—unlike their colleagues in Baku, they did not explicitly refer to Medians as the ancestors of Azerbaijanis. Only

after Stalin's death in 1953 did the scholars in Leningrad return to the Indo-European concept with regard to the Medians.<sup>31</sup>

*After Stalin: Ethno-Linguistic vs. Territorial Identity*

The death of Stalin in 1953 did not alter the way Azerbaijani national history was written in Baku. In the following year, Azerbaijani historians completed the draft of a two-volume national history. The Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) printed 500 hardcover copies of the draft edition (*maket*) text in August 1954 and distributed it among the foremost scholars (including historians and archaeologists) and writers of the republic, the scholars of Oriental studies in Moscow and Leningrad (St. Petersburg), and leading figures of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (CPA).<sup>32</sup> The Institute requested reviews in order to discuss sensitive and disputed issues and produce a conclusive and final version. In the following months, numerous scholars sent their reviews to the Institute in Baku. Azerbaijani historians saw their nation a territorial identity as promoted in the preceding two decades. The draft relied heavily on this territorial definition of the Azerbaijani national identity. The chapter on prehistoric societies on the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan explained that in the Neolithic age, "cattle-breeding started to develop among the Azerbaijani tribes."<sup>33</sup> The following chapter was on "Media—the Ancient State of Azerbaijan."<sup>34</sup>

About a year later, in the summer of 1955, a number of academic meetings were organized in Baku to discuss the reviews and the draft edition. One of the meetings, on 20 June 1955, involved historians, archaeologists, and linguists and discussed the reviews and critiques of the ancient history of Azerbaijan and the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani nation.<sup>35</sup> According to the chair of the meeting, there were numerous reviews from leading scholars who were satisfied with the result—including Professor V. Avdiev, a leading Soviet Iranologist, and A.V. Fadeev, an expert in Caucasian and Abkhaz studies from Moscow University.<sup>36</sup> Professor I.P. Petrushevskii, a prominent Orientalist and expert on the medieval history of Azerbaijan, was also happy to see that the national narrative covered "all territories [both Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan] populated by the Azerbaijani nation."<sup>37</sup>

The Soviet Iranologists were now liberated from Stalin's wrath and strongly opposed to the draft history based on their linguistic definition of nation. The chapter on the formation of the Azerbaijani ethnos in the draft edition received the most criticism from the reviewers. The formulation of the ethnogenesis claimed that:

the Medians formed the nucleus of the ancient-Azerbaijani ethnos. The unification of the tribes of the ancient Azerbaijani ethnos began to consolidate by the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the seventh century BC. The whole population of the country was united under one rule during that process. Again during the formation of the ancient Azerbaijani ethnos, its language also crystalized. A

little later, the process of the formation of ancient Azerbaijani ethnos spread towards the Albanian tribes and further.<sup>38</sup>

The creation of the state of Media-Atropatene was seen as a consequence of this merger. The territorial identity was constructed around a mixture of autochthonous tribes and Median tribes, and then the same principle incorporated the Caucasian Albanians and the Caspians into the list of ancestral Azerbaijanis regardless of their linguistic classifications.<sup>39</sup>

The Soviet Iranologists who reviewed the draft text, including Petrushevskii and O. L. Vil'chevskii, a leading Soviet Kurdologist, were against the above view because their concept of national history construction was based on linguistic continuity. They saw the Azerbaijani people primarily as a Turkic nation and they had a Turkic ethnic basis for the Azerbaijani national ethnogenesis in mind. In their review, they referred to the "migration of the Turkic-speaking tribes 'Oguz, [and] Kypchaks'" and suggested that the Azerbaijani ethnos was formed in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries as a consequence of the assimilation of the majority of the (Caucasian) Albanians and Azeris.<sup>40</sup> That is why P.G. Arutiunian, a senior researcher at the Oriental Institute, argued that "the Albanians were not the ancestors of the Azerbaijani people. They had lived their lives and perished."<sup>41</sup> Petrushevskii, Vil'chevskii, and other reviewers agreed that some Medians—the population of Atropatene—became part of the Azerbaijani ethnos.<sup>42</sup> However, their number was minuscule or, in the words of the Soviet Iranologists, "they formed a limited racial substratum without transferring their name and language to the [ancient] Azerbaijanis."<sup>43</sup> For them, the Turkic language used by the modern Azerbaijani nation was proof that their Turkification was extremely strong and the Turkic ethnic component of the nation dominated the previously existing indigenous ethnicities. Thus Iranologists adhered to a strictly linguistic understanding of ethnos, which sought linguistic continuity between the ancient and contemporary stages, and pointed the Azerbaijani historians towards a Turkic past. That is why, in the review sessions at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR in Baku, the Azerbaijani participants opposed the Iranologists and Orientalists, arguing that "the very essence of the arguments of Vil'chevskii and others does not differ from the ideas of the Pan-Turkists."<sup>44</sup>

These discussions bring us to another disputed issue. The Soviet Iranologists saw Medians as an Aryan or Indo-European people. The linguistic definition of nation pointed out that in order to define the ancient Medians as the ancestors of a contemporary nation, a linguistic link between them had to be established. While some of the Medians blended into the Azerbaijani ethnos and lost their language, "the other part of the Medians became part of the Persian and Kurdish ethnos and at the same time kept their linguistic continuity."<sup>45</sup> Thus the Soviet Iranologists implied that Medians could only be claimed by the Iranian and Kurdish nation-builders. Following the same logic, they came to the conclusion that "all constructions that relate the ancient Medians to the 'ancient-Azerbaijani ethnos' are artificial and historically incorrect"<sup>46</sup> and that "history and linguistics do not provide any basis [support the claim] that



Medians were ‘ancient Azerbaijanis.’”<sup>47</sup> The Azerbaijani reply aimed to hit back at the monolithic image of Media using linguistic instruments:

One of these [Median] tribes [listed by Herodotus], Paretaceni, has a name with Iranian etymology and lived in the north of Isfahan and further to the east. It seems that Paretaceni stood apart from the rest of the Medians and they were not always acknowledged as belonging to them. As for the names of other Median tribes, only one of them, the Arizanti—“Aryan tribe” has Iranian etymology. Hence, it can clearly be said that other Median tribes could not be “Aryan tribes” or Iranians.<sup>48</sup>

Medians were a mixture of different tribes and their Aryan identity has not been proven beyond doubt. In the words of the Azerbaijani scholar who chaired the review session, “Prof. I.P. Petrushevskii [and] Vil’chevskii are dogmatically digging out a modified version of an old theory without having any data [to prove] that Persians were linguistic successors of Medes. However, this theory has not been proved by anyone.”<sup>49</sup>

The linguistic approach also prevented Soviet Iranologists from uniting different ancient ethno-linguistic identities under the label of Azerbaijan or Azerbaijani identity. In particular, the reviewers of the draft text opposed the inclusion of both Albanians and Medians in the Azerbaijani ethnos. The Iranologists understood Medians to be essentially a group of Indo-European tribes, unlike Caucasian Albanians. The Azerbaijani historians could build their national history around Caucasian Albanians but they had to withdraw their claims to the Medes because:

[Caucasian] Albanians and Medians did not have anything in common. Their territory, language, religion, political life, and political history were all separate. Historical sources—Greek, Armenian, Assyrian, and others—about the Medians and Albanians convey that the two were separate peoples and never united.<sup>50</sup>

How could two linguistically different groups be defined as the ethnos of a nation?

The Azerbaijani territorial approach towards those identities was less rigid. First, it claimed that the Indo-European settlers did not displace or annihilate the autochthonous population. The population of Media was a mixture of aborigine (non-Indo-European and non-Semitic) tribes and Indo-European new settlers. The territory was evolving constantly and there were no clear-cut ethno-linguistic borders. “There were close ties between Medes and the populations of Elam [in the southwest of contemporary Iran], Urartu [in the east of contemporary Turkey] and with others.” So it would be awkward to disregard the interaction between Medians and the local tribes in the north. The indigenous tribes were dominant in the north and east (i.e. Media Atropatene). Hence, Azerbaijani historians continued, this difference was demonstrated in the territorial differentiation of Media Atropatene from the Greater Media in the south:

Ultimately the historical province of Media split in two: the north-west [of the province] was named Atropatene. It pursued an independent path of development closely linked to the history of development of Albania, [a territory] close to Atropatene in ethnic and cultural terms. The population of the southern and eastern parts of the Media province merged with Persians both ethnically and culturally.<sup>51</sup>

What the ancient historians referred to must have been these “Persianized” Medians in the south.

In addition, there was a dispute among the Soviet Iranologists and Azerbaijani historians about the borders of the Median territory in antiquity. According to the Soviet Iranologists,

only a small part of the territory that had been populated by the Medians overlapped with the historical territories of Azerbaijan. Atropatene [the ancient name of Iranian Azerbaijan] was a minor part of ancient Media. The bigger part was located around the contemporary towns of Iran and Iranian Kurdistan. [Moreover] the territory of contemporary Soviet Azerbaijan had never been part of Media and it had not been populated by Medians.<sup>52</sup>

The Azerbaijani reply was to move the emphasis of the narrative from the province of Media to the Median imperial state stretching from Asia Minor to Central Asia. “In our opinion,” the Azerbaijani historian who chaired the session replied, “the bold assertion [mentioned above] does not correspond to reality. Separate sources, though indirectly, suggest that the territorial and ethnic boundaries of the Medians [Empire] expanded up to the Kura River and even further to the north.”<sup>53</sup>

Finally, The linguistic approach did not accept the retrospective naming of contemporary Azerbaijani territories as “Azerbaijan.” The Iranologists claimed that

in antiquity there was no such name as “Azerbaijan.” [Ancient] History knows only Media and [Caucasian] Albania; the term “Azerbaijan” should be used in reference to later ages, when this word appeared [ ... ] It would be wrong, for instance, to refer to Kievan Rus as “Russia.”<sup>54</sup>

The Iranologists’ solution was to go back to the primary sources:

The country has to be named in a particular episode of history as it was named in the records of the time. It should be named Azerbaijan at the moment when the primary sources started to use this term. Up to that point, individual parts of the country should be referred to by the names used at the time in question.<sup>55</sup>

Thus in the chapters on the ancient period the different sections of contemporary Azerbaijan should be called Mannea, Caucasian Albania, Media Atropatene, Aturpatakan, etc. In the later chapters these separate territories could be called a united territory

of Azerbaijan. From the Azerbaijani perspective, however, the Iranologists' argument was extrapolating the reality of a different geography to the case of Azerbaijan. Kievan Rus could not be called "Russia" because it was also claimed by the Ukrainian nation-builders. The Soviet solution for this Russian–Ukrainian conflict was to promote the idea of an earlier "east-Slavic nation," which had preceded the formation of Russian and Ukrainian national identities. Subsequently, Russian identity was based on the Russian language—thus, Russian identity appeared after the separation of Russian from other East Slavic languages. This was again a linguistic approach to national identity and Iranologists pointed it out to defend their lingo-centric definition of Azerbaijanis. In the Azerbaijani case, however, identity was already constructed around a specific territory and the Azerbaijani nation-builders used the term "Azerbaijan" without referring to the constantly changing ethno-linguistic composition of the territory.

The territorial definition was further developed in the years that followed. The final version of Azerbaijani national history put emphasis on Mannea (a tribal union around Lake Urmia in the tenth to seventh centuries BC) and the Azerbaijani ethnos was defined as a merger of "Manneas, Caspians, Cadusii, and sections of the Medians in the eastern regions of Azerbaijan."<sup>56</sup>

### *Conclusions*

Western Orientalists left the Iranian nation-builders a legacy of understanding nations through the prism of racial and linguistic continuity. The modern constructors of Iranian national identity utilized these two components in the 1930s. According to this approach, Medes were identified as the first Aryan or Indo-European people in west Asia. The Azerbaijani historical narrative, however, could not follow a linguistic or racial approach. The linguistic approach implied a discontinuity in the Azerbaijani history because of the Turkification that occurred in the thirteenth century. The Azerbaijani nation-builders followed a path that contradicted the Iranian theory, and established historical continuity according to the territorial principle. The Azerbaijani theory aimed to turn a geographic term into an ethno-toponym—i.e. a name that would identify both the region and all the ethnic groups within the territory. In their view, the Azerbaijani nation was a cauldron which melted all the tribes and ethnicities that had inhabited these territories since the beginning of history. That is why "Azerbaijan" did not have a limited usage in the national narrative and could not appear merely as a geographical term in the medieval annals. It was the name of a nation that was a synthesis of several constituent ethno-linguistic groups through time. In their view, adding the label "Azerbaijan" next to the names of ancient figures or polities was a natural conclusion. The Azerbaijani territorial approach was scarcely original. It was akin to the nineteenth century construction of the modern British territorial and national identity all the way back to the Celts, regardless of the switch to the Anglo-Saxon tongue.

The Iranian historians had nothing to prove or struggle for. They had the comfort of being the first nationalizers/occupants of the past and they possessed the tools

already developed by western Orientalists. The Azerbaijani nation-builders, however, had an uneasy position because they had the difficult task of reconquering the same past from an already consolidated Iranian narrative. Besides, the Azerbaijani nation-builders went against the mainstream in the region. While Armenians, Georgians, Turks, and Iranians built their modern identities based on ethno-linguistic definitions, Azerbaijanis were the only ones to follow the territorial principle. This discrepancy was difficult for the others, including the Soviet Iranologists, to comprehend within their habitual paradigm. Although the Iron Curtain delayed the inevitable debate with Iranian historians by half a century, the Azerbaijanis found their first opponents within the Soviet Union. The Soviet Iranologists—drawing, as the Iranian nation-builders did, on western Orientalism—attacked the Azerbaijani narrative at the first opportunity after Stalin, the patron of the Azerbaijani national narrative, had died.

A dispute between two independently constructed national narratives in separate polities such as those of Germany and France, or Hungary and Romania, would not necessarily need any coordination or reconciliation. A similar dispute within the Soviet Union, however, demanded political attention. By contradicting the Azerbaijani narrative, Soviet Iranologists jeopardized the national identity of one of the republics within the multinational Soviet system, which had obvious political implications. In addition, multiple narratives of the same past were not tolerated because history had political functions and it was written with respect to ideological tenets. History had to be written within the Communist Party's ideological framework, and one ideological "truth" could not produce multiple historical interpretations. The first secretary of the CPA and other party officials in Baku were kept informed about the discussions between the two groups. We know this because, as was the usual practice for such important cases, the minutes of the above-mentioned academic discussions and meetings were sent to the first secretary of the CPA. However, the CPA leadership could not reconcile two interpretations; instead, they tacitly defended the views of the Azerbaijani historians and their national narrative vis-à-vis the Soviet Iranologists. Consequently, while the Azerbaijani historians continued to construct their national narrative in Baku, the Soviet Iranologists reproduced the Iranian interpretation of the past. This also shows the limits of the Communist Party's control over history writing and the hardships of accommodating contradictory interpretations of history within a multinational communist state.

### *Notes*

1. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Weiner, *Landscaping the Human Garden*. For the Soviet Union: Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.
2. Here I use 'Iranian' representing dynastic terms and not to refer to a particular ethno-linguistic identity.
3. Yilmaz, "The Soviet Union.," Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography*, 19–37.
4. Jones, "Third Anniversary Discourse."
5. Rendall, *The Cradle of the Aryans*; Le Bon, *The Crowd*; Childe, *The Aryans*; Cox, *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations*; Gobineau, *Selected Political Writings*, 134–44; Biddiss, *Father of Racist Ideology*,

- 112–51; Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*; Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 1–123. For a summary of further sources and counter-arguments: Vaziri, *Iran as an Imagined Nation*, 75–81.
6. Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 20.
  7. Vaziri, *Iran as an Imagined Nation*, 71.
  8. Oppert, *Peuple et la Langue Des Mèdes*.
  9. Delattre, *L'Empire des Mèdes*; Vaux, *Ancient History from the Monuments*, 15; Rawlinson, *The Five Great Monarchies*, 306–25; Winckler, *Zur medischen und altpersischen Geschichte*, 116–17, 122; Winckler, *Auszug aus der vorderasiatischen Geschichte*, 82–6; Prášek, *Geschichte der Meder und Perser*; Bury et al., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2,209; Berr, “Foreword”; Huart, *Ancient Persia and Iranian Civilization*, 26; Herzfeld, *Iranische Denkmäler*; Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran*.
  10. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 186, 199–202, 206–7. Kashani-Sabet cites archival materials and the following school textbooks covering the race, history, and geography of Iran: Mirza Abu Talib Khan, *Ilm al-Asbya* (Tehran, 1343/1924); Zuka’ al-Mulk Furughi, *Tarikh-i Mukhtasar-i Iran* (Tehran, 1343/1924); Abbas Iqbal, *Ashtiyani, Jugbrafiya-yi Asiya va Iran* (Tehran, 1345/1926). On Hasan Pirnia and other nation-building historians and bureaucrats of the time see: Grigor, “Recultivating ‘Good Taste,’” 17–45; Atabaki, “Agency and Subjectivity,” 74; Safamanesh, “Architectural Historiography 1921–42.”
  11. Kashani-Sabet, *Frontier Fictions*, 207.
  12. Abdi, “Nationalism, Politics.”
  13. Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, 46; Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, 27, 148; Katouzian, “Nationalist Trends in Iran,” I:541–42.
  14. Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*, 96–7.
  15. Some western scholars claimed that the Magi were an indigenous tribe of priests, also the leaders of the non-Aryan population of the Media. However these arguments about mixed ethno-linguistic Media.
  16. For details see Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography*, 33.
  17. Dzhafarzade, Klimov, and Iampol’skii, *Istoriia Azerbaidzhanskoi SSR*, 15–17.
  18. Conquest, *The Politics of Ideas*, 8–9.
  19. *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana kratkii ocherk*.
  20. *Ibid.*, 19.
  21. *Ibid.*, 21–31.
  22. *Ibid.*, 31.
  23. Vurğun, “Azərbaycan Epopeyası,” 20–21.
  24. Vurğun, “Lenin Ordenli,” 42; also see the same emphasis in his article: Vurğun, “Azərbaycanın Elmi Tarixini Yaradaq,” 54.
  25. *Istoriia Azerbajana: chast’ I*, 27–8.
  26. Turaev, *Istoriia drevniago vostoka: chast’II*, 106–7. According to Turaev, the principality of Mannei was located in the west side of Lake Urmia and was also founded by the Aryans, 47. An identical narrative can be found in the Soviet edition: Turaev, *Istoriia drevnego vostoka: tom II*, 34, 77; Bartol’d, “Mesto Prikaspiiskikh Oblastei,” 656; Bartol’d, “Istoriko-geograficheski obzor Irana,” 35, 135, 140, 152, 21.
  27. Struve, *Istoriia devnego vostoka: kratkii kurs*, 109.
  28. Struve, *Istoriia drevnego vostoka*, 366.
  29. Avdiev, *Istoriia drevnego vostoka* (1948), 449.
  30. Avdiev, *Istoriia drevnego vostoka* (1953), 558.
  31. Pigulevskaia et al, *Istoriia Irana*, 8.
  32. *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana: Maket*, Volume 1 and 2.
  33. *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana: Maket*, Volume 1, 12.
  34. *Ibid.*, 17–29.
  35. Azərbaycan Respublikası Prezidentinin İşlər İdarəsi Siyasi Partiyalar və İctimai Hərəkətlər Dövlət Arxivi [The Political Parties and Public Movements State Archive of the Executive Office of the Pre-

- sident of the Republic of Azerbaijan] (hereafter ARPİİSPİHDA), (fond)1-(opis)41-(delo)486-(list)5, June 20, 1955.
36. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-6/7, June 20, 1955.
  37. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-7, June 20, 1955.
  38. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-20, June 20, 1955; *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana: Maket*, Volume 1, 32–3.
  39. *Istoriia Azerbaidzhana: Maket*, Volume 1, 33.
  40. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21, June 20, 1955.
  41. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-19, June 20, 1955.
  42. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21, June 20, 1955.
  43. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21/22, June 20, 1955.
  44. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21, June 20, 1955.
  45. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-22, June 20, 1955.
  46. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21, June 20, 1955.
  47. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21, June 20, 1955.
  48. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-14/15, June 20, 1955. Herodotus records six tribes that constituted the Medians: “the Busae, the Paretaceni, the Struchates, the Arizanti, the Budii, the Magi” Herodotus, [*Histories*]. Vol. 1, 101.
  49. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-22, June 20, 1955. D’iakonov’s account published in 1956 on the Medians somehow parallel to the Azerbaijani line. According to D’iakonov the language that was called “Median” by the ancient sources belonged to the Iranian group of languages (next to the Avestian, ancient Persian, Parthian, Sogdian, Scythian, and Khorezmian). However, this did not mean that all population in the province of Media was Indo-European. This was a language of a particular tribe or tribal federation while there were other tribes and this was not a homogenous territory. It would be hard to claim that one ethno-language dominated particularly in the Media Atropatene. Also, according to D’iakonov, the difference between the Median and ancient Persian was much bigger than the difference between the Median language and others. D’iakonov, *Istoriia Midii*, 67–70.
  50. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-21, June 20, 1955.
  51. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-11, June 20, 1955. D’iakonov agreed with this argument: D’iakonov, *Istoriia*, 70.
  52. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-11, June 20, 1955.
  53. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-11, June 20, 1955.
  54. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-9, June 20, 1955.
  55. ARPİİSPİHDA, 1-41-486-9, June 20, 1955.
  56. *Azərbaycan tarixi uç cildə*, 62.

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