

# Historical Approaches to the Issue of Etymology, Statehood and Identity of Azerbaijan \*

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## Abstract

Azerbaijan and Iran as neighbouring countries have a very ancient history and rich culture. It is completely wrong approach to equate Azerbaijan and Iran or to consider Azerbaijan an integral part of Iran. Sometimes historians and researchers talk about these two countries separately, and sometimes they consider Azerbaijan as an integral part of Iranian geography. However, if we pay attention to the early days of history, we can see that Azerbaijan and Iran were completely different countries that were not connected. Azerbaijan was formed as geography inhabited by Turks in the early Middle Ages and was not connected to Iran. On the other hand, Iran has a more federal structure and is formed as a multinational geography. If we pay attention to

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\* The Treaty of Turkmenchay divided the territory of Azerbaijan into Northern and Southern parts between Russia and Iran in 1828. So, the paper studies the general history of Azerbaijan until 1828 and focuses on the statehood of Northern Azerbaijan since 1828.

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the etymology of the name of Azerbaijan, the history of statehood and the existing historical approaches to its identity, we can see that this country initially has not been a part of Iran and was formed as an independent state.

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan, Iran, Azerbaijani history, etymology, statehood, identity.

## **Azerbaycan'ın Adı, Devletçiliği Ve Kimliği Meselesine Tarihsel Yaklaşımlar**

### **Öz**

Azerbaycan ve İran çok eski bir tarihe ve zengin bir kültüre sahiptir. Azerbaycan ve İran'ı eşitlemek veya Azerbaycan'ı İran'ın ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak görmek tamamen yanlış bir yaklaşımdır. Bazen tarihçiler ve araştırmacılar bu iki ülkeden ayrı ayrı bahseder ve bazen Azerbaycan'ı İran coğrafyasının ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak görürler. Ancak tarihin ilk çağlarına dikkat edersek Azerbaycan ve İran'ın birbirine bağlı olmayan tamamen farklı ülkeler olduğunu görebiliriz. Azerbaycan, Orta Çağ'ın başlarında Türklerin yaşadığı bir coğrafya olarak kurulmuş ve İran'a bağlı değildi. İran ise daha federal bir yapıya sahip ve çok uluslu bir coğrafya olarak şekillenmiştir. Azerbaycan isminin etimolojisine, devlet tarihine ve kimliğine yönelik mevcut tarihsel yaklaşımlara dikkat edersek, bu ülkenin İran'ın bir parçası olmadığını ve bağımsız bir devlet olarak kurulduğunu görebiliriz.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Azerbaycan, İran, Azerbaycan tarihi, etimoloji, devletçilik, kimlik.

### **Introduction**

The form of government in most of the states and empires existed in the East was almost same. The value that unites these states, which are represented by different peoples, is that they are dynastic states and are mostly mentioned in the sources by the names of dynasties. For this reason, in some cases, the states that existed in the East in the Middle Ages are named after dynasties in modern historiography. With the emergence and spread of Islam, a very large Islamic geography was created, including Azerbaijan. Some of the states that exist in the Islamic East today have also nationalized the names that emerged in the Islamic era. It should be noted that the name of Azerbaijan took a new shape with the emergence of Islam.

It would be appropriate to give a brief introduction about the etymology and history of the name of Iran before talking about the etymology of the name of Azerbaijan and the history of statehood. There are also speculations that the name of Iran appeared during the Sassanid period and was derived from the name "Eran". The fact that the name Iran is derived from Eran is closer to reality. Thus, one of the Turkish researchers, Metin Erendor, draws attention to the term Eran, which is derived from the Iranian name, and notes that the term was found in a written monument next to the emblem depicting the coronation of the Sassanid Shah Ardashir I in Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran.<sup>1</sup> In that historical period, the name of Iran did not officially represent the name of any state and did not have a national meaning. This issue is also reflected in the Western scientific literature, and one of the approaches states that in the time of Ardeshir I, the term Eran meant people living in this region more than the state.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Sassanid state, founded in the third century, was a large empire for some time and managed to unite today's Iran and South Azerbaijan, part of Turkestan, Anatolia, Iraq and some areas inhabited by Arabs. However, there was an independent statehood in both the north (in the example of Albania) and the south (in the example of Atropatene) of today's Azerbaijan in the pre-Sassanid historical period.

Persian rule in Iran is characterized by the Achaemenids before Christ and the Sassanids after Christ. The Sassanid state, which emerged in the third century and became a great empire, was occupied by the Arab caliphate in the seventh century. After that, the Persian rule in Iran suspended until 1925. After the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate from the end of the tenth century, Iran was ruled for a thousand years by Turkic dynasties from Central Asia or Turkestan.<sup>3</sup> The people were united on the basis of religious identity, and Iran, as usual, had a geographical meaning during the millennium of Turkic rule in Iran, which began with the Qaznavids.

The independent statehood in the historical lands of Azerbaijan began with the establishment of the Mannea state in the IX century

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<sup>1</sup> Metin Erendor, *İranda Türk Kimliği*, Kamer Yayınları, İstanbul 2018, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> David Niel Mackenzie, "Eran, Eransahr", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *İran ve İnkılabı*, Zerbamat Basımevi, Ankara 1941, p. 11.

BC. Immediately after the fall of the empire of Alexander the Great, in the late 4th and early 3rd centuries BC, Albania and Atropatene were established in what is now northern Azerbaijan and southern Azerbaijan. To this day, there are biased opinions in the scientific literature about the ethnic composition of these states. After the Arab conquest of Sassanid lands and Albania in the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the lands of Atropatene and Albania, were united into a single administrative division. After that, these lands were called Azerbaijan, and on the eve of the beginning of a strong people's movement against the Arab occupation in Azerbaijan in the ninth century, the traditions of independent statehood were restored and lasted for hundreds of years.

The common history of the peoples of Azerbaijan and Persia began with the establishment of a new kingdom by Shah Ismail I in Tabriz, the cultural center of Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Iranian throne gradually replaced the throne of Azerbaijan after Shah Abbas came to power. Among the factors influencing this issue were the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Ottomans and involvement of Persian elements in the palace and benefit from their power by Shah Abbas. After that, both Azerbaijan and Persia became two of the four most important provinces of Iran, which have a geographical meaning. The administrative division of Iran remained unchanged during the Safavids, Afshars and Qajars. At the same time, the first attempt to build a state on a national basis in the geography of Iran was made again in Azerbaijan. Therefore, it is completely wrong to confuse the names of Iran and Azerbaijan or to consider Azerbaijan an integral part of Iran. If we look at the different approaches to the roots of the name of Azerbaijan and the history of statehood, we can observe this fact.

### **Historical approaches to the etymology of the name of Azerbaijan**

Historians have not yet expressed a unit opinion about the name of Azerbaijan. Historically, there were tribes, tribal associations and states with different names in the lands of Azerbaijan. Although it is believed that the first state in Azerbaijan was Mannea, sometimes Media is included here. Media consisted of two parts - Greater and Minor Media. The state of Atropatene also included Minor Media.

After the fall of the empire of Alexander the Great, the states called Albania and Atropatene were established in the lands of historical Azerbaijan. Albania covered the territory of present-day Northern Azerbaijan and Atropatene, the territory of Southern Azerbaijan. The geographical map of Azerbaijan was originally created over Atropatene and Albania. Of course, the origin of the name of Azerbaijan is one of the issues of interest in the science of history.

The scientific literature is dominated by the idea that the name of Azerbaijan is derived from Atropatene. The ancient Greek historian Strabo, who gave the first information about Atropatene, said that the name Atropatene was derived from the name of Atropates, the head of the country of Minor Mada/Media.<sup>4</sup> Atropates (not a personal name, but a religious position - meaning "guardian of fire" and the name of the highest-ranking priest in the fire-worshipping temple) was a well-known commander in the Achaemenid period and later in Alexander's time was appointed as a satrap in the lands of today's Southern Azerbaijan. In the time of both the Achaemenids and Alexander, empires were divided into satrapies. The territory of present-day Southern Azerbaijan was also under the satrapy of Atropates. He became fully independent after the death of Alexander the Great, and the lands he controlled were later renamed Atropatene.

Interestingly, the name of Atropatene was mentioned later as "Azerbaijan" in the works of most historians and maps compiled by travellers, especially in Arabic sources. The fact that the name of Azerbaijan is derived from Atropatene and gradually became the name of a state seems a little contradictory. Therefore, some historians do not consider this approach correct. Various opinions about the origin of the name of Azerbaijan from ancient times to the present day show that some questions remain unsolved.

Thus, Fazlullah Rashid al-Din, a prominent historian and physician, put forward a very interesting opinion about the name of Azerbaijan in his work entitled "Jami al-Tawarikh". The work contains information

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<sup>4</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*, XI.13.1., English translation by Horace Leonard Jones, London 1961, p. 303.

about Oghuz Khan's visits to Azerbaijani lands of Shirvan, Aran and Mughan. In this regard, Rashid al-Din noted that the army collected land and built a large hill, which was named Azerbaijan on the orders of Oghuz Khan.<sup>5</sup> These views of Rashid al-Din on the derivation of the name of Azerbaijan were a novelty, but these views did not reflect the historical reality. Because, hundreds of years before the arrival of Oghuzs and Seljuks in Azerbaijan, Turks lived in these lands and the name of Azerbaijan was found in the sources. Even the medieval Arab historian Yagut al-Hamawi wrote that the name of Azerbaijan is connected with the name of Azerbaz descended from Noah, derived from the particles "Azer" and "Bijan".<sup>6</sup> This idea of the origin of the name of Azerbaijan is not so widespread among historians and is not considered as the right approach. Another interesting approach to the derivation of the Azerbaijani name belongs to the prominent Azerbaijani historian Abbasguluagha Bakikhanov. He wrote that the name of Azerbaijan means Babak's fire in his famous work "Gulustani-Iram".<sup>7</sup> After the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Arab Caliphate, the looting of the local population by the Arabs and the imposition of high taxes caused justified dissatisfaction. At this time, the Khurrami movement began in Azerbaijan, and Babak later became the leader of the movement. The Khurrami movement launched in Azerbaijan under the leadership of Babak was even successful for some time, and Azerbaijan escaped from the Arab invasion. It is a historical fact that the Khurrami movement and its ideological foundations spread in the territory of north-south Azerbaijan and became a symbol of freedom of the Azerbaijani people. Prominent Azerbaijani linguist-scientist Firudin Aghasioglu Jalilov analyzed the writings of ancient and medieval historians and studied the roots and history of the ancient tribes living in Azerbaijan on a linguistic basis. In this regard, F.Aghasioglu tried to prove that the name of Azerbaijan has nothing to do with Atropates and originated in Azerbaijan, which means "Land of

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<sup>5</sup> Zeki Velidi Togan, *Oguz destanı, Reşideddin Oğuznamesi, Tercüme ve Tahlili*, İstanbul 1982, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Azərbaycan Tarixi Üzrə Qaynaqlar*, Çıraq, Bakı 2007, p. 182.

<sup>7</sup> Abbasqulu Ağa Bakıxanov, *Gülüstani İram*, Bakı 1991, p. 59.

Azers".<sup>8</sup> Of course, this approach is also a new idea about the historical roots of the name of Azerbaijan, but like the approach of previous historians, it has not yet found its decisive confirmation. The Turkish researcher Dr. Hajer Göl emphasized that two legends about the name of Azerbaijan are most widespread. According to the Turkish researcher, the name of Azerbaijan is derived from the combination of the words "azer" (fire) and "baygan" (protector) means the protector of fire.<sup>9</sup> These views on the etymology of the name of Azerbaijan indicate that there is no unequivocal approach to the issue.

The name of this country mentioned in historical sources as Atropatene, Azerbadeqan, Azerbaygan, Azerbijan and Azerbigan is Azerbaijan. This is an unchanging fact. From the above, it can be concluded that the notion of "protector of fire" on the name of Azerbaijan is closer to the reality. The borders of Azerbaijan, which is located at a strategic point in the fight against the enemy and is mostly mountainous, have changed at different times. Neighbouring Albania and Atropatene were separate states before the Arab conquest. The name Albania was used later in historical sources in the form of Agvan, Arran and Shirvan. After the Arab conquest, the territory of Albania and Atropatene remained essentially unchanged. However, after the Arab invasion, Arran, Azerbaijan and Armenia were united into a single administrative unit.<sup>10</sup> Of course, the lands under the Abbasid Caliphate were separated geographically and every geography represented one country at that time. In this sense, Azerbaijan also took a different shape as a geographical name during the Caliphate. Ibn Hawqal compiled a map of those countries based on Istakhri's writings and called it a map of Azerbaijan.<sup>11</sup> In the geographical maps compiled by these historians and travellers, the territory of Azerbaijan stretched from Derbent in the north, including Hamadan and Zanja in the

<sup>8</sup> Firudin Ağasıoğlu, *Azərbaycan Türklərinin İslamaqədərki Tarixi*, III Bitik, Ağrıdağ Nəşriyyatı, Bakı 2014, p. 370.

<sup>9</sup> Hacer Göl, "Geçmişten Günümüze Azerbaycan", *Bitlis Eren Universitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Cilt 5, Sayı 1, Bitlis, (2016), p. 154.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Istakhri, *Kitab al-Masalik wa-al-Mamalik*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Brill, Leiden, 1870, pp. 180-181.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Hawqal, *Şütrat al-ard*, c. I-II, ed. J.H.Kramers, Leiden, 1939, pp. 331-332.

south, and from the coast of Caspian Sea in the east to the present-day Turkish border including Armenia in the west.

Thus, the important ideas listed about the roots and history of the name of Azerbaijan, are of great importance in clarifying the issue. These views put forward by historians on the origin of the name of Azerbaijan differ from each other. These differences in themselves do not allow us to say an unambiguous opinion on the history of the name of Azerbaijan. It should be noted that countries are usually named after people, places and tribe. In this sense, some historians accept the name Atropatene as the initial version. An in-depth analysis of the etymology of the name shows that the names Atropatene and Azerbaijan are very far from each other. However, the existing different approaches do not cast doubt on that Azerbaijan is a Turkic country. The study of the origin and history of the Turkic peoples is also important in the field of Turkology in Turkey. However, since no research has been conducted in the history of Turkish public opinion, a significant number of Turkish historians believe that the name Azerbaijan comes from Atropatene, and at the same time accept that the Turks are an indigenous people in Azerbaijan.

### **Historical approaches to the issue of Azerbaijani statehood**

If we look at the history of Azerbaijan's statehood after the Arab invasion, we can see that Azerbaijan is not part of Iran. Thus, a strong resistance movement against the ruling class and the Arab occupation began in Azerbaijan at the end of the VIII century. This movement called Khurrami, spread to a large part of Azerbaijan in 816 under the leadership of Babak and became a national liberation movement against the Arab occupation. As a result of the movement's victory over the Arab invaders, Azerbaijan became independent in the first half of the ninth century. The history of the first state called Azerbaijan can be attributed to the IX century. Thus, mentioning of Babak, the leader of the Khurramites, as a ruler in the book "History of the Prophets and Kings" by the Arab historian al-Tabari, who spoke about the widespread Khurrami movement in the territory of Azerbaijan, can



confirm that Azerbaijan is an independent state.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, Babak was the ruler of the independent Azerbaijani state. In some cases, they try to show Babak as just a rebel. However, the presence of the seal of the Azerbaijani ruler Babak, his palace (Bazz fortress), regular army, currency, and official correspondence with the rulers of neighbouring countries confirms the existence of Azerbaijan as a state in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Accepting this fact, a prominent Azerbaijani historian Acad. Ziya Bunyadov, referring to the Arab historian al-Suyuti, noted that Caliph al-Mutasim captured the king of Azerbaijan in 837.<sup>13</sup> It is one of the facts confirming that Babak was a king and Azerbaijan was an independent state in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Naturally, the Abbasid caliphs wrote distorted information in historical books about Azerbaijan and its ruler Babak fighting against them. The Abbasid Caliphate, which did not give up its intention to invade, re-occupied Azerbaijan in 837, stifling the national movement in Azerbaijan in blood. However, the Arabs could not stay in Azerbaijan for long and reckoned with Azerbaijan's independence. This movement dealt such a blow to the Caliphate that the Arabs were forced to leave the occupied Azerbaijani lands.

In the second half of the ninth century, the traditions of independent statehood were restored in Azerbaijan. The Shirvanshahs dynasty was established in the lands of Azerbaijan joining the Kura River to the Caspian Sea and managed to maintain its existence until the 16th century. From then on, the lands of Northern Azerbaijan between the Kura River and the Caspian Sea were mentioned on the maps as Shirvan.<sup>14</sup> The Shaddadids dynasty, established in the north of Azerbaijan in the 10th century, was able to maintain its existence until the end of the 11th century. In the 9th century, independent statehood was restored in the lands of South Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, and Sajid, Salarid, Ravvadid, Atabegs, Jalairid, Garagoyunlu, Aghgoyunlu and Safavid dynasties replaced each other on the throne of Azerbaijan. In the Middle Ages, states in the East were sometimes

<sup>12</sup> *The History of al-Tabari*, Volume XXXIII, English translation by C.E. Bosworth, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> Ziya Bunyadov, *Azərbaycan VII-IX Əsrlərdə*, Şərq-Qərb, Baku 2007, p. 335.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Haviland, *Kulturel Antropoloji*, Türkçeye çeviren İnac, Hüsamettin; Ciftci, Seda, Kaknus yayınları, İstanbul, 2002, p. 17.

referred to as dynasties. However, these areas are marked on the maps as Azerbaijan. The expression of the Azerbaijani state can also be found in historical books of the XIV century. Thus, the fourteenth-century Azerbaijani historian Abu Bakr al-Qutbi al-Ahari, in his work "Tarikh-i Sheikh Uwais" in Persian, referred to the events of 1304-1359. The work reflects the decline of the Hulagu (Elkhanid) state and the accession of the Jalairid dynasty to the Azerbaijani throne in Azerbaijan. In this regard, the expression "Kingdom of Azerbaijan and Arran" was developed in the work.<sup>15</sup> Even Hasan beg Rumlu's "Ahsan al-Tavarikh", one of the Persian-language sources, mentioned Jahanshah, the ruler of the Garagoyunlu dynasty, considered one of the most powerful dynasties in Azerbaijan, and Hasan padshah (king), the ruler of the Aghgoyunlu dynasty, as the ruler of the Azerbaijani throne.<sup>16</sup> In the Middle Ages, "throne" was used in the East in the sense of statehood. The term "Azerbaijani throne" also means the Azerbaijani state. All of these facts give grounds to say that Azerbaijan is an independent state and it is not part of Iran.

The common history of Azerbaijan and Iran began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty. Thus, a new kingdom was established in the city of Tabriz by Ismail Safavi I, a descendant of Hatai of Turkish origin, in the city of Ardabil, Azerbaijan in 1501. A new empire was established in the East with the establishment of the Safavid dynasty. After that, Turks, Persians, Kurds and some Arabs living in a large area stretching from the Caucasus Mountains to the Persian Gulf united. Nevertheless, some modern historians try to Persianize the Safavid dynasty and consider the Safavid state to be a Persian state. Even the ethnic roots of Shah Ismail, the founder of the state, are biased in the scientific literature. However, what is mentioned in the sources about Shah Ismail and his dynasty gives grounds to say that he was a Turk. Minorsky, a prominent Russian orientalist who studied the literary work of Shah Ismail Khatai, considered Shah Ismail to be the pir of the Azerbaijani

<sup>15</sup> Abu-Bakr al-Qutbi al-Ahari, *Tarikh-i Shaikh Uwais (History of Shaikh Uwais)*, An Important Source for the history of Adharbajjan in the XIV century, Edited and translated by J.B.Van Loon, Mouton & Co, 1954, p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Həsən Rumlu, *Əhsənüt-Təvərix*, Azərbaycan dilinə tərcümə (Oqtay Əfəndiyev və Namiq Musalı), Baku 2017, p. 257, 290.

Turks, based on the phrase “*Khatai became a speaker; he became a pir of Turkestan*”.<sup>17</sup> Undoubtedly, Shah Ismail Khatai belongs to the Turkic population of Azerbaijan, and the Safavid Gizilbash state, which he proclaimed in the center of the Azerbaijani throne in Tabriz, was also the Azerbaijani state. By replacing the Aghgoyunlu dynasty, the Safavids opened a new page in the history of Azerbaijani statehood. It is completely wrong to consider the Safavid state as a Persian state. Public administration, the tribes involved in the establishment of the state and the development of the Turkic language in the palace prove that the Safavid dynasty was an Azerbaijani state. Among the sources proving that the Safavid dynasty was the state of Azerbaijan, the works "Tarikh-i alamara-ye Ismail" and "Tarikh-i alamara-ye Safavi" written by an anonymous author have an important place. Referring to the anonymous author, prominent Azerbaijani historian, Professor Dr. Oqtay Efendiyev notes: “*Shah Ismail summoned Huseyn bey Lala, Muhammad bey Ustajli, Ahdibey Shamli, Khadimbey Khulafa, Grapiribey Qajar, whom he considered the pillars of the state, and asked: do you want Azerbaijani kingdom (throne) or Gulustan fortress? All the gentlemen answered this question by saying Azerbaijan*”.<sup>18</sup> The term kingdom or throne of Azerbaijan is also used in this source. This unequivocally means the state of Azerbaijan, and indirectly, the state established by the Safavids is also the state of Azerbaijan.

However, the Safavid Shahs had to move their capital from Tabriz to Qazvin and then to Isfahan under pressure of the Ottoman Empire. With the transfer of the central government from Azerbaijan to Iran, the Safavid dynasty was also called the kingdom of Iran from time to time, and the Safavid Shahs began to be shown in historical books as the Shahs of Iran. Thus, Iskandar beg Munshi dedicated his book “Tarikh-i alamara-ye Abbasi” written in Persian to Shah I Abbas of the Safavid dynasty and showed him as the Shah of Iran. However, the name of Iran does not mean that the state is Persian. The Safavids, Afshars and Qajars who ruled the Iranian kingdom were also Azerbaijani Turks. Among the historians who defended the Safavids of

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<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Minorsky, “The Poetry of Shah Ismail I”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4, London 1942, p. 1006a.

<sup>18</sup> Oqtay Əfəndiyev, *Azərbaycan Səfəvilər Dövləti*, Şərq-Qərb, Baku 2007, p. 52.

Turkic origin were V.V.Bartold, M.S.Ivanov and I.I.Petrushevsky. All three authors considered the Safavids to be Turks, considering the attributes of statehood, army structure, and the language used in the palace.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, this center of Turkism is unequivocally Azerbaijan. Therefore, today the Safavid state in Azerbaijan is considered the Azerbaijani state. The Safavids established in Azerbaijan and continuing their existence in Iran (Persia), formed a new empire in the East. Azerbaijan, Persia, Khorasan and Kurdistan became the provinces of the Iranian kingdom. As a matter of course, Azerbaijan has always been the central province of Iran after this unification, and the Iranian kingdom was ruled by Azerbaijani Turks. Nevertheless, some Iranian historians consider Azerbaijan to be an integral part of Iran, based on the name Iran. However, Iran has been a common state of Turks and Persians for hundreds of years. Azerbaijan, inhabited by Turks, and Persia, inhabited by Persians were the main provinces in the Iranian kingdom. At the same time, it should be noted that Azerbaijan has always played a central role.

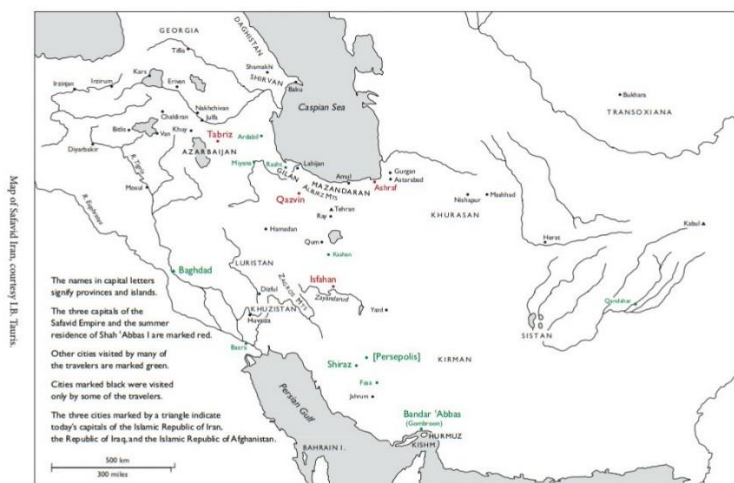
In 1736, Nadir Shah, a descendant of Afshar of Turkic origin, changed the dynasty with the accession to the throne in the congress held in the area called Mughan in Azerbaijan. The Safavid dynasty, which had been a powerful empire in the East for many years, experienced its most powerful period during the reign of Nadir Shah Afshar. Nadir Shah abolished the old principalities and created a single administrative territory under the name of Azerbaijan. The center of Azerbaijan was Tabriz, and the ruler was Nadir Shah's brother Ibrahim. Thus, the Azerbaijani ideology is gaining new momentum. An important event to resolve the issue of the royal throne was held not in Mashhad, Isfahan, but in the territory of Azerbaijan. Most likely, by holding such a serious event in the territory of Azerbaijan, Nadir Shah

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<sup>19</sup> Zülfiyyə Veliyeva, "Safevilerin Menşei və Kızılbaşça", *Journal of Azerbaijani Studies*, p. 336.

[https://www.academia.edu/9279352/Safevilerin\\_Men%C5%9Fei\\_ve\\_K%C4%B1z%C4%B1ba%C5%9F%C3%A7a\\_The\\_Origin\\_of\\_Safavids\\_and\\_Kizilbash\\_Language\\_Kizilbashch\\_a](https://www.academia.edu/9279352/Safevilerin_Men%C5%9Fei_ve_K%C4%B1z%C4%B1ba%C5%9F%C3%A7a_The_Origin_of_Safavids_and_Kizilbash_Language_Kizilbashch_a) (Accessed on: 03.11.2020)

wanted to show the one-time return of the South Caucasus or his affiliation to the Azerbaijani Turks.<sup>20</sup>



Note: The map of the Safavid state was compiled by I.B.Tauris

However, the atrocities committed by Nadir Shah Afshar against Azerbaijan took the first steps to separate Azerbaijan from Iran after his death. After the death of Nadir Shah in 1747, feudal disintegration began in Iran and Azerbaijan was divided into independent khanates. At the end of the 18th century, the Qajars regained power in Iran, including the territory of South Azerbaijan.<sup>21</sup> In Northern Azerbaijan, the khanates continued their independence. After Agha Mohammad Shah Qajar, the kingdom of Iran began to decline. This process took a long time, and Azerbaijan suffered the most.

At a time when the Qajars were weakening, Tsarist Russia headed for Iran in order to gain control of the Great Silk Road and access to the warm seas. The Qajars were defeated twice in the war with the Russians. The Turkmenchay Treaty of February 10, 1828 was signed

<sup>20</sup> Səməd Bayramzadə, “Maykl Aksvörtinin Nadir Şah Kitabı Azərbaycançılıq Baxımından”, İngilis Şərqişünası Maykl Aksvörtinin “Nadir şah” Kitabının Azərbaycan Dilinə Tərcüməsinin Təqdimatı. *Elm nəşriyyatı*, Bakı 2018, p. 73-74.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *İran ve İnkılabı*, Zerbamat Basımevi, Ankara 1941, p. 54.

between Russia and Iran to end the war, and Azerbaijan was thus divided into two parts. This division laid the foundation for future tragedies and national problems of the Azerbaijani people. After the Turkmenchay Treaty, Northern Azerbaijan was officially occupied by Tsarist Russia. After that, Russia relocated hundreds of thousands of Armenian families from Iran, Turkey and Syria to the Yerevan, Karabakh and Nakhchivan regions of Azerbaijan in order to establish ethnic support in the Caucasus.<sup>22</sup> The process of Armenianization of Christian Albanians and the establishment of the Armenian state in the lands of historical Azerbaijan began with the dissolution of the Albanian Church and its unification with the Gregorian Church in 1836. Unfortunately, this migration policy worked against the people and the state of Azerbaijan. After the partition of February 10, 1828, Southern Azerbaijan remains part of Iran until now. In Northern Azerbaijan, victory was achieved in the struggle against the Russian occupation, and finally, in 1918, the independent statehood was restored. Although the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic established in 1918 was occupied by Soviet Russia in April 1920, but it laid the foundation of modern Azerbaijani statehood and identity.

### **Modern Azerbaijani statehood and formation of Azerbaijani identity**

In the Russo-Iranian wars of 1804-1813 and 1826-1828, the Qajars were defeated, and in accordance with the terms of the Turkmenchay peace treaty, "Whole Azerbaijan" was divided into two parts between Russia and Iran.<sup>23</sup> After this division, the Aras River became a border between the divided people of Azerbaijan and became a symbol of parting. At the same time, differences between the population of North and South Azerbaijan began to manifest themselves in many spheres of society.<sup>24</sup> It showed itself more clearly in economic and cultural development. Thus, opening of new forms of schools in

<sup>22</sup> Səməd Bayramzadə, "Bir Daha Türkmənçay Müqaviləsi Haqqında", *Güney Azərbaycan: Tarix Və Müasirlik*, Baku (2014), p. 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> Metin Erendor, *İranda Türk Kimliği*, Kamer Yayınları, İstanbul 2018, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> Sonay Ünal, *Yakın dönem İran tarihi: Azerbaycan Milli Hükümeti, 1945-1946*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, Ankara 2019, p. 9.

Northern Azerbaijan, which had been under the occupation of Tsarist Russia for many years led to the beginning of the enlightenment movement under the leadership of M.F.Akhundzadeh and later the flow of ideas to South Azerbaijan. However, Mirza Hasan Rushdiyye, benefited from the ideas of M.F.Akhundzadeh, was called the father of not only Azerbaijani, but also Iranian education.<sup>25</sup> This connection has never allowed the differences between Azerbaijanis to deepen, and even today, the linguistic and cultural unity between the north-south Azerbaijanis is preserved.

The enlightenment that began with Akhundzadeh in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the awakening of people in northern Azerbaijan. Hasanbey Zardabi's "Akinchi" newspaper, which is considered to be the founder of the Azerbaijani press, played an unprecedented role in the propaganda of enlightenment. As a result, a new page appeared in the history of Azerbaijan. On May 28, 1918, a group of Azerbaijani intellectuals led by M.A.Rasulzadeh declared the Declaration of Independence on the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.<sup>26</sup> After the Russian occupation, the restoration of the traditions of independent statehood in northern Azerbaijan also gave impetus to the formation of the Azerbaijani identity. At the beginning of the last century, Turkism and Azerbaijanism were the main ideological lines of the Azerbaijani state. However, it should be noted that Azerbaijanism was an idea in the national sense, and Turkism was the main ideology. That is, Turkism and Azerbaijanism developed together.<sup>27</sup> However, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) who pursued imperialist policy occupied the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic that recognized *de facto* by the Allies at the Versailles Palace and officially by neighbouring countries such as Ottoman and Iran by violating the norms of international law on April 27, 1920. Nevertheless, the name of Azerbaijan was still alive.

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<sup>25</sup> Ş.Tağıyeva, Ə.Rəhimli, S.Bayramzadə, *Güney Azərbaycan*, Orxan, Baku 2000, p. 351-354.

<sup>26</sup> Hüseyin Baykara, *Azərbaycan İstiqlal Mübarizəsi Tarixi*, Kitab Klubu MMC, Baku 2017, p. 291.

<sup>27</sup> Mirzə Bala Məmmədzadə, *Milli Azərbaycan Hərəkatı*, MGT yayınları, Baku 2018, p. 16.

Since 1828, South Azerbaijan has remained part of Iran. A new identity policy was implemented in Iran with the overthrow of the Qajars and coming to power of the Pahlavi in 1925. The Azerbaijanis also suffered from the greatest damage. Reza Shah Pahlavi, who pursued a sharp nationalist policy against the Turkic peoples, tried to assimilate the Azerbaijanis. Therefore, a wrong policy was pursued about the identity and roots of Azerbaijanis. The person in charge of this case was the Iranian historian Ahmad Kasravi, who was originally from Azerbaijan. Thus, A. Kasravi's work "Azeri ya zaban-e bastan-e Azerbaijan" published in Tehran in 1921 contains the following thoughts about the identity, ancestry and language of the Azerbaijanis: *"Azeri language does not belong to the Turkic language family. Azeri is a language of Iranian origin. Azeris became Turkic after the arrival of the Seljuks in Iran. Northern Azerbaijan has never been called Azerbaijan. M.A.Rasulzadeh gave the name of Azerbaijan to Northern Azerbaijan, which is Caucasian Albania. (South) Azerbaijan, which is part of Iran, has always been called Azerbaijan"*.<sup>28</sup> We also claim that we are not Azeris, but Turks, and Azeris are Iranian-speaking! Turkification of Iranian-speaking Azeris is a natural process. This process may not belong to the native Turks, but to the Iranian-speaking Azeris, and we cannot condemn Kasravi for his statements about this process. We must condemn Kasravi because he denied the existence of Turks in this area until the arrival of the Seljuks, and allegedly the local population consisted only of Iranian/Persian speakers, and the flow of Turks from Central Asia in the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Turkified them! Hundreds of years before the arrival of the Seljuks in Azerbaijan, Turks lived in these lands. Traces of Turks can also be found in Urartu, Byzantine and Arab sources in Azerbaijan. Evidently, it is a historical fact that the name of Azerbaijan was formed in South Azerbaijan. Northern Azerbaijan is mentioned in historical sources as Albania. However, the name Azerbaijan became a common name for both the people of northern and southern Azerbaijan in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Residents of both Azerbaijanis, who have the same roots, language and culture, have always considered themselves ethnically Turks and nationally Azerbaijanis. The baseless claim of Kasravi, a

<sup>28</sup> Arif Keskin, "Fars Milliyetçiliğinin Üç Dalğası "İranlılığa" Giden Yol", *Güney Azerbaycan Sosyal, Kültür, Siyasi Araştırmalar Dosyası*, (2005), p. 25.



Persian nationalist, about the language of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis does not correspond to reality. A new movement launched in Southern Azerbaijan under the leadership of Pishavari against the national oppression policy of the Pahlavi regime in 1945-1946. This movement, called 21 Azer Movement, played a key role in the national awakening of the Iranian Turks and mainly the South Azerbaijanis. The most important results of this movement were the establishment of national self-awareness among the Turks of South Azerbaijan, the declaration of Azerbaijani autonomy within the protection of Iran's territorial integrity, the restoration of education and press in the mother tongue and the elimination of economic stagnation in South Azerbaijan.<sup>29</sup> However, the Pahlavi dynasty, supported by the imperialist powers, drowned this movement in blood and abolished the autonomy of Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the first embryos of the Azerbaijani identity were put among the Turks of South Azerbaijan.

Independence was soon restored in northern Azerbaijan. On the eve of the collapse of the USSR, on October 18, 1991, Azerbaijan declared its state independence again. After that, Azerbaijanism changed from idea to ideology. The restoration of independent statehood and Azerbaijani national identity in Northern Azerbaijan has also affected South Azerbaijan. As a result, millions of Azerbaijanis living in Iran are demanding that their national identities be recognized as Azerbaijani, not Iranian.<sup>30</sup> As can be seen, the Azerbaijani identity includes millions of Azerbaijanis who have undergone a great development since 1918 and today live outside the Republic of Azerbaijan.

### Conclusion

Thus, existing approaches to the etymology of the name of Azerbaijan, the history of statehood and identity prove that Azerbaijan has been an independent state for at least the ninth century and is not part of Iran.

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<sup>29</sup> Ş.Tağıyeva, Ə.Rəhimli, S.Bayramzadə, *Güney Azərbaycan*, Orxan, Baku 2000, p. 219-224

<sup>30</sup> Brenda Shaffer, *Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani identity*, Harvard University, Cambridge Massachusetts 2002, p. 212

Naturally, its location on the Great Silk Road played a very important role in the formation of mutual trade relations between Azerbaijan and Iran. These relations were sometimes remembered with bloody clashes. Over time, the constant pressure of large empires on Azerbaijan and Iran and the looting of the local population united them both against a common enemy. It should be noted that this process also resulted in the formation of a new empire in the East. Azerbaijan and Persia, which were different countries until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, were united in the Safavid Gizilbash state established in 1501 by Shah Ismail Khatai I. From the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the failed steps of the Qajar dynasty in domestic and foreign policy and its defeat in the wars with Tsarist Russia disrupted the unity of the Iranian people.

The failure of policy of the Qajars, the aggressive policy of Tsarist Russia and the formation of new trends in the East brought about the establishment of nation-states in Azerbaijan and Iran in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, the first initiative to create a national state in the Turkic and Muslim world was made in Azerbaijan in 1918. However, the occupation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic by Soviet Russia in April 1920 and the coming to power of the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran in 1925 put an end to the centuries-old history of statehood of the Azerbaijani people. The Pahlavi dynasty initiated the Persianization of the Iranian state by beginning Persian chauvinism. Thus, an incurable spiritual gap appeared between the peoples of Azerbaijan and Iran. After that, the history of Azerbaijani statehood was falsified in both Azerbaijan (Northern and Southern). Northern Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This process also opened a new page in Azerbaijani historiography, and then distorted information about the history of Azerbaijan was involved in the study. These on-going studies confirm that Azerbaijan has been an independent state since the Middle Ages and is not part of Iran.

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