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*Azerbaijani writing in the Georgian cultural space*

*(General Overview)*

Georgians and Azerbaijanis have been living side by side in the South Caucasus since ancient times. The history of the neighboring peoples tells us many stories of mutual assistance. Over the centuries, they often fought together against invaders: in 1054, under the command of Bagrat IV (Georgian: ბაგრატ IV; was the Georgian king [mepe] from 1027 to 1072) Georgians participated in the defense of southern Azerbaijan; During the defense of Shirvan, led by the heir to the throne, Demetrius, the army of king David/Davit IV Agmashenebeli/Builder (Georgian: დავით აღმაშენებელი, was the Georgian king [mepe] from 1089 until his death in 1125) fought together with the neighboring people; husband of Tamar the Great (Georgian: თამარ მეფე [tamar-mepe], the Queen of Georgia from 1184 to 1213), Davit Soslan helped free Ganja from the Iranians; In the 12th-14th centuries, Georgians and Azerbaijanis fought together against Mongol invasions, and in 1236, during the Tbilisi assault, Azerbaijanis defended the city together with Georgians. Erekle II (Georgian: ერეკლე II, Georgian king [mepe] of Kakheti from 1744 to 1762, and of Kartli and Kakheti from 1762 until 1798) and the khan of the Karabakh Khanate, Ibrahim Khalil Khan (Azerbaijani: İbrahim Xəlil Xan Cavanşir, 1732–1806), made a military alliance, and in 1795, the Georgian army fought to defend Karabakh, and later, during the defense of Tbilisi, the Georgian army was supported by Azerbaijani horsemen.

In 1797, Aga-Mohammad Khan, the conqueror of Tbilisi, was killed in Karabagh. The famous Azerbaijani writer and historian Chingiz Qajar verifies: *“Many historians share the opinion that Agha-Mohammad was killed as a result of a conspiracy led by a person close to the Iranian opposition or King Erekle II of Georgia. <...> Ibrahim Khalil Khan was a close ally of the Georgian king, and if there was a conspiracy, it is possible that Ibrahim Khalil Khan also took part in it.”* Assumptions of Azerbaijani historians rely on the convergence of political interests of Georgians and Azerbaijanis, but the killing of Agha-Mohammad-Khan also had a great emotional impact. Karlo Kaladze (1907-1988) dedicated the ballad "Zulfigar" (1969) to this story, which is preceded by an address to the Azerbaijani poet Suleiman Rustam (Suleiman Ali-Abasoglu Rustamzadeh, 1906-1989): *"Agha-Mohammad-Khan ravaged Tbilisi, killed Sayat-Nova and Vagif was sentenced to death. The one who cut the throat of Agha-Mohammad-Khan in Karabakh - is regarded our hero as well, Suleiman..."*

In the ballad, Vagif's sense of fate is also clearly read. The Azerbaijani poet of the 18th century is mentioned as a great representative of the common Caucasian culture. Vagif's poetry

was so popular that records of his poems are preserved in Georgia not only in the Azerbaijani but also in Georgian. The aesthetic sophistication of Vagif's poem has become a part of Georgian cultural memory. Admiration for his poetry also sounds in the popular song of the 21st century: „*მე ვაგიფის ტკბილ ენაზე ვმღერო*“ [me vagipis t'k'bil enaze vmgheri] — “I sing in the sweet language of Vagif”.

Of course, in addition to marriages dictated by political interests and military alliances, political intrigues and feudal enmity took place in the history of neighboring peoples, but despite the fact that Georgia is an ancient Orthodox country, and Azerbaijan is a part of Islamic civilization, ethnic and religious differences have never become the cause of wars caused by mutual hatred. *"The origin of these relations should be sought in ancient times; repercussions re still heard in myths, bayats and the songs of Ashugh"* (Dilara Aliyeva).

Originating from the cult of ancestors, in ancient times the spiritual closeness of different peoples was explained by their kinship. There are several legends about the ancestors of Azerbaijanis, but in the medieval Caucasus, both Christians and Muslims traced their origins to biblical characters from the Old Testament. In one of the parts of the "Life of Kartli" (XI century), in particular, in the first chapter of the works of Leonti Mroveli "The life of Georgian kings and the forefathers and the progenitors" ("The story of eight brothers"), it is said that the ancestors of all Caucasian peoples descended from one father - the legendary Children of Targamos. Almost all historical works written before the 20th century confirm this story. It should be noted that modern genetic studies have proved the truth of this statement: the majority of the people living in the Caucasus are the bearers of the gene of the ancient European haplogroup J2, which proves that the population of the Caucasus originally descended from the territory of the Middle East.

Not only in ancient times, but also in the following centuries, our ancestors considered Azerbaijani-Georgian cultural relations as spiritual kinship. The text of Shota Rustveli's poem confirms this cultural closeness: in the intertextual space of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" we not only hear the characters of "Leyli and Majnun" (1188) by Nizami Ganjavi, but also the allusions of the poem's episodes: (1327.4). Nizami's heroes are also mentioned in "Tamariani" by Chakhrukhadze (1170-1212). The fact that great Georgian poets referred to Nizami Ganjavi's texts without comment proves that their readers were well acquainted with his poems. More than so: intertextuality is the convergence of different discourses - the dialogue of cultures in the space of one text. In modern literary studies, interdiscourse is understood as *"the beginning of the foreigner in any discourse"* (Pyege-Gro), but the heroes of Nizami never evoked the feeling of "stranger" in Georgian readers. Passion for the work of the great Azerbaijani poet did not decrease in the following centuries either: if in the 17th century Nodar Tsitsishvili translated three novellas from his poems "Leyli and Majnun" and "Seven Beauties", in the 18th century new Georgian editions of Nizami Ganjavi's works also appeared.

"Iskandar-Nameh" ("The Book of Alexander", 1194 or 1196–1202) occupies a special place in Nizami's creativity. It should be noted that in this text, the Azerbaijani poet was the first among the Eastern poets to express his admiration for the "paradisiacal" nature of Georgia and the beauty of Tbilisi. Georgia of the 12th century was not a "stranger" country for other Azerbaijani poets either. A collection of letters of Khaqani Shirvani (Afzal al-Din Badil Haqani

Shirvani /Azerbaijani: Xaqani Şirvani/ 1126 - 1199), a famous poet of the Shirvanshah royal court, has been preserved, which proves that he had correspondence with Georgian figures. The poet imprisoned in Shaburani prison created a cycle of "Habsiyāt Qasidas" ("Prison poetry"), where in "Christian Qasida" he mentions the residences of Bagrations - Nacharmagevi and Mukhran, and dreams of escaping from prison and taking refuge at the Bagrations' court. The news of the life of the Bagration royal family was also close to the heart of Haqqani's disciple - Falaki Shirvani (Abu l-Nizam Muhammad). Marsha (a funeral ode) belongs to him, in which the poet laments the death of the Georgian king Demetrius I (1125-1156) and describes his heroic actions. Davit Aghmashenebeli's eldest son Demetrius showed himself in the battles of Didgori and Shirvan while he was still the heir to the throne; In 1117, King David sent him on a campaign to Shirvan, where Demetrius won a brilliant victory, and in 1138, under the command of Demetrius I, Georgians took Ganja and brought the city gate to Georgia as a sign of victory (protected in Gelati).

Many outstanding figures of the 18th century flocked to the court of Erekle II, including the Azerbaijani poet Mola Vali Vidadi (Azerbaijani: Molla Vəli Vidadi). Vidadi spent several years in Tbilisi, where, according to some sources, he served as a royal court poet. Georgian sources confirm that the Azerbaijani poet lived in the governor's palace in Tbilisi for a long time. He dedicated many lines to Georgia and Georgians. After the death of the king's son Levan in 1781, Vidadi wrote an elegy for the deceased. As a diplomat of Ibrahim Halil Khan and Vizier of Karabakh Khanate (Eshik Agha - person in charge of external affairs), the famous Azerbaijani poet Mola Panah Vagif (Azerbaijani: Molla Pənah, 1717-1797) visited Tbilisi several times, where he became friends with the Georgian prince Yulon /Batonishvili/, to whom he dedicated "Mugam". We have already mentioned what a mark Vagif's work left in the Georgian cultural memory. Here we only note that in the creative legacy of the Azerbaijani poet, there are many poems dedicated to Georgia and Georgians.

In the 19th century, the political-administrative situation of the Caucasus changes: the Russian Empire conquers the North Caucasus; The kingdoms and khanates of the South Caucasus gradually lose their independence and become part of a huge empire. During the whole century, the administrative-territorial status of the Caucasus, which became part of the Russian Empire (Province /guberniya/, regency), its division into markets, districts, okrugs and the granting of the status of administrative centers to different cities (Georgievsky, Stavropol, Tiflis) changed.

The relationship between the Georgian poet-romantic Nikoloz Baratashvili (1817-1845) and the Azerbaijani poetess Goncha Begum; is a symbol of the Georgian-Azerbaijani cultural relations of the first half of the 19th century. The last four months of his life, Nikoloz Baratashvili served in Nakhchevani and Ganja, where he met Goncha Beyim (Azerbaijani: Qönçəbəyim Naxçıvanski), the daughter of Ehsan-Khan Nakhichevansky /Kengerli (Azerbaijani: Ehsan xan Kəlbəli Xan oğlu Naxçıvanski /Kəngərli/, 1789-1846), the famous last khan of Nakhchevani, with the pseudonym of Goncha Begum (Begum /begüm/ - a title and address accepted in the Muslim world for a noble lady). N. Baratashvili was fascinated by Goncha Beyim's personality and appearance. According to Georgian scientists (T. Sharabidze, M. Tcertcvadze, T. Tushabramishvili, Z. Saria), Goncha Beyim was N. Baratashvili's last poetic

muse. In the letter "Goncha-Begum" N. Baratashvili tells the content of one of the poet's poems and promises - "*I will write this poem and send it to you with my translation*". Most likely, the poet fulfilled his promise and sent the text of several poems of Goncha Begum to Tbilisi.

Although it has not been documented, according to I. K. Enikolopov, "Text of Goncha Begum's poem" translated by N. Baratashvili was used by the famous Ashugh (balladeer) Sattar (Azerbaijani: Səttar, 1828-1891) for his song. According to other sources, Azerbaijani Khanendas (singers of Azeri folk music genre) often used not only in the poetry of Hafez/Hafiz (Khājeh Shams-od-Dīn Moḥammad Ḥāfez-e Shīrāzī, 1325–1390), Saadi Shirazi/Sadi of Shiraz (1210-1291-92) and Fuzuli (Azerbaijani: Məhəmməd Füzuli, 1494-1556), but also the interpretation of Goncha Begum's poems in Georgian and Azerbaijani language for his "mughams". N. Baratashvili's letters prove how much the poet admired Sattar's voice and talent. The story of their personal relationship is also known, which adds truth to the opinion expressed by Enikolopov. Apart from Sattar, other khanendas also worked successfully in Tbilisi: Ashughs, gifted with poetic, musical and improvisational talent, occupied a prominent place in the cultural life of Tbilisi.

In the 40s of XIX century, Tbilisi (Tiflis) became the political-administrative, socio-economic and cultural center of the Caucasus. Viceroy's palace was built here, his chancellery and all regional institutions of the Russian Empire; Publishing houses, theaters, centers of cultural and literary societies were established; Schools, seminaries and gymnasiums were opened. Temples and religious institutions of various religions were located in Tiflis. As a result of such "*concentration, all creative people (poets, writers, musicians, actors, publicists, etc.) settled in Tiflis, this contributed to the formation of a lively and rich socio-political and cultural environment of the city,*" - Azerbaijani scientists (Irada Bagirova, Rahim Mejnunov) note. Gradually, a completely different, the so-called "Literary space of Tiflis" was established, which was distinguished by the fusion of diverse national traditions. Since then, Georgian-Azerbaijani cultural relations have acquired a new image.

Almost all prominent figures of Transcaucasia lived and worked in Tiflis, including such famous Azerbaijani writers as Mirza Fatali Akhundov (Azerbaijani: Mirzə Fətəli Məhəmmədağlı oğlu Axundov /Axundzadə/, 1812-1878), Abasquli Agha Bakikhanov (Azerbaijani: Abbasqulu ağa Bakıxanov/, pseudonym Goodsy /Azerbaijani: Qüdsi/, 1794-1847), Ismail Bey Gutgashinli (Azerbaijani: İsmayıl bəy Sultan Nəsrullah oğlu Qutqaşınlı, 1806-1861) and many others. Famous Azerbaijani writers Nariman Narimanov (Azerbaijani: Nəriman Kərbəlayi Nəcəf oğlu Nərimanov, 1870-1925), Abdullah Shaygi Talibzade (Azerbaijani: Abdulla Şaiq Talibzadə, 1881-1959) and others were born here. It is worth noting that the first Azerbaijani magazines and newspapers were founded in Tbilisi and were distributed from here to Azerbaijan, which played a big role in preserving the traditions and identity of the national culture. In the years 1906-1914, the famous Azerbaijani satirical magazine "Molla Nasraddin" (Azerbaijani: Molla Nəsrəddin) was printed in Tiflis. Azerbaijani literary works were often published in Georgian newspapers.

The work of Azerbaijani writers in the literary space of Tiflis had a great impact on the development of Azerbaijani writing and contributed to its Europeanization. Azerbaijani literature to "*the selection of a literary genre, story, hero no longer depended on the writer's desire, but*

*was subject to the literary value system of a specific literary environment, <...> for writers, this value system became an artistic criterion" (specialist in literary theory R. Aliyev).*

Literary enlightenment that began at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries was of special importance for the Azerbaijani literary process, in the development of which the literary environment of Tiflis played a part: in 1872, the Azerbaijani theater began to operate here: a troupe of Muslim lovers staged Mirza Fatali Akhundov's play "The Adventures of the Lankaran Khanate Vizier" in the Azerbaijani language. In 1886, a letter dedicated to Azerbaijani-language performances was published in the Georgian magazine "Theatre", where the work of the Azerbaijani troupe was positively evaluated. Not only Akhundov's plays, but also Narimanov's, Akhverdiyev's, Vezirov's and others' plays were staged, but the most important contribution to the development of Azerbaijani drama belongs to Mirza Fatali Akhundov plays, who was regarded the "Tatar Moliere".

The famous playwright, poet, prose writer, philosopher, democrat, teacher and educator, the founder of Azerbaijani criticism and the compiler of the Azerbaijani alphabet, Mirza Fatali Akhundov /Akhundzade/ lived in Tiflis from the age of 22. His contribution to the preservation of the identity of Azerbaijani culture and the development of national literature is widely known. I will only mention that his work has earned high praise in the circle of Georgian writers. N. Baratashvili, Gr. Orbeliani, N. Berdzenishvili, A. Tsereteli, Vazha-Pshavela, I. Chavchavadze, G. Tsereteli and others followed his letters and works with great interest. In 1897, Akaki Tsereteli translated Akhundzade's comedy "The Adventures of the Lankaran Khanate Vizier" into Georgian. In 1898, it was printed in the 7th issue of the Journal "კრებული" [k'rebuli] - "Collection" magazine (p. 13-53) and was staged on the Georgian stage. It is significant that almost all Georgian writers of the 19th century showed great interest in Azerbaijani culture; the collection, recording, study and translation of Azerbaijani folklore into the Georgian language was intensively carried out. In the 90s of the 19th century, collection of Azerbaijani /"Tatar"/ folklore collected by N. Asatiani, where Georgian translations are attached to the original texts. Critical writings dedicated to Azerbaijani culture are noteworthy: "Nizami and Rustaveli" by G. Tsereteli, a letter dedicated to Mirza Fatali Akhundov by A. Tsereteli and others. Many letters were dedicated to Azerbaijani literature and culture by Ilia Chavchavadze's "Iveria magazine".

If in the 19th century Mirza Fatali Akhundov appears as a prominent figure in the Azerbaijani literary space of Tiflis, at the beginning of the 20th century it is already a prose writer and playwright, publisher of the magazine "Molla Nasraddin" Jalil Mammadkulizade /Mamadguluzadeh, pen-name "Molla Nasraddin"/ (1866-1932), who lived in Tiflis until 1921. According to Azerbaijani scientists (Irada Bagirova, Rahim Mejnunov), in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, *"Tiflis was one of the important centers of Azerbaijani culture. By preserving and developing certain historical traditions, the literary environment in Tiflis played a special role in the development of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia and was enriched by their cultural and literary activity"*.

The declaration of independence in 1918 became a key historical event for Georgia and Azerbaijan at the beginning of the 20th century. It is true that Azerbaijan maintained its independence for only 23 months, and the Democratic Republic of Georgia existed for 10 more

months, but each day of the existence of young independent states was very important for the development of the national cultures of our peoples. *"Azerbaijani living in Georgia cooperated with democratic print media for the purpose of propagandizing their democratic rights and ideas of freedom: "Al Bairaghi" (Scarlet Flag), "Galajak" (Future), "Vatan" (Vətən - Motherland), "Galajak Tiflis" (Future Tbilisi), "Gardash Gaigis" (Brotherly Care), "Islam Gurjistan" (Islamic Georgia), "Ganjlar Yurdu" (City of Youth) and others"*. Great importance was the Azerbaijani-language newspaper "Vatan" ("Motherland"). *"At the time when the newspaper "Vatan" was published in the Azerbaijani language in Tbilisi Georgia was still a democratic republic, unlike Azerbaijan. Therefore, Azerbaijanis set a goal to protect the idea of freedom and democratic rights from Georgia"* (Elv. Aslanova).

During the Soviet period, the Georgian-Azerbaijani literary lifestyle changed: Tbilisi lost the function of the Transcaucasian administrative center and the Azerbaijani cultural center, but the leading ideas of the socialist ideology of "friendship of peoples" and the creation of a new identity of the "Soviet people" promoted cultural relations and personal contacts. Group "creative business trips", writers' "meetings" and "poetry evenings" were organized; Jubilees and ceremonial events were held on the republican and union level; Translation work was actively developed with the state support. It is true that the selection of authors and works was carried out according to the criteria established by the socialist ideology (the main attention was paid to the literature depicting the "Soviet existence" and "socialism building"), but the works of the "classicists" were not forgotten either. We consider it significant that the first book that was translated into the Azerbaijani language was Shota Rustaveli's "The Knifht in the Panther's Skin" (translated by: Samed Vurgun, Mamed Ragimov and Suleiman Rustam). During the Soviet period, many works depicting the history and socialist present of the Georgian and Azerbaijani people were created. Personal contacts and true friendship contributed to the mutual enrichment of cultures.

At the end of the 20th century, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the processes of creating independent states in the post-Soviet space were followed by severe years of socio-political and economic crises. Due to the objective-historical circumstances, the development process of Georgian-Azerbaijani literary relations slowed down, but later it was not only restored, but underwent qualitative changes, which corresponded to the ongoing democratic reforms in public life. In 2010, the President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, founded the "Union of Azerbaijani Youth of Georgia"; Magazines «Əhli-Beyt» and «Iman» (for Shiites) and «Uğur» (for Sunnis) are published for Azerbaijanis living in Georgia, state (Georgian) language courses are successfully functioning, etc. Creative meetings of Georgian and Azerbaijani writers are held. Unfortunately, the commercialization of publishing has slowed down the translation process, but despite this, not only the works of modern Azerbaijani writers, but also important monuments of Azerbaijani culture are translated and printed in Georgian. Thus, in 2021, the publication of the Georgian translation of "Koroglu" by Georgian writer Zezva Medulashvili became an important cultural event for Azerbaijanis living in Georgia.

New importance has been applied to the cultural heritage and relations of our peoples, their study and the restoration of cultural monuments are actively underway. A number of important cultural monuments for Azerbaijani culture are protected in Georgia, the so-called

"Pantheon of Distinguished Azerbaijanis" — memorial cemetery where Mirza Shafi Vazeh, Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Fatali Khan Khoiski, Hasan Bey Agayev and others are buried was renovated in 2012; House-Museum of Nariman Narimanov and Jalil Mamedkulizade was opened in a renewed form in 2018, along with Mirza Akhundzade state Museum of Azerbaijani Culture and others.

And finally, a symbol of Georgian-Azerbaijani cultural relations of our time is the construction of the new building of the Tbilisi Azerbaijani State Drama Theater named after Heydar Aliyev, the foundation of which was laid recently (in October 2023). The modern theatre building project is conceived as a new cultural centre where conferences and exhibitions dedicated to Azerbaijani culture will be held.