

Reading Nineteenth-Century Persian Histories from the Caucasus

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Abstract This essay examines six Persian-language historical works that were produced in the Caucasus during the nineteenth century. These works have conventionally gone unnoticed due to the language of composition and the predominant approach to the region as a Russian imperial province. Interestingly, these texts bear the mark of the Afsharid period, and demonstrate a marked interest in the figure of Nader Shah. They demonstrate that the Safavid collapse and the subsequent developments of the eighteenth century had an important impact on conceptions of political legitimacy in the Caucasus. They also suggest that the birth of new local Persianate historiographical traditions in the region should not only be viewed through the lens of Russian imperial modernity and instead be better situated in their local and historical context.

Keywords Caucasus. Historiography. Karabagh. Azerbaijan. Shirvan. Dagestan. Nader Shah.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Production, Patronage, and Circulation. – 3 The Afsharid Role in Nineteenth-Century Political Claims. – 4 Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Study.

1 Introduction

This essay examines Persian historical works from the nineteenth-century Caucasus in terms of their historical frameworks. In this period, modern political units such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Iran were not yet clearly demarcated. Not only did Russian imperial administrative boundaries frequently change, but people on the ground had different and sometimes conflicting ways of describ-



Edizioni
Ca' Foscari

Eurasiatica 18

e-ISSN 2610-9433 | ISSN 2610-8879

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-550-6 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-551-3

Peer review | Open access

Submitted 2021-05-18 | Accepted 2021-06-30 | Published 2021-12-21

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DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-550-6/005

ing the geography and history of the region. This essay is a preliminary foray into this genre which shows how the writers of this Persian corpus favoured eighteenth-century political frameworks for their political and historical claims rather than modern national or imperial perspectives.

As the texts covered in this article demonstrate, Persian literary production persisted in the region well into the Russian period, which began in earnest after the Treaty of Gulistan (1813) when the Russian Empire annexed a large swath of territory in the eastern Trans-Caucasus. However, because these Persian texts were mainly composed under Russian rule, they have tended to escape serious scholarly attention. Russian and early Soviet scholarship on the region with a philological orientation, taken by scholars with a good knowledge of Arabic and Persian, traditionally focused on the period of “classical Islam”. This research paid special attention to the works of early Arab geographers and Mongol-era Persian sources, as attested to by the works of Barthold (1984) and Minorsky (1953; 1978). They and their late Soviet and Russian successors such as Shikhsaidov (1969; 1984) and Alikberov (2003) showed limited interest in nineteenth-century cultural production.

On the other hand, scholars of the modern Caucasus have followed the Soviet-era artificial division of the region into north and south and seem to lack the breadth of the early philologists. Scholars of the North Caucasus view Persian as beyond their remit and focus on Arabic and regional languages (in many cases, justifiably so), while specialists of the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) have narrowed their interest to well-defined cultural canons, which leave little space for Persian sources. For instance, post-Soviet scholarship on modern Azerbaijan has been centred on Turkic identity, and has given little historical weight to Persian literary production during the Russian imperial period (Goyushov, Caffee, Denis 2010, 308-10). The Persian sources examined in this essay have typically only been revived and discussed in the service of political arguments in Nagorno-Karabagh, although distinct intellectual interest has been shown in the Persian works of ‘Abbāsqūlī Āghā Bāqīkhānūf (Akhmedov 1967). Last, it is worth noting that western specialists of the region in this era tend not to read Persian and instead rely largely on Russian sources.¹

In other words, with the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, nineteenth-century Persian works from the region became “homeless

1 The generic monographs of the region by King and Forsyth fall prey to this pattern in the most egregious way, as they rely almost wholly on sources in European languages and Russian (King 2008; Forsyth 2013); Recent surveys of higher academic calibre, such as the *Routledge Handbook to the Caucasus* (Yemelianova, Broers 2020), similarly overlook these sources and include no expertise on Persian sources.

texts”, similar to the way in which Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi (2001, 270-1) described Persian works from the same period produced between Iran and South Asia. Only few scholars, such as Rebecca Gould (2015, 2019a, 2019b), have sought to integrate the region’s Russian-era Persian compositions into a broader Eurasian framework of Persian cultural production.

Of the six texts that I analyse, three deal with the history of Karabagh (1747-1806), a small khanate based in the southern segment of the lesser Caucasus mountain range which for a short period exercised great influence over the neighboring regions of Shirvan, Dagestan, and western Iran more broadly. These three texts were written roughly between 1840 and 1855.² The earliest is the *Tārīkh-e Qarābāgh* (henceforth *TK*), “The History of Karabagh”, composed by Mirza Javānshīr Qarābāghī, likely originally composed in the 1820s and 30s despite the earliest text in evidence being from 1847 (Javānshīr Qarābāghī 1994). We are lucky to have a facsimile of this text published by George Bournoutian (Javānshīr Qarābāghī 1994).³ The next is the *Karabag-name* [sic] (henceforth *KN*), “The Book of Karabagh”, composed by Russian army officer and provincial administrator Adigözal Beg in 1845 (Adigözal Beg 2004). For this text, we are forced to rely on Bournoutian’s translation from 2004, which is problematic and should be used with caution.⁴ Last is *Tārīkh-e Şafi*

2 Although most conventional Persian transliteration systems render the initial “qāf” of Karabagh as a Latin “q”, I use “k” for consistency and to match modern Latin renderings of the region’s name.

3 For citations of this text, I have kept Bournoutian’s original translation unless otherwise noted. In some cases, I modify the translation and I cite the facsimile separately, which is located in the back of the book with a separate pagination that is part of the original manuscript. These passages will be cited in the followed manner: *TK* facsimile, page number.

4 The main issue with Bournoutian’s English rendering of the *Karabag-name* is that it seems, bizarrely, that he has not in fact consulted the original manuscript that he claims to translate. Instead, it appears that he has consulted multiple other translations, and the reader is forced to conclude, based on a single footnote (*KN*, 11, fn. 1), that he has used an Armenian manuscript translation in place of the original. He provides no information about this text which he treats as the original. This confusing arrangement only comes to light because of Bournoutian’s uncertainty regarding the original language of composition; first, he writes that the original manuscript is “in Turki, but written in Persian script” (11), but later equivocates that the work, “according to the author, was transcribed into Persian *naskh*, with numerous Turki phrases, by a *khoshnevis*” (13). This curious phrase with its distractingly untranslated Persian flourishes betrays the fact that Bournoutian did not have access to the original. What’s more, if the original was in fact in Azerbaijani Turkish, as he first writes, then he would not have been in a position to translate the work, as he does not claim a scholarly knowledge of Turkish (the redundant phrasing “Turki, but in Persian script” confirms his unfamiliarity with the language, as does his incorrect characterization of the language as an exclusively spoken dialect before the twentieth century; 1, fn. 3). Ultimately, there is no reason to assume that the text was written in Turkish, and the original author’s boasting of the scribe’s “bilingual quill” may simply indicate the interpolation of some Turkish passag-

(henceforth *Şafī*), “The Pure History”, purportedly a broader account of the history of the Caucasus although it focuses disproportionately on the Khanate of Karabagh, and the gradual integration of its territories into the Russian imperial sphere (Nersesov 1855). It was written by the re-converted Christian Mirza Yusef Nersesov in 1855. This work is unpublished, but I have studied a manuscript copy found in the Kekelidze Institute in Tbilisi, Georgia.⁵

The other histories of the region are more eclectic in subject; the earliest is a long and convoluted account of the Tabriz region following the Afsharid period called *Tajribat al-Ahrār va Tasliyat al-Abrār* (henceforth *Tajribat*), “Testing the Pure and Consoling the Pious”, composed approximately in 1827-28 by ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg Donbolī (Donbolī 1970).⁶ The following work, written in 1841-42, is a history of the regions of Shirvan and Dagestan from antiquity, composed by the Russian officer and descendent of the Khans of Baku ‘Abbāsqūlī Āghā Bāqīkhānūf, called *Golestān-e Eram* (henceforth *Golestān*), or “The Flower-garden of Paradise” (Bāqīkhānūf 1970). This text is well-known among Azerbaijani historians and frequently regarded as a seminal work of that historical tradition. The final history is an unusual historical account given its composition fully in Turkish and is called *Āthār-i Dāghestān* (henceforth *Āthār*), “The Sources of Dagestan”, or perhaps more poetically “Traces of Dagestan”, written by Ḥasan al-Alqadārī in 1894 and printed in St. Petersburg (al-Alqadārī 1312/1894-5). It covers the history of Dagestan from the advent of Islam in the region through the late nineteenth century.

Apart from *Tajribat*, which was written in Qajar Iranian territory, the other works were composed in Russian imperial realms. Only *Āthār* by al-Aqdārī, the latest of our sources, was originally a printed work, the rest manuscripts. Several other relevant sources in this genre exist; Bournoutian outlines and references several of these in his introduction to his translations of *TK* and *KN*, many of which are found in the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences Institute of Manuscripts (*KN*, 2). Most are in Persian, although some sources are also in Russian.

There are logistical and linguistic reasons for not including Armenian and Georgian histories in this study, but the most important reason is that although engaging with Persianate literary forms, Ar-

es. More importantly, Bournoutian’s translation of a translation is still likely a largely faithful rendering of the original text, but his lack of transparency is curious considering his own (justified) criticisms of scholarly tampering with primary sources from Karabagh in translation by Azerbaijani and Turkish scholars.

5 There also exists a partial English and Armenian translation of the work (Kostikyan 2000).

6 For the date of composition, see page “*dah*” (ten) in the introduction; the work was completed by the author’s son after his death.

menian and Georgian sources belonged to self-contained literary traditions (this does not, however, indicate that their notions of history and national geography were stable or uncontested). The Persian works from the region, in contrast, were dealing in more fluid boundaries and less clearly defined linguistic, religious, and political frameworks. This study aims to offer a few interesting observations about the character of these works which will hopefully facilitate their study by students and scholars of the region in the future. An incorporation of Armenian and Georgian perspectives would also be a valuable future addition to this initial study.

2 Production, Patronage, and Circulation

The manuscript trail shows that these texts were likely widely circulated and read. The following are the minimum numbers of copies that existed for each, according to the editors of their respective published editions: *Tajribat*, three; *Golestān*, five; *TK*, three; *Şafī*, one; *KN*, one.⁷ Lastly, *Āthār*, being a print work, would have been more widely available. The true number of copies of these works was almost certainly higher, as some have likely either perished or remain undiscovered in archives and private collections.

What's more, the authors had some familiarity with one another's works. In *Āthār*, al-*Alqadarī* cites *GE* liberally (20, 39, 64, 77, 80-2), while Bournoutian writes that Adigözal Beg almost certainly borrowed from the *TK*. Meanwhile, in *Şafī*, Nersesov emphasizes his dissatisfaction with the other books of history regarding the region, meaning that he had likely had access to both *TK* and *KN* (*Şafī*, 2b). It is safe to conclude, then, that histories of the region were reasonably accessible, at least to an educated readership, and that they tended to be copied multiple times. This circulation is noteworthy because provincial or local histories had not been widespread during the Safavid era, nor, to our knowledge, during the following khanates period. Therefore, the expansion of this genre seems to have coincided with the Russian conquest of the region.

A variety of motives can explain this expansion of historical writing. The first is the ostensible desire of Russian patrons to familiarize themselves with the newly conquered lands of the Caucasus, leading them to commission works of local history. This was the case for all of the Karabagh histories; *TK*, for instance, was written for "Count and Prince" Mikhail Semenovitch Vorontsov, the viceroy of a range of southerly Russian imperial provinces, due to his "keenness

⁷ *KN* was also translated into Armenian in manuscript form, presumably in the nineteenth century (*KN*, 11).

to learn of the past events in every province under his command, and the truth about the government and authority and power of the past khans" (TK facsimile 2). *KN* and *Şafī* were similarly composed at the request of local officials in the imperial administration who were supposedly eager to learn about the empire's newly acquired lands (*Şafī*, 3a; *KN*, 149).

However, there is some reason to doubt that imperial patronage was the chief motive for composition. In the case of *Şafī*, Nersesov has a strong ulterior motive which animated his writing, which is the already aforementioned desire to rectify the errors of the existent histories of Karabagh by adopting a more critical attitude towards its rulers:

Because I had read conflicting accounts [owing to] partisanship in books of history, and I had heard false reports and tall tales, with the appeals and recommendations of some friends I made a firm resolution to compose a history pure and free of superfluous descriptions and without falsehoods and contradictions (*Şafī*, 2b).

Here, then, it is requests from his contemporaries and the lamentable state of the literature which seem to comprise the main motive of composition, a view corroborated by the chosen title of the text, *The Pure History*. In any case, Nersesov's patron was the military officer Grigol Orbeliani, a Georgian official stationed in Dagestan at the time of the text's composition, a situation which casts further doubt on the notion of demand for such a history originating among the imperial administration.

Nor is it entirely clear what use Russian-speaking administrators would have made of Persian-language histories. Adigözal Beg knew Russian, as was likely the case for Nersesov as well, and it appears that there was no great shortage of young scribes and officers from the region who could have composed directly in Russian (Bāqikhānūf, the author of *Golestān*, is another such example who instead chose Persian; see Heß 2015). In fact, historical accounts of the region were also written directly in Russian and typically published in the journal *Kavkaz*, printed in Tbilisi. One such history of Karabagh by Ahmed Beg Javanshir (1828-1903) was published in the journal in 1883-84 (Jevanshir 1884), and Mirza Jamāl's own work had been translated and published in the journal in 1855 (Jevanshir Karabagi 1855). Of course, patrons would have appreciated historical works dedicated to them even they could not comprehend the contents, but it is more likely that Mirza Jamāl and Nersesov were writing for local audiences. The latter even states that he chose the language of Persian so that more people might derive pleasure from his work (*Şafī*, 2b). Imperial administrators were clearly only one target group within a much broader audience.

The authors of the remaining works, on the other hand, were more openly driven by intellectual aspirations. In *Golestān* (1970, 1), Bāqīkhānūv explains that “The science of history, which we desire by our very nature... familiarizes humans with the beauties of morality and skill and renders them wise in securing their livelihoods and exercising forbearance”. Al-Alqadāri (1894, 11-12) in *Āthār* does not provide a precise justification for composition, although his introductory reference to “the guardians of the sciences” betrays an academic orientation. He does mention that he was invited to write the work, without specifying by whom. Of all of our authors, ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg in *Tajribat* is the only one intent on producing a work of which the chief merit would be linguistic and literary sophistication, as he makes clear with his routinely impenetrable prose as well as by rendering a portion of the work a literary anthology.

A final factor to consider in the production of the texts is their physical presentation. Judging by the facsimile of *TK* and the excerpted facsimile for *Tajribat* provided in their respective edited editions, and from my own work with *Şafī*, at least three of five are modest and undorned manuscripts. Overall, then, it is reasonable to assume that although these works were partially conditioned by demand among the imperial elite, the primary intended audience was local. In the mid-nineteenth-century Caucasus, the writing of local histories in Persian was popular. Despite an absence of a Persian speaking population, the use of Turkish as a common spoken lingua franca, and the use of Russian as the language of elite administration, Persian texts constituted an important arena for debating new ideas and political claims.

3 The Afsharid Role in Nineteenth-Century Political Claims

Although cultural production in the nineteenth-century Caucasus is nearly always framed in terms of the impact of the Russian conquest and encounters with European modernity, the narratives in this corpus belie a strong preoccupation with the eighteenth-century past. These authors were extremely attentive to the aftermath of the collapse of Safavid power (1722) and Nader Shah’s reign (1736-47), events which constituted the chief catalysts in their historical narratives. We can begin, once again, with the Karabagh histories – *TK*, *KN*, and *Şafī*. All three focus on the post-Safavid decades of the eighteenth century, although *TS* initially takes the form of a more wide-ranging universal history before devoting the bulk of its narrative to the post-Safavid period.

In *TK*, Nader Shah’s rise launches the political history of Karabagh. According to the author Mirza Jamāl, the success of the founder of the khanate, Panāh Khan, is due to Nader’s recognition of the former’s military skill and political capacity:

When the late Nader Shah subjugated the *velayats* of Qarabagh [sic], Ganje, Tiflis, and the Shirvans, he summoned all from among the tribes and settlements who were brave, skillful, and intelligent and drafted them into his service, giving them income, honor, and positions. One of those conscripted was Panāh Khan, who among the tribes was famous as Panāh Ali Beg Sārūjlū Javānshīr. He succeeded in all his duties and surpassed his peers in battle. He demonstrated particular courage during the campaigns of the late Nader Shah against the soldiers of Rum [i.e., the Ottoman army]. The [shah], therefore, kept him close by, both when traveling and at the court, where he served the shah conscientiously, zealously fulfilling all tasks, attaining high office and gaining the shah's favor. As the years passed, Nader Shah's regard for Panāh Khan increased daily and the latter surpassed his comrades-in-arms and colleagues in rank and position (TK, 46-67).

Although the text goes on to explain that the two had a major falling out in the last years of Nader's life, the author portrays this as a result of chicanery by malevolent elements near the shah.

A number of wicked men at the shah's court, as well as among the tribes [...] began to speak evil of the late Panāh Khan and succeeded in changing the late shah's disposition towards him (TK, 48).

Overall, this appears to be a minor hitch in the narrative which is resolved after Nader's murder in 1747.

The *KN* offers a slightly different version of this narrative which still emphasizes the rise of the Karabagh Khans in a particularly Afsharid context. Notably, Adigozel Beg (*KN*, 151) opens his history with a desolate and lawless Iran, dramatically rescued by Nader; "... the ruling breeze and valor of Qiriqlu [sic] Nader Shah Afshar began to blow from heavenly Abivard, ...and began to raise the foundation of the house [of Persia]". After the sovereign made Panāh Khan into his *ishik aghasi* [sic] (that is, a retainer with direct ties to the ruler), Nader was threatened by the talent and skill of the man he had promoted, which led to Panāh Khan's escape to the fortified mountains of Karabagh. Once more, Nader is not blamed for his position but merely depicted as being discerning of Panāh Khan's extraordinary abilities, and once again the sovereign's death resolves this conflict (156-7). Both *TK* and *KN* indicate that Panāh Khan offered his fealty to the Afsharid successor 'Adel Shah, and only fully asserted his autonomy once the Afshars had definitively lost control over most of their territories in 1748 (*TK*, 67, 70; *KN*, 158).

Furthermore, *KN* also describes how many of Panāh Khan's later competitors had been elevated to positions of power under Nader, and it appears that it is these individuals whom he perceives as the

greatest threat to his power. One was a local Armenian ruler (called *meliks*) named Allah Qolī, who was given the title *Soltan* by Nader as a reward for his bravery in wars against the Ottomans; another group were those of the family of Melik Egan of Dizak, who had also been given the status of *melik* by Nader as well (163). Panāh Khan was so threatened by these figures that he had them killed or permanently ousted from their positions of power.

Mirza Yusuf Nersesov's *Şafī* contrasts the other two Karabagh histories in his more critical portrayal of Panāh Khan and careful attention to the Armenian political actors of the region. He describes (82b) Panāh as a deserter of his post to which he had been appointed by Nader and recounts the Khan's ill-treatment of several Armenian *meliks* of the region (an example is the imprisonment of Melik Sa'i and the elders of Dizak and the seizure of their possessions).

But in this text, too, Nader is a major protagonist, and like the other authors Nersesov had read Afsharid historiography and knew the ruler's story well (37a). The author lists the same Armenian *meliks* that appears in the other histories and also attentively notes how they derived their position through their service to Nader. He repeats, for instance, the same story about Allah Qoli Soltan that is found in the *KN* (78b), and also recounts in far greater detail Melik Egan's rapport with Nader – apparently, the ruler had personally tested Egan's honesty by asking him to fulfill the silly and impossible task of picking mushrooms during the winter (77a). Nader's condemnations were also remembered; the author describes how Nader had one of the Shahnazarov *meliks* of Varanda choked (apparently saying with disdain, "He is a son of Shirvan!", 78a), which Nersesov justified by explaining that the family was given to infighting and rivalries owing to their selfish desire for power.⁸ Local leaders' relationship with Nader, then, was construed as a determinant factor to their political status as well as their moral standing. As Nersesov states at one point, "After Nader Shah there was no sovereign ruler in the Iranian realm" (83b-84a).

Despite the persistent popularity of the Safavids after their dynasty's loss of power, a fact well known and often repeated in the field (Perry 1971, 59-69; Tucker 2006, 67-77), none of the authors of the Karabagh histories made their claims in relation to the Safavid political legacy, instead emphasizing the Afsharid intervention and specifically the heritage of Nader. In *Şafī*, Nersesov makes quick work of the Safavids in his fifth chapter, jamming them in with a legion of others under the title, "Regarding the sovereigns of the Islamic period". He also uses the term *qezelbāsh*, key to Safavid his-

⁸ In the fifteenth century, the *Shīrvān Shāhs* were arch-rivals of the early Safavids coalition in the eastern Caucasus (Barthold, Bosworth 1960-2007).

toriographical discourse, to describe the Qajars, who were rivals of the Khanate of Karabagh (*Şafī*, 95a, 102a). We find the same adversarial usage in *TK*, where Mirza Yusuf calls the army of a rival local ruler in Azerbaijan “the *qezelbāsh* army”, using the entrenched Safavid identity with enmity. This latter text signaled further distance from the Iranian political legacy writ large by emphasizing how the Khanate was non-aligned, writing that “Ibrahim Khan [r. 1756-1806] [...] ruled independently in the art of government without submission or obedience to the *pādeshāhs* of Iran or Rum [i.e., Ottoman lands]” (*TK* facsimile, 23).

Moving beyond the Karabagh histories, interesting parallels are found in our other texts, although viewpoints on the Afsharid sovereign here differ widely. In *Tajribat* (155), ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg proudly asserts his Kurdish Donboli heritage and describes how the tribe rose to prominence in the Tabriz region during the era “of Paradise-holding Safavid Sultans”. But he is prouder still of his uncle’s service in Nader Shah’s army, boasting that (64):

During the years of his service, Nader Shah did not find a single particle in that good-humored and kind man which violated the laws of retainership (*chākerī*), with which to create an excuse to execute him or to distance him from the court for a few days for laziness, even though there were numerous examples of his peers [who had received such unjust treatment] [...] Until the night of the murder of he who deserved crown and status, [my uncle] was with [Nader] in all of his battles and perils, and owing to his wholly pure intensions and wholesome conscience he did not neglect his duty and his sacrifice for a single minute.

This quote again demonstrates the pattern, also present in the Karabagh histories, of embedding the cruelty and caprice of Nader in a framework of legitimacy. By withstanding Nader’s harsh and fickle tendencies, ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg’s uncle displayed unimpeachable moral character and his service to the legitimate Afshar king awarded the family the distinction which they continued to enjoy in the Qajar era.

In other ways, ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg’s work betrays the mark of the Afsharid era. He describes the careers of other relatives in the service of Nader, such as his father’s participation in the “Khosrow-like campaigns of holy war and the courageous and boundless struggles of Nader” (67). His text also devotes several pages (477-82) to a lamentation of the death of Nader at the hands of treacherous Afshar tribesmen and generals, an event provoked by the depredations of the “vile Afghans and disgraceful Uzbeks” (477).

The author quotes various Afsharid sources such as the poet Ferdowsī-ye *Sānī*’s *Nādernāmeḥ* (478), and also reproduces a fifteen-page section of one of Nader’s most widely read chronicles,

the *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī* by Mirza Mahdī Astarābādī (463-77). ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg’s praise of Nader and his legacy is rendered more remarkable by his strong assertion of a Twelver Shi’a identity (55), given the ruler’s well-known efforts to dismantle Safavid religious policy. For ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg, it is the dynamic Afsharid period which marks the expansion of Donbolī power over Azerbaijan and warrants the telling of its history, and he devotes little space to the Safavid era even though his family (or the Donbolī tribe more generally) was already of some significance in the Ottoman-Safavid borderlands and specifically in the border town of Khoi (Dāwūd, Oberling 1995).

The remaining two histories, *Golestān* and *Āthār*, do not portray nineteenth-century power and legitimacy as a direct product of Afsharid politics, but Nader Shah’s reign still constitutes a pivotal part of their narratives. In *GE*, ‘Abbāsqūlī āghā Bāqīkhānūv dedicates a substantive section to the less than twenty years of Nader’s prominence, roughly 16 of 197 pages in the edited edition; compare this, for instance, to 36 pages for the entire Safavid era. This is not insignificant for a work ostensibly covering the history of the region from antiquity to the Russian period. Citing (*Golestān*, 156) Afsharid sources such as the *Nādernāmeḥ* (potentially referring to multiple court histories, including the *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī*) and the less widely read Afsharid *Zobdat al-Tavārīkh* (1741/2), he depicts Nader’s reign as exceptional, marred only by an abrupt turn to gratuitous violence and tyranny at the end of his life: “And the country of Iran, that he had made prosperous, fell into ruin because of his cruelty” (157). The sovereign’s death has a special narrative role in launching the action in the final chapter of the book, a story culminating in the Russian annexation of nearly the entire sphere of influence of the Khanate of Karabagh (mainly Dagestan, eastern Georgia, Sheki, Shirvan, Karabagh, Ganje, and Baku) in the Treaty of Gulistan of 1813.

In *Āthār*, at a distance of nearly 150 years from Nader’s murder, al-Alqadārī is the first historian of the region to frame his broader historical narrative around Russian presence in the region. As Gould also notes (2011, 166) it is very likely that al-Alqadārī’s model was *Golestān*, given his frequent citations of Bāqīkhānūv that we have already mentioned and the fact that he frames his broader narrative between the key events of the arrival of Islam in Dagestan and the Treaty of Gulistan, adding a final chapter to cover later events. But the bulk of the work, chapters three through twelve, treats the overall theme of Russian expansion as well as Nader’s wars.

This text’s more Russia-centric approach may also be a result of its more northerly perspective. Dagestan, although a part of the vast Persian-language sphere and the Safavid polity, generally favoured Arabic cultural production over Persian, with the exception of Derbend (Gould 2019a, 260). Still, al-Alqadārī gives ample weight to eighteenth-century developments, which constitute a disproport-

tionately large part of the narrative. The years after the Safavid collapse, Nader's reign, and the following decades which are covered in chapters six to eight, take up 59 out of 194 pages, as opposed to only 41 for the entire Ottoman and Safavid period, the latter mainly treating Shah Abbas' campaigns in the Caucasus in chapters three to five. The author also consulted (102) *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī* (which he calls *Tārīkh-e Nāder*), and although he condemns Nader's cruelty, he duly recounts his accomplishments in detail and credits him with restoring the territorial integrity of Iran.

4 Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Study

Although the extant scholarship has devoted little space to political legacies other than those Safavid or Russian, this preliminary study shows how nineteenth-century historians of the Caucasus looked to the prior century to make sense of their world. The Afsharid origins of nineteenth-century political claims in the region are fascinating because they suggest that new notions of political legitimacy and geography were elaborated in the aftermath of the Safavid collapse. Indigenous political rivalries spurred these changes rather than the Russian conquest.

Our historians did not endorse Nader Shah's legacy wholeheartedly, and in fact gave little weight to the Afsharid dynasty or even Nader's political ideas on religion, lineage, and diplomacy. But they did attribute an inordinate amount of influence to his political and administrative decisions. Those whom he favored gained a distinct edge in this political discourse, and the texts show a fascination with Nader the man. The widespread circulation of Afsharid historiography, especially of *Jahāngoshā-ye Nāderī* which is cited by most of our authors, suggests that Nader's legacy in the Caucasus had great significance during this period.

Post-Safavid claims to legitimacy were not the only novel element in these texts, and much remains to be explored in greater detail. One topic that may be further explored is the way in which these historians sought to establish original geographic notions of power. For instance, by portraying a state whose power stretched from the northern borders of Iraq to the south of Dagestan, Mirza Jamāl (*TK*, 85) was carving a unique geographic claim for the Karabagh Khanate based on regional tribal alliances. The borders and cultural orientation of this entity were still vague, though. Certainly, this conception of the Khanate was multi-lingual and multi-religious, as was the norm in the pre-modern era. But it did not have a clear relationship with Azerbaijan, the center of which was conceived to be the Tabriz region and thus not a core part of the Karabagh aegis (*TK* supports this idea when it portrays an adversary of the Khanate, Fath 'Alī Khan Afshar Urūmī, as based in Azerbaijan, 75-83).

Tajribat, centred around the story of a Tabrizi family, is instead more grounded in an Azerbaijani identity, and is also a novel historical work for this reason (84-6). There were no self-proclaimed histories of Azerbaijan during this period from Russian realms because the notion had greater weight in the south, in Qajar realms. *Golestān*, often considered the first history of modern Azerbaijan, was a history of Shirvan and Dagestan – a formulation used in *Şafī* (86a) as well to describe Panāh Khan’s sphere of power (Nersesov specifically uses the formula “the *Shīrvāns* and *Dāghestān*”). The connection to Dagestan here should also be taken seriously; the Karabagh khans were connected to Dagestani rulers by marriage and collaborated with them regularly.

Lastly, al-Alqadārī’s treatise on Dagestan signals a continuation of the same tradition as *Golestān* and even strengthens this link by choosing to compose the work in “Azerbaijani Turkish”, which the author identifies as one of the common languages Dagestan (*Āthār*, 19-21). Although he drew upon Persian sources and Persianate literary frameworks, his switch to Turkish and much stronger emphasis on the Russian presence in the region approach may signal the waning of the pre-occupation with Afsharid Iran in the historiography of the region.

Abbreviations

Āthār = Ḥasan al-Alqadārī, *Āthār-i Dāgestān*

Golestān = ‘Abbās-qūlī āghā Bāqīkhānūf, *Golestān-e Eram*

KN = Adigözal Beg, *Karabagh-name*

Tajribat = ‘Abdolrazzāq Beg Donbolī, *Tajribat ol-Ahrār va Tasliyat ol-Abrār* (vol. I)

TK = Mirza Jamāl Javānshīr Qarābāghī, *Tārīkh-e Qarābāgh*

Şafī = Mirza Yūsuf Nersesov, *Tārīkh-i Safī*

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