



ĀZARBĀYJĀN JOURNAL

ĀZARBĀYJĀN (ĀDARBĀY[E]JĀN), the title of a satirical-political journal published at Tabrīz in 1907.

Among the many newspapers and periodicals published in Azarbaijan and Caucasia which have borne the name *Āzārbāyjān*, this bilingual Persian and Azeri Turkish journal is the most memorable. Launched at Tabrīz a month after the coronation of Moḥammad-‘Alī Shah, it combined politics with humor in a sufficiently varied mix to make it worthy of the description “magazine.” Its tone was strongly liberal and nationalistic.

The manager and editor of *Āzārbāyjān* was ‘Alī-qolī Khan Safarov, who had already made himself known at Tabrīz as the issuer of illegal leaflets in 1892-93 and publisher of progressive news-sheets named *Ebtehāj* and *Eqbāl* in 1898. In the imprint of *Āzārbāyjān* he is named as ‘Alī-qolī Khan, former editor of *Ebtehāj*. He had spent part of his early career in Caucasia and later had been employed at the headquarters of the Crown Prince Moḥammad-‘Alī Mīrzā as a “*rāporčī-bāšī*” (chief intelligence agent). Despite this, he had always sympathized with the freedom-seekers.

Up to issue no. 15, communications to and from *Āzārbāyjān* were handled by Ḥājji Mīrzā Āqā Tabrīzī (Bolūrī), a liberal-minded merchant and prominent backer of the constitutionalists, particularly the patriotic journalists, in Tabrīz at the time. Kasravī considers him to have been the founder of *Āzārbāyjān*. Bolūrī owned a printing press, which he had earlier bought from the Crown Prince Moḥammad-‘Alī Mīrzā, and he placed this press, which used movable



type and was called the Nāmūs Press, at *Āzarbāyjān*'s disposal. The first and last pages, however, being made up of caricatures, were lithographed and run off at another establishment, the Eskandānī Press. From the fifteenth issue onward, the recipient and sender of the communications bore the pseudonym Ḥājjī Bābā Tabrīzī. Like its contemporary, the satirical journal *Mollā Naṣr-al-dīn* published at Tiflis, *Āzarbāyjān* frequently attributed items to an imaginary figure, in its case named Ḥājjī Bābā. The example was to be followed by later humorous and semi-humorous publications in Iran. Ḥājjī Bābā appears in the majority of *Āzarbāyjān*'s caricatures. He is an elderly man, clad in the then usual garb of an Azarbaijani city-dweller; often he is flanked by another imaginary figure, his friend Ūlmāz (Azeri Turkish for “Can’t be done”).

Āzarbāyjān is the third satirical journal in the history of the Persian press, having been preceded by *Šāhsevan* (Istanbul, 1888 or 1889) and *Ṭolū* (Būšeher, 1900); but if the time of *Āzarbāyjān*'s appearance, the extent of its circulation, and various special features are taken into account, it deserves to be rated as the first important Persian satirical journal.

Not all the contents of *Āzarbāyjān* are satirical. Most of the leading articles, and some of the poems, reviews, and announcements which were printed in it, are unmistakably serious. Like many later humorous or semi-humorous publications launched in Iran, it was greatly influenced by the already mentioned journal *Mollā Naṣr-al-dīn* of Tiflis. It never equaled *Mollā Naṣr-al-dīn* in the quality and presentation of its subject-matter, but was more courageous than the latter in its critical comments on internal politics—in its case, Iranian politics. Amongst other things, *Āzarbāyjān* engaged in a debate with its Tiflis counterpart, and in an article headed *Mollā Naṣr-al-dīn javābi* condemned the latter's support for the contemporary Iranian prime minister, ‘Alī Aṣṣḡar Khan Atābak.

Āzarbāyjān was opposed to autocracy, sympathetic to Iranian nationalism, and eager for moral and social reforms. On the first point, it directly attacked Moḡammad-‘Alī Shah in biting lampoons, poems, and caricatures, going to greater extremes than any other contemporary publication. It also showed more awareness of popular feelings. Among the subjects in which *Āzarbāyjān* took interest were social problems such as usurpation of peasants' rights by landlords, drug addiction, and hoarding and overpricing of essential goods.

Āzarbāyjān vigorously advocated freedom of oral and written expression. It spoke up in defense of the free press of Iran and Caucasia and in praise of



liberal journalism. Some of its angriest protests and lampoons were over the sale of Iranian girls from Qūčān to Turkmen who were Russian subjects—a scandal in which high-ranking Iranian officials were involved (nos. 6, 13, 14, 16, 17).

Unlike other liberal-nationalist journals of the time, *Āzarbāyjān* refrained from using religious expressions and arguments to explain and popularize its liberal ideals. Indeed it called on the Iranians to change their habits as a sign of release from the bonds of tyranny, in particular to celebrate the Nowrūz festival of that year (1335 Q.) even though it fell in the month of Šafar during the customary forty days of mourning for the Imam Ḥosayn (no. 3, p. 5).

Āzarbāyjān's opinions about foreigners were far from favorable. Russian and Ottoman Turkish policies were sharply criticized, and the Ottoman sultan was personally lampooned (no. 17, p. 6). The Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 for partition of Iran into spheres of influence naturally incurred severe condemnation. *Āzarbāyjān* also took a poor view of Joseph Naus and the other Belgian officials in the Iranian government's service (no. 15, p. 7).

Āzarbāyjān was the first Iranian publication to appear in both the national language and a local language. The example was followed a fortnight later by another liberal journal, *Faryād* (published at Orūmīya [Urmia] during 1907). It must be added that the Persian content of *Āzarbāyjān* greatly exceeded the Azeri Turkish content, and that one of its articles expressed preference for the use of Persian in writing.

The intention was that *Āzarbāyjān* should appear weekly, but this proved impracticable. The first issue was published on 6 Moḥarram 1325/19 February 1907. The date 1324 printed conspicuously in the vignette of this issue refers to the grant of the constitution in that year. At least 23 issues came out before publication of *Āzarbāyjān* ceased, probably as a result of the death of 'Alī-qolī Safarov. Issue no. 21 was printed on 22 Šawwāl 1325/29 November 1907, but nos. 22 and 23 are undated. Since the interval between each issue from no. 15 onward ran to over a fortnight, it can be inferred that the last issue was probably printed at the end of Du'l-ḥejja or beginning of Šafar 1325 (early January 1908); if so, Kasravī's surmise that *Āzarbāyjān* lasted one year is not far off the mark. Only three months after the demise of *Āzarbāyjān*, publication of a successor journal began; this was *Ḥašarāt al-arż*, which came out at Tabrīz between March, 1908, and January, 1911.



Āzarbāyjān's vignette was a lion with the sun on its right side and the name *Āzarbāyjān* showing through the sun's rays. In the second and subsequent issues, the national emblem of the lion and sun was added in the form of an internal vignette at the top of page 2. The first and last pages were occupied by caricatures, which were in color and lithographed; the name of the caricaturist remains unknown.

Āzarbāyjān carried advertisements. It consisted of eight two-column pages measuring 35 x 24 cm. The price per copy was 14 *šāhīs*. The annual rate for subscribers in Tabrīz was four *tūmāns*; no rate for subscribers elsewhere was notified.

Sets of *Āzarbāyjān* are preserved in a number of important libraries of Iran, the Cambridge University Library, and Bibliothèque Nationale (Versailles).

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