



## BAKU II. HISTORY, IN THE 19-20TH CENTURIES

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### ii. History in the 19th-20th Centuries.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Russian autocrat Alexander I (1801-25) used both diplomatic pressure and military force to bring the semi-independent principalities and khanates of Transcaucasia under Russian suzerainty. After the annexation of Eastern Georgia in 1801 and the establishment of a permanent Russian presence south of the Caucasus, the commander of Russian troops, General Tsitsianov, began a series of campaigns into Caucasian Azarbaijan, taking Ganja in 1804, Karabakh (Qarabāḡ) and Šervān in 1805, before being killed outside Baku early in 1806. That fall Baku was captured by General Bulgakov, and Iran later gave up its claims to Baku, as well as to Georgia, Šervān, Karabakh, and Ganja, in the Treaty of Golestān (12 October 1813). The city was placed under the Russian military governor in Derbent, and the oil lands, salt ponds, and fish industries were taken over by the state. Much of the Persian system of landholding and peasant-landlord relations was maintained by the tsarist authorities, though the Russian treasury appropriated the lands of the former khans and of the *dīvān*. The peasantry was divided into state peasants and landlord serfs, with the latter a distinct minority.

After the conclusion of the second Russo-Persian War in 1828 (Treaty of Torkamāñčāy), Baku and eastern Transcaucasia enjoyed nearly a century of



peace. The local economy revived, and Baku emerged as the most important Caucasian trading port on the Caspian. At the beginning of the 1830s, the variety of currencies left by the khanates was replaced by a single Russian monetary system, and a decade later the imperial Russian standards of weights and measures were introduced. The first secular Russian school was opened in Baku in 1832, and instruction was carried on in both Russian and Azeri. At first the oil industry developed slowly, as lands were leased by the state to local entrepreneurs. In 1848, so Soviet sources claim, a Russian technician, F. A. Semenov, drilled the first oil well in the world. But it was only in the last thirty years of the century that the rapid expansion of drilling, refining, and shipping of oil products helped create an upper class of oil industrialists. Foreign entrepreneurs like the Swedish brothers Ludwig and Robert Nobel were instrumental in making Baku the world's leading producer of oil by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Military governance of Transcaucasia ended in 1841, and the territory was divided into two provinces: the Georgian-Imeretian *guberniya* and the Caspian *oblast'*. But this division was short-lived, and, with the appointment of Prince Mikhail Vorontsov as Viceroy of the Caucasus (1844), four provinces were created (1846) with Baku and much of Caucasian Azarbaijan falling into Shemakh province. As part of his policy to attract local elites to supporting Russian rule, Vorontsov convinced Nicholas I (1825-55) to legitimize the landholding structure in Muslim Transcaucasia, and in 1846-47 the hereditary rights of Muslim landlords over their lands and peasants were recognized in law. Even after the Emancipation Decree of 1861 was extended to Caucasian Muslim areas in 1870, the landlords retained much of their authority over both peasants and properties.

Baku became the administrative center of the province (renamed Baku province) after an earthquake devastated Shemakh in 1859. The municipal reform of 1864 was applied to Baku in 1878, and a *duma* and a mayor, elected by the urban propertied class, were permitted to administer local affairs within strict limits. While ultimate authority in the city remained in the hands of appointed governors and police officials, the upper middle class of industrialists and merchants gained considerable influence by the end of the century. The few Azarbaijani magnates, like Tagiev and Topchibashev, competed for dominance both in the economy and in local politics with the well-placed Armenian and Russian bourgeoisie. The Russian state often gave preferential treatment to the Christian population, and in 1892 the non-



Christian representation in the Baku дума was limited to one-third of the membership.

At the other end of Baku society the oil industry had spawned a multinational working class, which by the early twentieth century was engaging in strikes and demonstrations, organizing illegal trade unions, and responding positively to Social Democratic appeals. In 1904 Baku oil workers and their Marxist leaders negotiated the first general labor contract in Russian history. During Russia's first revolution (1905), Baku workers formed a soviet of workers' deputies but restricted much of their activity to economic, rather than political, concerns. Relations between Armenians and Azarbaijanis in the city degenerated into riots and massacres while tsarist officials either sat passively or encouraged the inter-ethnic bloodletting. For his apparent involvement in the events the governor of the city, Prince Nakashidze, was assassinated by Armenian revolutionaries.

Even with the restoration of a harsh political order in 1907-08, the oil economy did not regain its earlier levels, and on the eve of World War I workers again launched massive strikes. Three years later revolution ended tsarist rule, and the resurrected Baku soviet became the de facto governing institution in the city for almost two years. From April through July, 1918, the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Stepan Shahumian held power in the city (the Baku Commune) and initiated a series of social reforms. But this brief experiment ended by summer, and in September Turkish troops occupied the city. Baku was declared the capital of independent Azarbaijan, and a nationalist government moved there from Ganja. Turkish occupation was replaced by British at the end of the World War, and the fragile Musavatist (Mosāwātī) regime tried to maneuver between the Allied Powers, from whom it hoped for recognition; Soviet Russia, whose Bolshevik loyalists threatened the government's existence from both within and outside; and the independent Armenian state with which Azarbaijan had conflicting territorial ambitions. Once the British evacuated (August, 1919), the enthusiasm of many Baku workers for Soviet power and the presence of the Red Army on the border became irresistible. On 28 April 1920, Baku became the capital of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azarbaijan. That year it hosted the famous Congress of the Peoples of the East.

Baku underwent a rapid and far-reaching transformation under Soviet rule. Its population grew from 439,100 in 1926 to 1,022,000 in 1979, and the central parts of the city were modernized to look like a Western municipality. At first



governed by Bolsheviks of Russian, Armenian, as well as Azarbaijani nationality, by the 1930s the leading cadres of Baku and Azarbaijan were almost entirely Azarbaijani. During the Stalinist period an associate of Lavrenti Beria, M. Bagirov, dominated party and state in Azarbaijan, presiding over the economic development of Baku and the political demise of the older generation of Soviet leaders. In the quarter-century since the death of Stalin (1953), Baku has developed into the seventh largest city in the Soviet Union, a major industrial center, and the cultural crucible for the Azarbaijani people.

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