

## **Azerbaijan in the Eyes of Polish Travellers and Exiles to the Caucasus**

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For a long time the East has attracted Europeans from the West not only with its charm and beauty. Quite frequently it was the place of compulsory stay. Among the Europeans who constituted the group of compulsory explorers of the Orient were Poles who, as a result of various unfortunate circumstances, were sent into exile to the Caucasus or were forced to seek asylum in Ottoman Turkey with its friendly predisposition towards Poles.

One place where the concentration of numerous Poles was especially apparent from the date of the first partition of Poland (1772) until the end of the 19th century and even longer was the Caucasus. Poles appeared there mostly as a result of the process of compulsory incorporation within the Russian troops which, since the time of the Tsar Peter I, had fought there in order to conquer the vast territories of the Caucasus.

According to one of the Polish explorers and at the same time an exile – Mateusz Gralewski (1877: 535) – the number of Poles residing in the territory of the Caucasus in 1848 was twenty-six thousand men and two thousand women. He also tries to estimate the number of Poles who died in the Caucasus. According to his knowledge the number of Polish losses in the Caucasus due to various factors such as participation in wars and battles, epidemics and diseases since the first partition of Poland (1772) reached half a million. The compulsory nature of the Poles' stay in the Caucasian lands did not allow any chance for them to be released and to return to their homeland. On the contrary, in most cases it condemned them to reside there forever.

Although the official status of the Polish men incorporated into the Russian army was that of soldiers, or even officers (since promotion also occurred, though rarely), Poles were nevertheless conscious that they were in Russian captivity, from

whence there was no way out. It happened rarely, however, that some Poles deserted and escaped to the Caucasian troops (mostly Circassian) fighting for their freedom against the Russian occupants, but allegedly it also happened that the Caucasian troops would betray those fugitives and send them back to the Russians. In such a situation the most severe of sentences for the fugitives was to be expected. There were also some cases, admittedly very rarely, where Polish soldiers or officers were discharged from the service for medical reasons or inability to serve.

Thus, the Poles staying in the Caucasus and being conscious of their hopeless situation tried to organize their lives in any form possible to survive. There are notorious cases where the families (mostly wives) of Polish exiles quartered in the Caucasus came to join them voluntarily. The Polish Caucasian community also paid attention to its intellectual and spiritual development. If it was possible, Catholic priests were brought there in order to organize parishes and take care of the spiritual state of the Polish exiles. However, the building of churches there (especially Catholic ones) was prohibited by the Russian authorities. Another form of organizing the Polish community was the establishing of libraries with collections of Polish books brought by some Poles from their homeland or even bought there at certain local markets.

Among the notable Poles staying in the Caucasus one could mention quite a large number of names. Their activity brought a visible contribution to the popularization of the Caucasus and the development of some scientific research referring to its geography, botany, history, anthropology, culture and the languages spoken in the Caucasus.

After the Napoleonic Wars, Captain Stanisław Nowacki was sent as a prisoner to the Caucasus. His first impressions referred mostly to the beauty of the mountains. He described his thoughts and experiences gained on the journey to the Caucasus in the work published in Poznań in 1833 entitled *Podróże do Georgii w czasie mojej niewoli w Rosji, odbyte w roku 1813, 1814 i 1815* [Journeys to Georgia during my captivity in Russia in 1813, 1814 and 1815] (Reychman 1972: 181).

After the patriotic uprising known in Polish history as the “November Uprising 1830” a new wave of Poles empowered the Russian corps quartered in the Caucasus. Among the soldiers compulsorily incorporated into the Russian army was the Polish prince – Roman Sanguszko (Baranowski 1987: 166). The numerous letters he used to write to his mother and relatives contain his experience and knowledge of the lands he lived in in the Caucasus, the culture and peoples of the places mentioned.

Another group of Poles exiled to the Caucasus appeared there a few years after the November Uprising. Among them there were some Polish artists such as the poets Tadeusz Łada-Zabłocki, Władysław Strzelnicki, and Leon Janiszewski - a music teacher by profession (Reychman 1972: 188-191). Although their captivity was unpleasant and hard, it nevertheless did not disturb them in their literary activity. Łada-Zabłocki wrote a lot of poems describing the beauty of the Caucasus and also used to translate Azeri folk songs (Reychman 1972: 190). As for Strzelnicki, he wrote a novel entitled *Mahmudek* [Little Mahmud], the plot of which is situated in some Azeri places such as Lenkoran, Baku, and Shemakhy. (Reychman 1972: 191).

Hipolit Jaworski, an exile of 1835, was lucky to return home in 1846. In his work *Wspomnienia Kaukazu* [Recollections of the Caucasus] (Poznań 1877) he included many valuable historical and ethnographic details from the places he visited. In his book he described the local authorities, the *mürids* movement and some other sociological and political phenomena unknown to the western world.

We should also mention Jan Wierzbicki, a doctor and natural historian, and Konstanty Zach, a linguist who died in the Caucasus during a linguistic expedition. He allegedly wrote the first grammar of the Azeri language. According to his friends, he prepared it but did not manage to publish it (Baranowski 1987: 172).

Some of the Polish exiles to the Caucasus became active as travelers, which resulted in some publications describing journeys in the Caucasus. In those descriptions the authors drew attention to particular regions, their peoples, customs, culture, etc. Those who paid a sizeable amount of attention to Azerbaijan were Mateusz Gralewski and Michał Butowd-Andrzejkiewicz.

Mateusz Gralewski was sent in 1844 from Warsaw citadel to the Georgian regiment. For several years he was quartered in the northern part of the Caucasus, probably in Dagestan. After this, he travelled along the coast of the Caspian Sea and he also travelled through Azerbaijan regions (Reychman 1972: 196). When he returned home in 1856 he described all of his journeys in his book entitled *Kaukaz. Wspomnienia z dwunastoletniej niewoli* [The Caucasus. Recollections from a twelve-year captivity] published in Lwów 1877.

In his more than five-hundred page book comprising eleven chapters he described various parts, both historic and geographic, of the Caucasus, such as: the Caucasus

Mountains, the Kumyk area, Dagestan, Georgia and Ossetia, Circassian lands, Shirvan, and the Cuba khanate<sup>1</sup>.

He not only paid attention to the nature, climate, flora and fauna, but from his descriptions one can see that he was also interested in the people, their history, and culture.

In his journey he travelled through the territory of present-day Azerbaijan, visiting three bigger cities there: Cuba, Baku and Shemakhy. Being in each of these three cities he tried to present their characteristics, history, some local customs, etc. When describing Cuba – a city famous for its trade and industry – he mentions its history which is somehow related to Russia. In 1796 Russians promoted a riot among the local people against the ruling sheik (khan) and afterwards they conquered Cuba themselves. Then, the Russians ruined the city, building earthworks on its ruins, and later on they built a new city called “New Cuba” located more to the south. According to Gralewski “New Cuba” had about ten thousand citizens. The inhabitants of Cuba are mostly Shiites and Sunnis represented by different nations such as Persians and Turkmens. There were also Armenians and Jews there. The city had a modern character with nice new buildings and paved streets (Gralewski 1877: 142-145). While in Cuba Gralewski also visited neighboring villages, in one of which he took part in a wedding ceremony. He tries to give a detailed description of this event, mentioning even the menu for the wedding dinner (1877: 180).

From Cuba his journey led him in a southern direction. He travels on the Shirvan plain which historically was divided into 3 khanates: the Baku khanate, the Shemakhy khanate and the Sheki khanate. He notices that the soil in this region is very fertile. There are many green places with gardens and orchards. The closer to Baku he gets, the less fertile the soil is. The vicinity of Baku is full of numerous salt lakes and oil-bearing areas. From Gralewski’s description (1877: 315) one can discover that the Russians invaded and conquered Baku after a six-month siege in 1806.

Gralewski is under a strong impression of Baku’s beauty, a city with a dozen or so centuries of its own history. He mentions that several-thousand-year-old Baku is surrounded by a massive stone wall and both inside the wall and outside it the city is most magnificent. The three most beautiful monuments of art that make an impression on Gralewski (1877: 315-317) are: “*baszta dziewicza*” [The Virgin Tower], an old caravanserai, and the ruins of the castle built by the Persian king –

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<sup>1</sup> We quote the names of geographic and historic units after Gralewski even they do not correspond to today’s names of those places.

Abbas II . Not only do the monuments of art and the architecture of the city draw the author's attention, but he also pays attention to the inhabitants, their habits and local customs, and he even notices some Polish elements in this city remote from Poland. While taking a stroll he noticed some Polish inscriptions on the wall of one building. When he visited the local jeweler he saw old Polish coins (called *abazy*) which were allegedly in use in Baku some time ago. Gralewski's description of Baku ends with his statement that although this commercial and industrial city had lost its fighting spirit, it has a great future and perspectives.

The last city in Gralewski's journey was Shemakhy. He mentions that the city is relatively new since it was built according to the Russian urban plans in 1824 on the ruins of the ancient city destroyed by wars and earthquakes. In Gralewski's opinion (1877: 329) the city is not interesting and has no aesthetic taste. The buildings are constructed in the same style, with flat roofs, and are similar to each other. The Russian Orthodox church is the highest building in the city since Russians never allowed any other buildings like mosques or Catholic churches to be higher than this edifice. Apparently, the author is not enthusiastic about Shemakhy, yet to pay justice to the city's features he adds the information that the city is famous for silk textiles and some musical instruments (Gralewski 1877: 329).

Another traveler and also investigator – Michał Butowd-Andrzejkowicz – spent the first two years of his exile in Tiflis (Tbilisi). Then his regiment moved eastwards. He travelled through Kody, Muganly, Shamkhor, Elizavetpol to the Shirvan plains, then to Shemakhy, Baku, and through Cuba to Derbent. He also took part in many campaigns in Dagestan and other regions. He presented his journey through those territories in a two-volume book entitled *Szkice Kaukazu* [Sketches of the Caucasus] which was published in Warsaw after his return home in 1859.

The major part of the first volume of his book concerns Azerbaijani matters, its lands, peoples, some legends and even language. He was the first to describe Gyanja – the first Azeri city on his way, which in the nineteenth century received the Russian name Elizavetpol<sup>2</sup>. He pays attention to the abundance of flora among which some modern, European style houses were situated together with typical oriental stalls and bazaar stands. He records the caravanserai, the mosque and the old fortress built by the Turks who were there before the Persians. The next Azeri city that he mentions is Shemakhy, founded in the 6th century by the Persian king Nushirvan. This city is located in the Shirvan region which also has a long and rich history. Andrzejkowicz presents, in a short passage, the history of Shirvan

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<sup>2</sup> This information comes from Andrzejkowicz.

beginning from pre-Islamic times, through Persian and Mongol rule and the wars between Turkey and Persia, until the time when the Russians conquered this province in 1805. He states that due to military circumstances, numerous wars and several changes in the rulers of this region, Shemakhy has lost its previous glamour. When describing Shemakhy, the author only mentions the presence of a mosque and some European style buildings. He also notices that the representatives of practically all crafts offer their services at the bazaar (Andrzejkowicz 1859: 112).

From Shemakhy he moved on to Baku, travelling through the Baku province. Andrzejkowicz (1859:119) admits that this province is the richest among all the Russian possessions between the Black and the Caspian Sea, bringing enormous income from oil, salt, saffron and other goods and means. Baku is also considered to be the best harbour on the western bank of the sea. As far as Baku is concerned Andrzejkowicz (1859: 122-123) begins the description of the city from its legend and history. He found out from it about the legendary Khunzar who gave the city its name (allegedly the previous name for Baku was Khunzar). The legend also mentions Khunzar's wife Ziummuriada, who built the tower (called "The Virgin Tower") in which she escaped from her husband. Much the same as Gralewski, Andrzejkowicz describes the city, paying attention to both the beauty of the old architecture of the castle (in fact, only its ruins), fortress and other old buildings, and to the less aesthetic new buildings, churches and mosques.

He pays only a little attention to Cuba, the next city on his way. In his opinion (1859: 161) Cuba has nothing of interest. The description of those regions considered to be Azeri lands ends with the description of Derbent. When describing Derbent Andrzejkowicz (1859:173) mentions the cemetery called *Kirkler* which means 'forty' that he visited there. The history of this cemetery brings contradictory opinions concerning the age and the people buried there. According to the local historical chronicle, *Derbent Name*, this is the burial place of brave Arabs who lost their lives fighting against the Khazars. However, the local Armenians claim that this is the necropolis of their ancestors who fought against the Muslims.

Both Gralewski's and Andrzejkowicz's remarks are of great value for scientific research. Not only did they observe and describe landscapes, towns, and villages, but they also paid attention to the people, local history, customs and the variety of languages spoken in the Caucasus. Their descriptions are full of unique pieces of information. Both in Gralewski's work and in the one by Andrzejkowicz (1859:132) one can find a portrayal of Ateshgakh village – the place where fire-worshippers lived and worshiped. Next, in Andrzejkowicz's work one can come

across the legend relating to the history of the drowning of Baku by Alexander the Great or the legend about the immortal *giaour* (*Ulmeli Giaur*). On the other hand, in Gralewski's work one can find an account of medical practices by local healers (1877:320) or accounts from Muslim holidays (1877: 154).

One should emphasize that Andrzejkowicz especially pays attention to the variety of languages spoken in the Caucasus. He has a good possibility to observe this whilst travelling through various places in the Caucasus. Since he was not a qualified linguist he could not properly name the languages he heard during his journey. Nevertheless, we should admit that his remarks concerning some languages, for example Azeri, are close to the truth. He used to call the language he heard in the Azeri lands as "Tatar." Taking into account the linguistic knowledge in the nineteenth century, especially that concerning eastern languages and the possibility of their classification, we should state that he had very good linguistic intuition.

One can also see that he was linguistically talented. In his descriptions and relations there are many words he quoted naming particular objects or phenomena. He also tried to quote some sentences, always giving a translation into Polish. Let us give several examples:

*Aferim*<sup>3</sup>(193) 'brawo' [bravo!];

*Bilmes* (171) 'nie rozumiem' [I do not understand];

*Cheir, cheir* (152) 'nie, nie' [no, no];

*Nachaber* (143) 'co słycać nowego' [what's new?];

*Sahol* (114) 'dziękuję' [thank you];

*Salam Alejkum* (143) 'Błogosławieństwo Boskie niech będzie z tobą' [God bless you];

*Urus gelliler! Urus geliller* (168) 'Ruscy idą' [The Russians are coming];

*Wallah-Billah* (198) 'dalibóg' [upon my word].

Gralewski also tried to explain some local phenomena by giving their names or quoting whole sentences; however, he did not pay as much attention to the language as Andrzejkowicz did.

Summing up the subject presented, we should point out the advantageous aspects of works written by Polish exiles. Those works constitute very valuable and detailed sources of information concerning such a very remote and unknown area as the Caucasian territories were at that time. Both authors paid attention to very important elements from nature, climate, flora, fauna, through the places, towns,

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<sup>3</sup> All examples are written in Andrzejkowicz's original spelling.

cities, villages, local history, religion, culture, customs and right up to the languages themselves. Undoubtedly, these books still constitute a source of diversified knowledge of great worth.

#### REFERENCE AND NOTES

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*Summary***Azerbaijan in the Eyes of Polish Travellers and Exiles to the Caucasus****Ewa Siemieniec-Gołaś**

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In the mid nineteenth century quite a numerous group of Poles appeared in the Caucasus within its various regions, a territory which at that time was already almost totally within Russian possession. The reason for the appearance of Poles in the Caucasus was of a political nature, since at that time Poland did not exist as a country, but was divided between three empires – Austria, Russia and Prussia. Some young Polish patriots from the part of Poland that had been incorporated into Russia, in fighting for independence, used to organize plots and riots against the tsarist regime. The consequence of their activity against the tsar was deportation and exile along with others to the Caucasus, where they were forced to serve in the Russian army.

For some of those Polish internal-exiles, their stay in the Caucasus afforded an occasion to travel and learn more about the Caucasian peoples, their lands, culture, languages and customs.

Among those Poles living in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, one can mention Mateusz Gralewski and Michał Butowd -Andrzejkowicz. Travelling across the territories of present-day Azerbaijan they wrote some books incorporating information on the local cities (Baku, Cuba, Gyanja and others), the peoples living there, their culture and customs. This literature presents the Azerbaijani realities of that time.

Key Words: Polish travelers and exiles; literature about Azerbaijan.