

## M. Y. Lermontov's Turkish Master Mirza Fet'ali Ahunzade\* /Ahundov's Literary Proceedings in Tbilisi

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### Abstract

*In this article is traced Azerbaijani writer, poet, dramatist Mirza Fet'ali Ahunzade/Ahundov's literary activities held by him in Tbilisi with his Georgian, Russian (particularly with M. Y. Lermontov), and Armenian counterparts. Besides, the article focuses on literary environment of Tbilisi of that time, the plots of Ahunzade/Ahundov's some literary works written in his Tbilisi stay in terms of multiculturalism, world-view, perception of 'other'...etc.*

*Keywords: Mirza Fet'ali Ahunzâde/Ahundov, his literary activities in Tbilisi, meeting with Lermontov, Ahunzâde/Ahundov as a Lermontov's Turkish master.*

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## Introduction

There are two major regions which are being considered to be the homeland of great Tsar-Soviet-Russian Literature masterpieces and which contributed to the artistic creations of significant Russian writers. Mainly, these are Siberia and Caucasus.

Russian writers who found themselves in Siberia due to different circumstances Radishchev (1749-1802), Dostoyevski (1821-1881), Pasternak (1890-1960), Soljenitsin (1918-2008) and others, would become one of the pioneers of the World Literature by showing the detailed socio-psychological picture of the Russian individual and the society in general in their literary works in an original manner.

Again, other Tsar-Soviet Russian writers and poets who were sent to Caucasus (Pushkin (1799-1837), Ahundov (1812-1878), Lermontov (1817-1841), Gorky (1868-1936)), during this period of time, while remaining the representatives of their nation, reflected the perception types of concepts of space, time, analysis of social issues, psychological types, structure of folklore, ways of interpretation of phenomenon and object/events by different cultures of the region and thus by doing so, they enriched their literary works turning Caucasus into the subject of the interest within the framework of the world literature.

In this context, Azeri poet, writer and dramatist Mirza Fet'ali Ahundov's life experience in Tbilisi contains various important facts in general which started in 1834 and continued till his death in 1878. Ahundov, whose literary life's nearly half had been experienced during his Tbilisi stay, would become one of the outstanding figures in the world of literature by his works which he created with the influence of different personalities met in Tbilisi and whom he had influenced as well.

His importance as of a writer had been increased after meeting in Tbilisi with an outstanding Russian poet Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841), known as a Russian Byron as he was deported to Caucasus region three years after Ahundov's arrival to Tbilisi. Their acquaintance in the Georgian capital has opened new creative perspectives for both of the poets and especially for Lermontov.

### 1. Ahundov's arrival to Tbilisi

Ahundov was born in Sheki (Nuha) in 1812. He was educated by his grandfather Ahund Alesker who was an outstanding spiritual personality in his contemporary Azeri society (Memedov, 1987: 6). Till 1833 Ahundov continued his education in a religious school – medrese (Mollahâne- in Azeri), in 1833 he was sent to the public school opened in Sheki. Mirza Shafiq Vazeh, on who there had been written various scientific articles in German literary societies (he would also migrate to Tbilisi) had a deep impact on Ahundov's literary and intellectual life as he was his teacher during the medrese years (as Rafili states it - "They met in Genje"). Vazeh's influence over Ahundov starts with the

question that master has directed to his disciple: "For which purpose are you mastering the secrets of the science?" Ahundov replied: "My intention is to become a Molla! (Preacher)". The master would reply to his exited disciple in such a manner: "So you want to become a deceiver". After this dialogue the brightminded student had lost his interest towards religious studies and dedicated himself to materialism.

Ahundov did not finish any of the educational institution which he entered after quitting the religious school due to different reasons –one of them being his age problem but was able to master languages like Russian, Arabic and Turkish so that in his early twenties (November 1834) he started to work as an interpreter in Baron Rozen's demense in city of Sheki. According to one of the versions (Sadigov, 1987) because of the difficulties that Ahundov experienced during his duty as a permanent staff of interpreter at a publishing house, according to Rafili – because of the possible solution to his troublesome living conditions (Rafili, 1958: 33) he has moved to Tbilisi, while according to another version it was a fact that all his property and belongings were destroyed in a fire accident which took place during the military conflict between Russia and Iran in the first part of the 19'th century, making him forced to move from Azerbaijan to Tbilisi eventually.

Ahundov, who used to live in different districts of Tbilisi, spent the last 13 years of his life in the house named as an Ahundov Museum nowadays. Today, Ahundov's residence which is located in the historical district of Tbilisi – Gorgasali Avenue, N 17 is being restored (old address: Myasnikov, N 53). The museum, in which the private commodities of Ahudov used to be shown, was functioning until recently. In the right and left walls of the museums entrance part there are memorial desks which say the following: "A distinguished Azeri writer, philosopher and intellectual M. F. Ahundov lived and created his works in this house during the years 1865-1878".

## 2. Literary Environment in Tbilisi

Ahundov started working as a translator-interpreter of the Eastern languages in the residence of the Caucasia region governor of the Russian Empire and continued on his mission till the end of his life. His acquaintance with Bakihanov, who was a friend of such Russian writers and poets as Griboyedov and Pushkin, had a great influence on Ahudov's intellectual and literary life in general as they met in Tbilisi. Ahundov had an opportunity to get acquainted with high society Georgian and Armenian writers, poets and businessmen, also with writers, poets and revolutionaries who were sent to Caucasus from different countries. Their meetings generally took place in the demesne of the Caucasus region governor of the Russian Empire. Besides, along with Georgian and Armenian writers, poets and intellectuals he was able to meet the participants and the ones who indirectly contributed to the Decembrist rebellion of 1825 and who were exiled to Caucasus. These were Russian writers and poets, as well as participants of Poland

rebellions of 1830 and of 1860. Among the personal acquaintances of Ahundov were writers and intellectuals of different ethnic origin such as MirzaApriyamEnikolopov, Abbas Kuli-Ali Bakihov, A. S. Griboyedov, Marlinsky and Lermontov.

### 3. Meeting with M. Y. Lermontov in Tbilisi

Pushkin's death, who was the pioneer of the Russian Literature, had caused a big social movement in Tsar's Russia including Caucasus. Pushkin had engaged in a duel with a French origin foster child of a German ambassador Heeckeren, Baron George d'Antes, trying to protect the honor of his beloved wife (Kelly, 2003: 58) in January 27/29 1837, and passed away in February 10, 1837. One of the reasons of the above mentioned social movement was a poetic work of M. Y. Lermontov written in 1837, which was dedicated to Pushkin and his honorable death. The poem was written in Persian and consisted from 56 stiches. The title of elegy was "The Death of the Poet" («                      »). Lermontov's elegy starts with the verse entitled- "Revenge, Sire Revengel!" in which the author blames the aristocratic surrounding in provoking the duel and Pushkin's eventual death (Bonamour, 2006: 29-36). By the influence and impression of the above mentioned poem the population poured out into the streets. Only Pushkin's house had been surrounded by the crowd of 50 thousand (Kelly 2003: 59), as the poem caused the indignation within the population. Consequently, Tsar Nikolas I sent Lermontov to Caucasus for one year period. Lermontov passed through cities and settlements like Stavropol, Pyatigorsk, Kizlar, Shuma, Shemaha, Kuba arriving to the Western region of Georgia, Kaheti together with heavy cavalry unit. While Tsar was going to Tbilisi, Lermontov's aunt Akhverdeva, who was married with one of the Tsar's relatives, asked him to excuse Lermontov for his guilt with the help of mediators. This fact played an important role in Tsar's change of his decision, which in part meant Lermontov's release. Lermontov arrived in Tbilisi in the middle of October of 1837 and left the city at the beginning of December (Andronikov, 1958:78).

Two young poets – Ahundov and Lermontov, who wrote lyrics of passionate reactance on Pushkin's death in two different locations (St. Petersburg and Tbilisi) (Lermontov, 2002: 169) met with each other in Tbilisi, the cultural capital of that period's Caucasus. According to some rumors, their first meeting took place in the residence of Aleksandre Chavchavadze, who was a writer and a general and who met Lermontov's aunt in St. Petersburg and his wife - Marina Orbeliani as they had turned their residence<sup>1</sup> into a literary society. Aleksandre Chavchavadze is also known as a pioneer of Georgian Romanticism of the nineteenth century. According to other sources they had met in the residence of the officer named Pyetr (Andronikov, 1958:126). Lermontov himself mentions this fact in the draught of his poem called "Me in Tbilisi" («                      ») as well as in his correspondences. In those draughts and correspondences Lermontov talks about "Erudite Tatar Ali" who is Ahundov (Andronikov, 1958:116, 125, 126, 141).

The meeting of two talents in the literary saloon played an important role in their future artistic development. This fact was the reason for Ahundov to assign a primary importance to Russia; As for Lermontov, during his stay in Tbilisi he took lessons from Mirza Fet'ali Ahundov who was a teacher of Tatar Language (i. e. Turkish) in the Gymnasium N 1. Before this fact, in one of the correspondences of Bestujev Lermontov has learned that: "Took lessons of Tatar<sup>2</sup> Language (Turkish)<sup>3</sup> as it was the Lingua franca in the Caucasian mountains region. Bestujev also took Turkish lessons from Fet Ali during his stay in Tbilisi. In one of his letters Lermontov writes the following to Rayvsky: "Turkish is of the same importance here as French is in Europe. I feel very sorry that I will not have an opportunity to learn Turkish fluently as it could be beneficial for me lately" (Lermontov, 1935: 393).

As a result of acquaintance with Ahundov, Lermontov showed an interest to the Turkish literature. Lermontov wrote a small novel entitled "Ashik Garip" and other folktales which had been published after his return from Caucasus and his death in 1846, in Petersburg. The plots of these folktales had been taken from Mirza Fet'ali (Kelly, 2003: 87). Azeri researcher M. Rafili concludes that Lermontov had taken the plots of his small folktales from Ahundov which contain some expressions of an Azeri origin (Rafili, 1937: 07; Hacilar, 2007:07).

#### 4. Works written in Tbilisi and their contexts

*a. Poetry:* There are no concrete specifications about when had Ahundov (1834–1878) started his literary activities. He had spent most of his life in Tbilisi. It is possible to collect his literary proceedings under three main headlines: Poetry, theatrical proceedings and short stories.

Ahundov's poetry that is known nowadays had been written during 1840-70 time period. Researchers assume that his lyrics entitled "Complain on Time" must be the first lyrics written before the period he arrived to Tbilisi. As for his second verse, it is a poem entitled "Obukhi" (The Morning Breeze), written in the age of 25 and which he dedicated to the Pushkin who died as a result of a duel in 1837. The poem was written in Tbilisi. This verse is also known by a title "A. S. Pu kin'in Ölümüne ark Poeması" (The Oriental Poem on Pushkin's Death) (Ahundov, 1987: 238).

The poem starts with the following verse:

"Kece etdim uygumu közümden kenar,

Sordum;

"Eysir çe mesi yüre im ne var?"

The above given verse expands in form of dialogue in the heart of a young poet. In his poem Ahundov refers to different Russian poets like Lomonosov, Derjavin, and Karamzin. The poem is translated into Russian and it had a great resonance in both Russia and Georgia as it was appreciated widely. After publishing the poem in Moscow, the

publishers of the journal sent the letter to Ahundov wishing him successful future literary life. This fact played an important role for Ahundov in intensifying his literary proceedings.

Another poem written in the classic poetic style is the one which Ahundov wrote in Persian and it is about Classic Elifba (the Arabic alphabet). The poem is assumed to be written during 1867 time period and is dedicated to Persian Shah Nesreddin. In his poem Ahundov emphasizes Islamic alphabet improvement issues and blames Persian and Turkish rulers in ignoring such kinds of attempts (Ahundzade, 2005: 233-237). Ahundov also wrote a poetic narrative entitled "Molayı Rumi ve Onun Tasnifine Babında" (About Mollah Rumi and his Classifications), in which he elaborates negative qualities like cupidity and stinginess (Palava, 1987:26-30).

*b. Theatrical proceedings:* Ahundov's predisposition towards theatrical art can be explained by his educationalist aspect. While writing his comedies with a vivid folk speech, he reflected all aspects of an Azeri Language. The multiplicity of ordinary expressions and idioms was the reason that his writings had been close to the general public. His satiric comedies in six volumes written in 40-50 years time period of the nineteenth century in Tbilisi is considered to be the reflection of 1830-40 time period of Azerbaijan. In his work entitled "Wisdom Stone Owner Alchemist: Molla bragim Halil" (1850) the writer elaborates on theme of Noah's greedy nation which lacks faith and the comic sides of their religious leaders. In his another work named "Famous Magician Muse Jordan; Batonik, Dervi Metali- ah" (1850) Ahundov portrays the life style and the moral consciousness of Karabakh land lord. In works like The Winner of War (1851), Vizier of Serab Han, Eastern Advocates, and others, Ahundov places the events and characters which filled different social frames in extraordinary worlds of meaning. On the other side, he is considered to be the pioneer not only of Azarbaijani theatrical art but of the Near East in general (Memedov, 2005: 14). In his play "The Vizier of Lenkeran Khan" (1851) Ahundov had presented the cunning executives of the palaces to the readers. In the same comedy play the writer has elaborated the theme of the oppressed low class individuals working as servants in the house of the vizier. Names like Namaz (Islamic pray), Oruch (Islamic fast), Veli (Saint – Islam) gives ideas about Ahundov's ideologic orientations. The writer's comedy play entitled "Hadji Kara (1852)" is the one with the same themes. Within the context of the play's main character -Haydar Bey the general picture of landlords and property owners is being shown. By the character of Hadji Kara the writer presented the common picture of Azerbaijani tradesmen of that period.

*c. Prose:* Ahundov wrote most of his prosaic proceedings during his stay in Tbilisi in which he elaborates themes that embrace various issues from women rights to common human rights. The literary path that the writer has opened originally, with the great help of Usûl-ı Cedid literary school had created the basics for the modern Azerbaijani Literature. Ahundov's novel entitled "Hékayet-i Yusuf ah" (Decieved Stars,

1857) shaped the basics of the Azerbaijani Literature and is considered to be first pattern of the Azerbaijani realistic prose in general.

The plot of the above mentioned work had been taken from the work of the Iranian historian Iskenderbey Munshi. Here, Ahundov reflects the socio-political views of his own. In his work the writer violently condemns the despotic rule of the Iranian Shah (Efendiyev, 1954: 60-85). In the mentioned work Iranian Aga-Mohammed-Han – a despotic ruler, who marauded Tbilisi in 1795, is being insulted. He also is believed to have forced Sunni Muslims to change their religious orientation.

## 5. Ahundov's perceptions and influence domains

Ahundov was interested with the social, political and religious issues not only of the geography that he lived in, but with the issues of the states that surrounded the region of Caucasus as he reflected those issues in his articles, literary writings and correspondences turning them into the subject of his interest (Sadigov, 1987: 5).

Ahundov is also known as the writer who had acquaintances with not only the writers, poets and scientists of that periods Tbilisi, but also with intellectuals (Encyclopedists) he was influenced by and had an influence upon. It is known that in this context, Ahundov influenced such Turkish intellectuals as Cemalettin Afgani and Ziya Gökalp. Again, in this context, it is of an importance to mention that Ahundov arrived to Istanbul in 1863 presenting his appendixes on Arabic and Latin alphabets to the Ottoman grand vizier Fuat Pasha.

The first Azerbaijani publishing – Zerdabi, had published Ahundov's writings on literature, art and philosophy of art in the newspaper "Ekinchi" in 1875. Ahundov's legacy and tradition of theatrical proceedings in modern times Azerbaijani theater was and is being continued by C. Memedkuluzade, R. Efendiyev, S. S. Ahundov, N. Nerimanov and others.

Mirza Fet'ali Ahundov's works, who knew Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Russian and French, have been translated into Russian, Persian and European languages starting from 1859. Especially his plays should be mentioned among them. Due to his great contribution to the creation of Azerbaijani drama theater Ahundov was named "Azerbaijani Moliere".

Akaki Tsereteli, who is considered to be one of the major Georgian writers and intellectuals of the nineteenth century, writes the following regarding Ahundov: "Ahundov has entered the literary domain together with Giorgi Eristavi where he proved to be a very successful writer. In his writings it is possible to see the life of an Azeri individual just like the reflection in the mirror. His stage plays have been written artfully". By saying this, Akaki Tsereteli has shown the peak of Ahundov's creativeness. Writers work entitled "Sergüze ti Veziri-Hani-Lenkeran" (Khan's Vizier), which Akaki Tsereteli

appreciated a lot, had been translated (Hanis Veziri) into Georgian (Palava, 1987:26-30).

Local and foreign researchers had reflected and interpreted Ahundov's life, philosophy and writings in a completely different manners. This fact has caused different ways of perception of the writer's legacy in general. Rafili, who wrote Ahundov's biography in 1959 compared him to the great writers like Mevlana and bn-i Sina<sup>4</sup>, others stressed the writer's materialistic side relying on the characters of his writings (Rustemov, 1986: 19), stating that he used to ironize the values of common folk. Ahundov's Turkish researcher Prof. YavuzAkpınar states the opposite of the above mentioned (Akpınar, 1994: 43)<sup>5</sup>, some of the researchers assert that the interest towards his writing had decreased among the general population (Efendiyev, 1954: 90). Azeri litterateur Jengiz Huseyinov in his biography of Ahundov, named "inevitability of an inevitable", states that the last years of Ahundov passed in melancholy and solitude. Again, it is stated that his relations with Tsar regime was not quite positive and that on his funeral in 1878 in Tbilisi there were only three Russian Kazaks.

## Conclusion

Ahundov had reflected the cultural environment that he lived in, life style and social phenomenon in his poetry, theatrical proceedings and prose elaborating them within the didactic (especially didactic!) satiric genre. Starting from the age of 24, the age he arrived to Tbilisi, and till his death, Ahundov reflected the different issues of Iranian, Armenian, Turkish and Azerbaijani societies in his writings putting his own points of view regarding those issues bravely. Unlike the Russian writers who were sent to Siberia, where they had no opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings, while getting that opportunity in Tbilisi, making only the analysis of their inner spiritual worlds, Ahundov could embrace the different issues of a wide geography during his stay in Tbilisi, analyzing them from the different points of views, as he, like other writers who used to stay in Tbilisi and Caucasian region in general, had a great opportunity to reflect the rich cultural and religious mosaic in his writings creating some of the outstanding masterpieces of the world literature.

## Notes

\* Ahunzade had changed his last name into Ahundov as he arrived to Tbilisi.

<sup>1</sup> A. Chavchavadze's residence in located near Telavi city, location named Tsinandali, 150 kilometers from Tbilisi.

<sup>2</sup> Private letters of 29/1/1974 to the Author (Laurence Kelly) from Mr. D. Barrett of the Department of Oriental Books, Boleian Library, Oxfors: In Lermontov's the dominant dialect in the Caucasian region would have been Azeri Turkish, and all the Turkish speaking people outside Turkey would have been called Tatars. See: Kelly, Laurence,

Tragedy in Caucasus, TPP, New York, p. 232.

<sup>3</sup> It is assumed that Russian writers while arriving to Caucasus region tried to learn Tatar Language which originally was Kumukhdialecte of Turkish language. See Rahmankul, Berdibay (1997), Baykal'dan Balkan'a, Ankara, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> Within the Turkish left wing ideology Ahundov is being compared with Namik Kemal who is considered to be a poet of freedom and patriocy.

<sup>5</sup> One of the persons in charge of the Ahundov's museum in Tbilisi - MirzaMemedoglu states that the writings of Ahundov had not been understood properly adding that he did not criticize religious persons but those fake religious ones who were using religion in their own interests.

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