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From the past

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# FATHER OF AZERBAIJANI JOURNALISM

Hasan Melikov Zardabi

*Hasan Bey with his  
wife Hanifa in 1878*

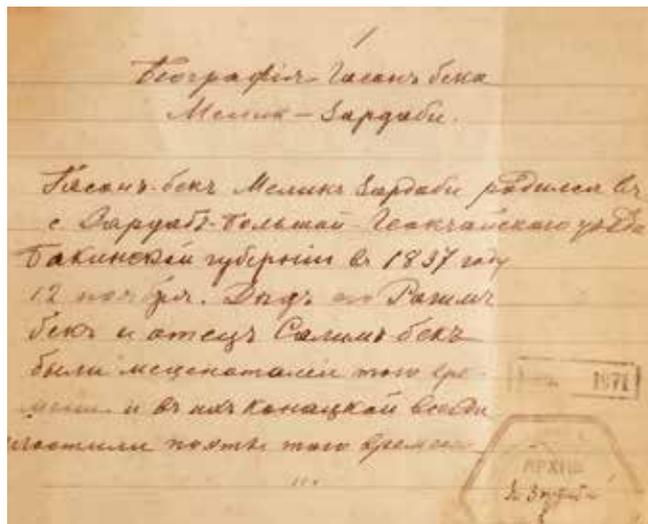


This year Azerbaijan celebrates the 150th anniversary of the establishment of its first newspaper *Əkinçi* "Ekinchi" (The Ploughman 1875-1877). Həsən bəy Səlim bəy oğlu Məlikov (1837-1907), publisher and editor, known extensively by his pseudonym Zardabi, was an Azerbaijani public figure, educator and intellectualist. Founder, sponsor and editor of the very first independent nongovernmental newspaper in Azerbaijani language "The Ploughman" in 1875, Zardabi was also the member of the Baku City Duma, who had pioneered numerous important events written in golden letters on the timeline of the social and political developments of Azerbaijani society.

Apart from being an author in his own newspaper Zardabi was writing in numerous newspapers of Azerbaijan and Russia, such as: "Bakinskiy listok", "Kaspi", "Zemledelcheskaya gazeta", "Həyat" and "Maktab" to mention just a few.

Yet, least known about Zardabi are details related to his birth and death. This article aims also to bring clarifications on that matter. Significantly, we consider as

*Zardabi's factual date of birth revealed from the memoir of Hanifa Abayeva*



the most reliable source for the date of birth of Hasan Bey the one presented by his wife Hanifa Xanım in her memoir, which is preserved at the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences Institute of Manuscripts. As it is



*From left to right: Ismail Gasprinski, Hasan Melikov Zardabi and Alimardan Topchubashov in Baku, beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

visible from the handwriting of Hanifa Abayeva Melikova, Hasan Bey was born on November the 12th in 1937.

The overall process of how the individuality and the character of Hasan Melikov was shaping is remarkable and interesting. He was born to a family with financial possibilities. His father was keen on educating his son beyond the popular then among Azerbaijanis religious education. Hasan Melikov received his primary education first from his father Salim Bey and then in a local madrasah, where he studied Persian and Arabic. Once, underlining critical thinking and analytical capacities of the little boy, Salim Bey told to the local mullah: "You better let it go. In any way, when my son will grow up and complete his education, he will not be among those pitiful, dark men who come to the mosque to listen to your lies".

In 1852, Zardabi initiated education in the Shamakhi city school, subsequently exempted from entrance exams he continued his education at the university in Moscow. Graduating with honors on a full govern-

House-museum of H. Zardabi. Zardab



1892г.			
Май	12	Иван	100 -
	26	Пожертвовано	15 -
Июнь	1	Пожертвовано	100 -
Август	3	Кладь на погреб	80 -
	22	Пожертвовано	10 -
Сентября	27	Пожертвовано бдной	10 -
Октябрь	26	Видный	300 -
Ноябрь	11	Членский взнос С-ву Спасения на водах	50 -
	13	Пожертвовано	75 -
Декабрь	29	Тифлисскому Кавказскому взнос по записи почтового смотрителя Тифлисского Муслиманского Уездина	300 -
1893г.			
Январь	16	Пожертвовано на устройство стани вокруг Исузданского кладбища	800 -
Март	1	Пожертвовано на инок в Окружной Суд	100 -
Май	1	Пожертвовано	25 -
	16	Членский взнос С-ву Красного Креста	10 -
	19	Редактору "Переводчик" на ибидей	500 -
	20	Пожертвовано М.С.Челюзову по записи полечителя приённого поном для бд-ница бояжиль	200 -
	24	Въ пользу Адегрии въ Зав. Св.Никои	100 -
Июль	4	Пожертвовано Кавказской Шерман	50 -
	5	Пожертвовано на постройку мечети въ Кубанскомъ уездѣ	300 -
	12	Пожертвовано черезъ Аб. Насырбекова	100 -
	18	Членский взнос по записи Директора Тифлисского Комитета за 1893 г.	25 -
Июль	7	Бдной ханжиль	25 -
	20	Пожертвовано на устройство ограды на	

*Исчисление 13497 - 62*

Response of the leadership of Baku to Hasan Bey's proposals for the development of the city of Baku. 1900

ment scholarship from the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics of the Moscow State University, Zardabi was a young man welcomed as "one of their own" in Moscow at the circle of poet Plesheyev and historian Sergey Mikhaylovich Solovyev, obtaining a chance to enter and observe the customs of the top circles of the intellectual society of contemporary Russia. Indeed, he was also the one who didn't pick up a chance to stay in Russia, marrying the daughter (most probably Vera Sergeyevna (1850-1921) of Solovyev. This fact was indicated later on by his wife Hanifa Xanim Melikova in her memoirs.(1)

Apparently, the life in the heart of Russia could have given to the young Hasan Melikov a very clear understanding of the cultural emptiness the majority of Azerbaijani population in the provinces was submerged into.

Once Zardabi felt the necessity and desire for social change, he also became aware of how difficult his task would be. He had to get used to fighting with Russian authorities that were openly telling him: "You are a problem to us, as there is only you who strives to open the eyes of your own people. Muslims, as a rule have a very low self esteem when it comes to themselves". (2) On the other hand, there were also those wealthy Azerbaijani compatriots that preferred to maintain a submissive position, so as to get benefits from already mean authorities, meanwhile exploiting ignorance of their own people.

*Tomb of Hasan Melikov at the Baku Memorial of Prominent Patriots***Zardabi was writing:**

"We don't have our own publishing business. Our newspaper is printed in the printing house of the gubernskoye pravleniye (municipality administration). Of course, others are not as passionate about our job as we are, and the deficiency in this regard is not our fault. Well, those who pay attention to us, don't laugh when you see a fraction of this newspaper, it's not an issue to laugh. We simply understand by all this that our Muslims have no one to publish a single newspaper."(3)

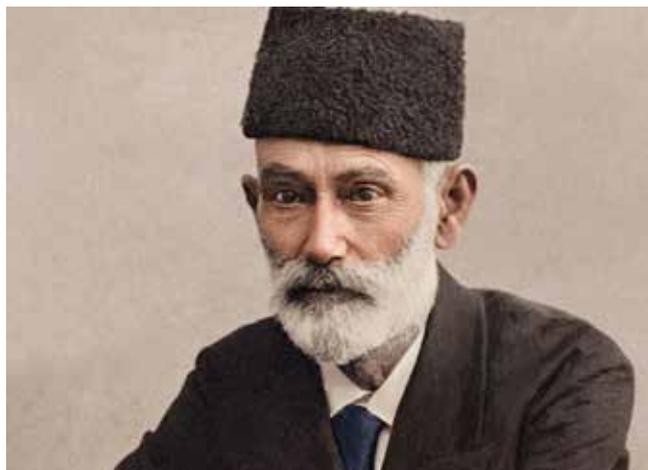
The wife of Zardabi, Hanifa Abayeva writes that since graduation from the Moscow University in 1865 and till his death in 1907, Həsən Bəy was shaping his life and making career choices according to inner passionate dictate, which derived from his: "visionary love and self-sacrificing convictions versus his nation".

In Zardabi we recognise a continuator and developer of ideas of Mirza Fatali Akhundov. He believed that: "Education of women would give them an elementary general knowledge and would cure Islamic inner life from deep social disease, the reason of which is indeed the way women have been enduring their lives since ages. Women are secluded and stuck in a lack of physi-

cal and intellectual motion. The lack of freedom of guiding themselves and undertaking activities makes them effete and impoverished [...] Those deficiencies are passed by mothers not only to their daughters, but to their sons as well."(4)

**Yet Zardabi:**

"Woman is the first teacher and educator of the young generation. Father and mother bear the responsibility

*Hasan bey Zardabi (Melikov)*

Newspaper "Ekinchi": 1875



for the child's preschool education. Significantly, the school is unable to educate the unprepared child. Despite this fact, an educated mother can conduct a process of education of her child with great success and instill in him/her the love for school and books.(5)

Zardabi was also stating the importance of urgent change in the habit of early age marriages within the context of women's bodies and their health. He would explain fatal results early marriages are bringing to any minor girl, writing: "The lifespan of the uterus would be long enough in the kəbin (religious marriage contract), if only it begins after the age of 20. But if married women are younger than 20 years, it shortens their lives."

Zardabi was also condemning the state of dependence that infused deeply into psychology of contemporary society, evaluating customs of excessively obedient and unhealthily submissive attitude among the population. He stated: "While considering freeing a slave as a deed praised by God, we have become slaves to each other, upon our own free will. Are the people not slaves to the Tsar, wife slave to husband, child to father, worker to boss, student to teacher and so on?"(6)

Hasan Bey Zardabi's words were also reflecting concerns of an intellectual while observing a situation of his nation: "At the same time, when educational establishments in Tiflis and neighboring cities were opening and the light of culture was spreading, the Eastern Transcaucasus was forgotten. The population, mainly Muslims, was considered backward, far from civilization. Enormous masses of Persian nationals were flooding the Transcaucasus daily, and they could not bring anything except for poverty and ignorance, shrouding those lands more and more, killing the weak rays of European civilization, which have reached here as if by mistake."(7)

Remarkably, despite Hasan Melikov Zardabi's passing away in 1907, his legacy had to face storms of political changes after the fall of the Russian Empire.

In this context, it remains barely known the fact of Zardabi's being buried three times and even his bones facing stalinist repressions. Həsən Bəy Zardabi passed away on November 28th 1907. His funeral was attended by large crowds. This was a situation of a kind that the city had never witnessed before. Citizens of all nationalities were gathering for the procession. In front of the modest house of Zardabi in the Baku Old Town, in front of the office of the "Kaspi" newspaper and in front of the City Duma numerous crowds concentrated and the passionate speeches were ongoing. Lately, the procession resembling a sea of people started connecting, the majority heading towards the Bibi Heybet cemetery. In front of the procession countless wreaths and garlands, while foremost framed and decorated with flowers, the first number of the "The Ploughman" newspaper was carried.

All classes of the society were present at this funeral. After hours, while the procession visited the most related to the activity of Zardabi places, it finally arrived at the Bibi Heybat mosque in the yard of which Zardabi was laid to rest. The place of his grave was considered the most frequented for the 30 following years.

Around the year 1936, rumors about the construction of the new Salyan highway, which was supposed to pass through the area of the historical Bibi Heybat mosque, spread in Baku. Towards that year, the members of the Zardabi family were already subdued to repressions, so much that there was not a single male (baş papaqlı) member of the family alive. Hasan Melikov fathered 6 children with Hanifa Abayeva. Two girls died in infancy. Eldest daughter Peri Xanım Melikova born

*Qaribsołtan Melikova*

in 1873 was living in exile in Paris. Eldest son Midhad Bey Melikov born in 1879 was under arrest, he was executed in 1937. Another son Saffet Bey Melikov was by then living in exile in Turkiye. Solely Qaribsołtan Xanım Melikova was then residing in Baku.

Tahir Aydınoglu, referring to the memoirs of his professor at the Faculty of journalism of the Baku State University Abbas Zamanov, presents a detailed narrative. Voices in the city were unofficially instructing the citizens to exhume the remains of their relatives before the construction works would begin. Qaribsołtan Melikova found two individuals to perform the task of digging the grave in the yard of the Bibi Heybat mosque. The bones of Həsən Bəy were recovered and placed in a wooden box, then carried on their shoulders to the district of Bayil. From Bayil, workers placed the box on the railroad in the direction of the mining fields. This time, no grave stone, no name, and no indication were reserved for the remains of Zardabi. It is unclear whether the remains were immediately placed to rest or preserved by Qaribsołtan for some time.

Upon post-Stalinist defrost professor Abbas Zamanov came forward with an initiative of commemoration of Zardabi. As the date of birth of Hasan Melikov was not clear by then, it was decided to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the passing away of Zardabi in 1957. The plan was warmly welcomed by the Communist Party Central Committee leader Shihali Qurbanov. The detailed plan of celebrations involved establishment of a commission and various events. At the final stage of approvals, the lack of one significant point of the framework was acknowledged. Works dedicated to the restoration of the grave of Zardabi were missing from the plan. Acknowledgment of this fact created a stir.

Distant relatives of Zardabi were questioned. None was able to say anything. The ultimate information obtained by Abbas Zamanov was that already in 1937 at the place of Zardabi's grave "radishes were planted". Relatives came to the conclusion that the only person who might know something is the daughter of Zardabi, Qaribsołtan. Zamanov mentions that he went to visit Qaribsołtan Melikova accompanied by Mireli Axundov and Ziyəddin Göyüşov. The daughter of Zardabi was a woman worn out psychologically by bitter experiences of repressions on her family, so when she heard the matter of "the grave" her reaction was rather agitated.

Zamanov recalls that she started throwing into them anything that she could find at that moment under her hand, lamenting at the same time: "Was this not enough



that anything related to my father has been destroyed, now you dare to come to ask for his bones. Leave and never dare to step again into this house."

Difficult days began, as all involved in the matter understood that Qaribsołtan Melikova would not speak out. She did not have children. Finally, Rauf Hajiyev (1922-1995) one of the prominent musicians of Azerbaijan, the child of her relative of whom Qaribsołtan took care during his younger years, was persuaded to ask her about the place. He learned that, remarkably, a hundred years after his birth, in 1937 the remains of Azerbaijani great enlightener were buried at the city cemetery somewhere next to the grave of Hanifa Abayeva Melikova.

Thereupon, Zamanov heads to the indicated place, together with a group of journalism and philology students. Students dig all the area surrounding the grave of Hanifa Xanım, but find nothing. Ultimately, at the lower corner just under her grave the shovel hits something. When the top of the wooden box is revealed, all eyes are brightened with hope, holding their breath while awaiting the box being lifted up.<sup>(8)</sup> The remains of Hasan Bey are finally discovered.

50 years after the funeral and 20 years after the exhumation, the remains of Həsən Bəy Zardabi were put

Funeral of H. Zardabi, Baku, 1907



to rest in the year 1957, at the Baku Memorial Complex Fəxri xiyaban.

Hasan Melikov was a genial visionary patriot thanks to whom Azerbaijani historiography enjoys important pioneering achievements, among those already mentioned above there is also his being the first Muslim teacher in Baku city; first charity society for education of the poor established in 1872; the first attempt to open a secular school for Muslim girls already in 1896; the first wife (Hanifa Abayeva Melikova) that have chosen not to use chadra in Baku at the end of the XIX century; the first staged theatre performance "Haji Kara" by Akhundov in 1873; all those innovations were actually promoted and organised by Hasan Melikov Zardabi.

As yet, another least known historical fact is that thanks to the visionary figure of Hasan Melikov and his legacy, we are dealing with the important influence of Azerbaijani journalism on the development of the Russian Muslim press as a whole. Thus, when Ismail Gasprinsky (1851-1914), the well-known Crimean publisher, editor of the newspaper "Terciman" (1883-1914) widely considered as the father of Muslim journalism in post Russian Empire geography, was actually at the very beginning of his activities, he asked Hasan Melikov Zardabi for recommendations and blessings regarding newspaper publishing. Zardabi's guidance and suggestions primarily through letters had a great impact on ideological and technical aspects, shaping the background and strategies of Gasprinsky in such fields as the usage of language and handling geographical particularities of Russian Muslims. Zardabi

was also influential on Gasprinsky's obtaining financial support from Azerbaijan for his newspaper editorial activities in Crimea. Precisely, newly revealed archival documents prove that Azerbaijani Tycoon Haci Zeynal Abidin Tagiyev made multiple donations already in the ultimate decades of the XIX century to Gasprinsky's newspaper.(1; 9) 🌟

#### Literature:

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