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THE RISE OF RED ORIENTALISM AND THE FALL OF THE RED ORIENTALISTS

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Abstract: *Following the Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks refashioned the study of the Orient according to the Marxist teleological paradigm of social and political development. A new school engaged in studying the socio-political setting of the East took shape as an alternative to classical, manuscript- and archeology-based Orientalism. This Red Orientalism was infused with idealism, often tendentious, and unabashedly tied to the Soviet government and particularly the Comintern, but by founding universities and research institutions such as the Moscow (Narimanov) Institute of Oriental Studies, Institute of “Red Professorship,” and Communist University of Toilers of the East (KUTV) with curriculums that included social sciences as well as modern languages, this new school of thought broke new ground by expanding the study of the East beyond the frontiers of established academic traditions and institutions. Red Orientalism, like the communist project of which it was a part, viewed itself as an agent of facilitated self-empowerment and encouraged Eastern individuals to participate, offering free education in the Soviet Union. The present article examines the birth and initial phase (up until the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s) of this radically different Soviet form of scholarship, particularly through the lives and careers of two Iranian Comintern activists, Avetis Sultanzadeh and Abulqasim Zarreh, who in their work at KUTV and the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow contributed to the crafting of a new understanding of Iran’s past and present that influenced Soviet policy toward Iran.*

Keywords: Orientalism, Oriental Studies, Comintern, Iran, Iranian Communist Party, Sultanzade, KUTV.

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All schools of thought are the product of their time and place, but Red Orientalism is even more so, being almost indistinguishable from the political and ideological environment in which it appeared. Edward Said’s description of Western Orientalism as “a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power” [Said, 1994, p. 12.] has little to do with Red Orientalism, which was openly in a “corresponding relationship with political power in the raw.” If the political agenda shared with that power was at times disfiguring, it also generated innovations and correctives to traditional Orientalism.

The Soviet Union came into being at the end of the final crest of the Colonial Epoch, and much of the Bolsheviks’ programme was a reaction to colonialism, both Western and Russian. The vast territories of the Russian Empire comprised a challenging ethnic and religious quilt ripe for social re-invention. In a series of essays in 1913–1914, [Ленин, 1973(1–3)] Lenin set out a vision of absolute equality for ethnic and cultural groups that extended far beyond non-discriminatory policies and the right to education and legal dealings in minority languages: all ethnicities and peoples, he argued, had the right not only to autonomous rule within a federated state but to secede from the state. These principles were reiterated in one of the first documents issued by the new Soviet authorities just days after the October Revolution: “The Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia,” [Декларация прав народов России, 1957, с. 19–20] bearing the signatures of Lenin and Stalin, and later enshrined in the Soviet constitution.

THE BOLSHEVIKS RE-ENGAGE AND RE-ENVISION THE EAST

Internal contradictions and the exigencies of governance and war – the protracted Russian Civil War and later the approach of World War Two – would temper and in some cases blunt these ideals, which showed cracks early on. In September of 1920, Grigori Zinoviev was addressing the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in his capacity as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Comintern. As he called for the right of peoples to self-determination and for a *jihad* in West and East Asia against British imperialism, the real contradictions of revolution and self-determination were playing out half a continent away in Central Asia, where the Red Army, in concert with the “Young Bukharian” modernising revolutionaries, was opening the breach in the fortress city of Bukhara, ejecting its absolute ruler, Emir Said Mir Mohammed Alim Khan, who fled “headlong across the Oxus to Afghanistan, dropping favourite dancing boy after favourite dancing boy in his flight” [Maclean, 1991, p. 149], but also bringing to an end the emirate’s short-lived independence and Tsarist-era semi-protectorate status. The storming of the city caused great damage, but the emir had barely been put to flight when Orientalist Vasily Bartol’d set off on an expedition to Bukhara to review its architectural monuments and implement measures for their preservation [*Становление советского востоковедения*, 1983, p. 109–110]. *Bukhara-ye sharif* (Noble Bukhara) was already being put under glass.

If in the early days of the revolution, the Bolsheviks’ main mission was to cement their precipitate victory by exporting the revolution beyond the urban centres of St. Petersburg and Moscow and throughout the remainder of Russia and the former empire, which required first and foremost agitators and soldiers; soon the goal was to sustain governance and rebuild. The need for agitators gave way to the need for regional experts. There were also the more mundane matters of delineating administrative boundaries, building diplomatic infrastructure, and establishing trade, cultural and other ties. To better understand the Soviet East as well as neighbouring Eastern countries, the Bolsheviks launched new training institutes and “refitted” Orientalist academic institutions held over from the Tsarist regime.

Moscow quickly usurped the former capital St. Petersburg’s role as the center for Oriental studies in the country. The Comintern, the international body governing non-Soviet Communist parties, was located in the new capital and additionally functioned as an Orientalist think tank. The idea of founding an Oriental studies institute in Moscow was expressed in a letter by the writer Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) to Lenin, [*Новый Восток*, 1922, с. 458] who responded by forwarding the letter, with his own signed resolution attached, to the People’s Commissariat of Ethnic Policy, calling on them to begin work on opening such an institute. Thus a Central Institute for Living Eastern Languages was created in Moscow on the foundation of pre-existing Orientalist institutions in Leningrad. When it quickly became clear that knowledge of Eastern languages would not be enough, the institute altered its curriculum to include a range of special disciplines: law, pedagogy and economics. In 1921, a decision was made “on the merging of all Moscow Orientalist educational institutions into one institute for higher education” which would be the Narimanov Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies¹. Moscow’s century-old Lazarev Institute (founded in 1815 by a wealthy Armenian family descended from immigrants from outside of Isfahan, Iran – their original surname was Lazaryan) and the newly formed Central Institute for Living Eastern Languages merged to become the influential Moscow Institute for Oriental Studies².

¹ Московский Институт Востоковедения (МИВ), sometimes also known as Институт Востоковедения имени Н. Н. Нариманова.

² 1921 also saw the founding of the All Russian Scholarly Association of Orientalists (Всероссийская научная ассоциация востоковедения (ВНАВ)), and The Institute of the Red Professoriate (Институт красной профессуры), where Iranian Orientalists Sultanzadeh, Zarre and Hesabi would teach. On February 11 of that year, the Council of People’s Commissars of the Russian Socialist Republic issued a directive “On the founding of Institutes for preparing a

But it was also critical for the young Soviet state to get Orientals themselves to understand the Socialist project. This meant bringing the ideas to them, which, at least within the new empire, could be done immediately. The Bolsheviks viewed the establishment of an educational and specifically an Oriental studies infrastructure in Central Asia as so urgent that a slew of educational institutions were set up in Tashkent while fighting still raged against both British and local forces to integrate the region into the new order. A Soviet history states that the dire situation required “a sincere Leninist belief in the inevitability of victory” [*Востоковедные центры в СССР*, 1988, с. 7]. In November 1918 in Tashkent, the Bolsheviks opened the Turkestan Orientalist Institute, which in 1920 became what was considered the first institution of higher learning in Central Asia. Enrolment was free and open to everyone, including women, and the institute was to be funded by proceeds from cotton farming. The same year, the renowned Russian Orientalist Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Semyonov arrived in Tashkent carrying with him “professors, equipment, books, etc.” for the institute [Литвинский, Акрамов, 1971, с. 67–76], but by the mid 1920s, “lithograph and glass-plate” copies of texts in “Eastern languages” were being made available to students. [*Востоковедные центры в СССР*, 1988, с. 6] The systemic and institutionalized study of Central Asia and the “East” was launched within Central Asia well before the area was fully pacified³.

As early as 1922, the new Soviet Orientalism in Tashkent was producing works aiming at new understandings of the region’s past and present, such as Semyonov’s “A Sketch of the Bukharan Central Government in the Time of the Emirs” or Usatenko-Chervonny’s “The English-Afghan Treaty of 1921.” [*Становление советского востоковедения*, 1983, с. 117]. But as historical revisionists, de-maskers of previous colonial policies who had indeed cancelled concessions and treaties considered unfair to Oriental countries, the Soviets were also the new conquerors of Central Asia and the Caucasus and thus faced with their own Orientalist dilemma: how to justify the imposition of their system while simultaneously condemning Western imperialism.

In the case of Central Asia, Soviet histories of Oriental studies paint the region – with some justification – as something of a blank slate in terms of secular, scholarly study of the East: “...if in Moscow, Petrograd, Kazan and other cities of the central regions of Russia, the years immediately following the Revolution were a time for restructuring a long-established system of Eastern studies, in Tashkent and all of Central Asia these years basically marked the initial formation of research on the East. Indeed, up until the October Revolution, Central Asia did not have a single institution specializing in the study of the East nor even a single secular institution of higher education.” [*Становление советского востоковедения*, 1983, с. 85]. The Tsarist Russian contribution to building Orientalism centers in Central Asia was judged either amateurish or limited to a handful of competent specialists.

Red Professoriate: 1. To found in Moscow and Petrograd Institutes for preparing a red professoriate for teaching at higher schools of the Republic theoretical economics, historical materialism, the development of social forms, contemporary history and Soviet building 2. To gather a staff of 200 in the Moscow and 100 in the Petrograd Institute....” Because not enough staff could be found Petrograd, only the Moscow institute was actually opened. From 1924–1928, the institute produced 194 graduates. It was housed in the Strastnoi Convent in the center of Moscow, which also served as a dormitory for KUTV students and some remaining monks. The decree can be found in the periodical [*Исторический архив*, 1958, № 6, с. 86].

³ For the Orientalists who could make the transition, Soviet power would see their profession better funded and a higher priority. From 1902 onwards, Tsarist Russian Orientalists such as Sergei Fyodorovich Ol’denburg (1863–1934), Vasily Vladimirovich Bartol’d (1869–1930) and others had repeatedly advocated establishing an institute of Oriental studies in Tashkent, but it was the Soviets who funded and built it. Not all could make this transition, however: Russian Central Asia ethnographer and linguist Vladimir Petrovich Nalivkin (1852–1918), who had initially supported revolutionary reform, became disillusioned with the extremist methods of the Bolsheviks and committed suicide in Tashkent in 1918, writing “I can neither agree with what is being done, nor do I wish to become an enemy of the people; thus I leave this life.” [*Лунин*, 1993, с. 219–220]

Soviet Orientalism, even though imposed from outside, nonetheless viewed and wrote about itself as re-connecting the peoples of Central Asia with their own culture and past, as a catalyst releasing the positive urges and energies held in check by previous regimes: "...the first post-October [post-revolutionary] years witnessed a fast growth in the ethnic self-consciousness of the peoples of Central Asia and their interest in their own past and present, which was noted by the organs of Soviet power in Turkestan." [*Становление советского востоковедения*, 1983, с. 90].

Almost 800 manuscripts and documents had been collected in Bukhara the year following the emir's ouster, including scrolls in "the Tajik language" walled into a cellar of the Ark [ibid., с. 109–110]. In the spring of 1921, a committee on museums and the preservation of architectural monuments in Turkestan was created.

The Caucasus saw a similar flurry of Orientalist institution building. Soviet power was established in Azerbaijan in 1920, and in 1922 an Orientalist department was opened in the State University of Azerbaijan. Tbilisi State University had existed since 1918, prior to the Bolshevik invasion in 1921. Under the Soviets, in 1936, an Orientalist school, including the study of Eastern languages, was created within the Institute for Language, History and Material Culture; and in 1938, a sub-department of Iranian Linguistics was created within the University of Tbilisi.

But back in the new Soviet capital in the early 1920s, the Soviets were finding that the infrastructure for training anything but locally effective teams was woefully insufficient, largely because instruction was conducted solely in the Russian language and catered to Russian and European cultures and histories.

Thus on January 21, 1921, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party decided to organize what it called "Eastern courses" at the Peoples' Commissariat for Ethnic Affairs. [*Директивы и декреты...*, 1921, с. 194]. But within weeks, this measure was also deemed insufficiently ambitious, and on February 10, a new resolution was passed to create the Communist University of the Toilers of the East – KUTV⁴, which became the smithy for political activists, propagandists and organizers of revolution in the East. The Soviet People's Commissariat in a decree ratified that in order to support the inauguration of the new university, "some 50–70 better-qualified foreign communists to be recruited for setting up 2–6 months training courses at the *Sverdlovka* school in Moscow for the teaching staff." [*Жизнь национальностей*, 1921, № 31 (дек.), с. 7].

KUTV differed from other Orientalist institutes, such as the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow and the Orientalist Department of the Military Academy of the Red Army⁵. In KUTV the students from the Orient studied primarily in their native languages: Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, and Persian, among others. At the time of the Communist Revolution, of the 4 million foreigners residing in the territory of the former Tsarist Empire, there were around one million from China, Korea, Turkey, Mongolia, Iran and Afghanistan [Персиц, 1969, с. 56]. By the end of 1921, instruction at KUTV was being held in eleven different languages [*РГАСПИ*, ф. 1318, оп. 1, д. 657, л. 34].

The KUTV curriculum was designed to enable graduates to work as teachers upon returning home. In addition to the Russian language, there were other general subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, world history and geography. But the core curriculum was political economy, historical materialism and the history of the Russian Bolshevik Communist Party. Furthermore, it was mandatory to study the history of the East, "The Colonial and Ethnic Question," and of each student's home country in particular. Early syllabi included the contemporary history of Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, with more countries added to the curriculum in later years [Гордлевский, 1968, с. 338; *РГАСПИ*, ф. 2313, оп. 4, д. 82, л. 30, 34; д. 4, л. 6].

⁴ КУТВ – Коммунистический университет трудящихся Востока.

⁵ Военная Академия РККА (Рабоче-крестьянской Красной Армии) им. Фрунзе.

Soon KUTV branches opened in other cities of the USSR. A Baku branch served Persians, Azeris and Turks living in that city; in Irkutsk, a branch was opened for Far Eastern students (including Koreans); in Sterlitamak, for Bashkirians; in Petrozavodsk, for Karelians; in Krasnokokshaisk, for Maris; and in Tashkent, the largest branch was founded: it could accommodate 140 Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Uzbek and other students, with a separate school for another 140 female students and several provincial schools in the region. [*Шесть лет национальной политики...*, 1924, с. 162; *Жизнь национальностей*, 1922, № 6–7, с. 18; 1924, № 13, с. 11].

In Moscow, the Iranian group, with some 15–20 students on average, was a strong presence among the KUTV students from the early days of its foundation [Avanesiyan, 1968, p. 96]. Even in the first years, two to three female students studied at KUTV annually. The overall number of Iranian students reached a hundred in the years followed, [Avanesiyan, 1968, p. 103] some enrolling directly from Iran. However, there were also a large number of students who joined KUTV from different regions of the southern part of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Since the late 19th century, the flourishing economy of the Tsarist Empire had attracted large numbers of Iranian merchants and labourers. On the eve of the 1917 Revolution, hundreds of thousands of Iranians had settled throughout the empire.

KUTV had advanced to the point that, by the mid 1920s, many of the competent graduates were going on to work in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or the Comintern. Senior students, together with the staff of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies and the Oriental Studies Department of the Military Academy, actively participated in All-Russian Orientalist Association sessions, delivering papers on a wide variety of topics. In autumn of 1925, KUTV students and teachers proposed creating a research institute within the university [Локровский, 1926, с. 3]. In late 1926–early 1927, the Academic Research Association – NIA⁶ was organized at KUTV. [*Революционный Восток*, 1929, с. 364] In addition to functioning as an important Eastern studies research centre, it offered graduate programs and published its own periodical, called the *Revolutionary East*, [*Революционный Восток*, 1927–1937], which by the late 1920s had become one of the most important publications in Soviet Eastern studies. From 1927, the Academic Research Association offered a graduate program, [*Сталинец*, 1929, № 13, с. 7] whose strength lay in providing a strong background in Marxist-Leninist theory with rigorous knowledge of a particular region.

In late 1929, NIA became the Academic Institute for the Study of Ethnic and Colonial Issues (NIA NKP),⁷ which existed outside the regular system of Soviet institutions and became the umbrella organization for KUTV, [*Сталинец*, 1930, № 8, с. 340] which now accepted only the best and brightest students, a far cry from its initial, poorly prepared enrollees. By the mid-1930s, NIA NKP had several departments, including one for Iranian studies. [*Сталинец*, 1934, № 23, с. 126; *Революционный Восток*, 1936, № 4–5, с. 100] According to Semyon Agaev (1935–1997), a renowned Soviet expert on contemporary Iran, in the early 1920s.

The paucity of reference materials made the challenges of scholarship facing young specialists on Iran radically more difficult. Thus it was only natural that the early works by Soviet authors had the character of popular sketches and descriptive pieces that could stimulate the reader to consider the fundamental issues in contemporary Iran. [Агаев, 1977, с. 8]

By the late 1920s, the level of scholarship had developed immensely, thanks to the hard-fought creation of reference materials and statistical data on the contemporary East. All the leading orientalists of the country were involved in some way in NIA NKP, which published books, anthologies, and reference works, as well as textbooks, grammars and dictionaries. [Гордлевский, 1968, с. 338]

⁶ Научно-Исследовательская Ассоциация (НИА).

⁷ Научно-исследовательская ассоциация по изучению национально-колониальных проблем (НИА НКП).

In 1937, with the Stalinist purges already underway across the country, a bureaucratic restructuring occurred that signaled the beginning of the end for KUTV. The university was divided into two independent organizations: one retained the name KUTV, but now only the students with Soviet citizenship remained there; the foreign students were transferred from KUTV to the Academic Research Institute of Ethnic and Colonial Problems (NII NKP)⁸, a new embodiment of the NIA NKP.

In January and February of 1938, the purges reached the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, where staff from different departments and specialties were arrested in the dead of night, charged with espionage and in most cases executed by firing squad on the day of sentencing, usually only several months following the arrest. These included Avetis Sultanzadeh and Abulqasim Zarre, whose careers are examined in more detail below, alongside other prominent figures in Iranian studies, such as Iranian-born Hassan Abdul Qasim Ashuri, Rudolph Abikh (1901–1940)⁹, of German heritage, and Russian scholar of Iran Konstantin Chaikin (1889–1938)¹⁰. Because the arrested scholars from the Institute of Oriental Studies were essentially also the teaching staff at KUTV, the university no longer had any personnel and soon KUTV was also closed, officially as part of the continuing restructuring of the educational system for future party functionaries. The Central Committee and the Comintern closed the NII NKP. This was done despite the fact that KUTV and NIA NKP enjoyed great prestige for being in the vanguard of re-inventing Oriental studies.

But KUTV had not been without blemish in the eyes of the Comintern and others. In 1929, some Iranian students had threatened to defect to Iranian government forces if they were not guaranteed better jobs after graduation [*ПРАВИЛ*, ф. 495, оп. 90, д. 180, л. 42] and a resulting inspection concluded that some were not studying Marxist-Leninist theory or science or but “exchanging various harem tales” [*ПРАВИЛ*, ф. 495, оп. 90, д. 180, л. 7]. This also reflected poorly on Sultanzadeh, who was at that time head of the Iranian Communist Party (CPI); and in turn, Sultanzade’s often uncompromising stances may have reflected badly on KUTV. In the mass irrationality of the repressions, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not these factors played a role in the school’s closure or Sultanzade’s downfall.

Many KUTV graduates were similarly sentenced and executed. Among those from Iran were Ladbon-Nuri (Ibrahimzade) (1901–1938), Hassan Abduhassan Ashuri (1902–1938)¹¹, Kamran Rizaev (1904–1938)¹², Hesabi (Dehzad), Abdul Hossein Rizaev (1895–1938)¹³. Some escaped the firing squad only to die from conditions of the camps: Nikbin Kerim Abbas (Hasanov – Zardusht) (b. 1893)¹⁴ was sentenced to eight years imprisonment but died in the northeastern ITL (Correctional Labor Camp)¹⁵ in 1940; while Hassan Hassanov (b. 1902)¹⁶ died in a village in the Krasnoyarsk Region in 1949 after the being released from the camps.

⁸ Научно-исследовательский Институт Национальных и Колониальных проблем (НИИ НКП).

⁹ Abikh was born into a Russified German family living in Baku and participated in the Gilan Revolution. Later he studied at the Military Academy in Moscow and worked on several books about Gilan and the poet Khlebnikov’s (1885–1922) connection with that country. Abikh found himself in trouble with Party authorities on more than one occasion, among other things for having supported the Trotskyist opposition in the 1920s.

¹⁰ Chaikin held a doctorate and was an accomplished scholar of literature and languages, having initially worked as a translator in the Soviet diplomatic corps in Azerbaijan and Persia. He published translations of Runi, Jami, Khakani and Nizami as well as of the Georgian poet Rustaveli.

¹¹ Ashuri was a Persian language instructor at the Institute of Oriental Studies. He was not a party member.

¹² Rizaev was a member of the Communist Party of the USSR and the CPI. Prior to KUTV, he had only an elementary school education. Worked as an inspector at the Gogol District Zhilsoyuz (Residents’ Union).

¹³ Hesabi was a former member of CPI, and from 1928 a member of the Communist Party of the USSR. He held a graduate degree and worked as an office manager at the headquarters of *Techperiodiki* [Technical Periodicals].

¹⁴ Nikbin was serving on the Radio Committee in Baku at the time of his arrest in 1938. He had engaged in undercover work for the Party in Iran on and off for several years, as well as working for Soviet organizations in Turkestan. Around 1930, Nikbin clashed with the Iranian Party leadership and was demoted. In addition to KUTV, Nikbin also studied at the Moscow Commercial Institute and then at the International Lenin School in the 1920s.

¹⁵ Исправительно-трудовой лагерь (ИТЛ).

Of the primary institutions driving the new Red Orientalism, only the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies continued to exist, if merely as an almost empty shell for the time being. The purges decimated the entire Soviet Academy of Sciences and related institutes including museums, felling scholars and students of all nationalities, resulting in a deficit of professionals that was subsequently filled mostly by amateurs from the working classes, untrained in serious scholarship. [ГАРФ, ф. 2301, оп. 17, д. 46, л. 1–2].

A NEW BREED OF SCHOLARS: ORIENTAL ORIENTALISTS

Sultanzadeh

Among the teachers at KUTV were Iranian-born scholars who contributed significantly to reshaping Soviet Orientalism. In Iranian studies, the most prominent were Sultanzadeh and Zarreh. While both were active members of the CPI and functionaries at different departments of the Soviet administration for long period of time they were among the first scholars who shaped the new Iranian studies in post-Revolutionary Russia.

Born in Maragheh, a city in the northwest Iran in 1889, Avetis Sultanzadeh, according to a short autobiography compiled in 1935 when he was awarded his doctorate degree, left Iran for the Caucasus when he was sixteen years old¹⁷. Following five years of study at the Yerevan Seminary, in 1911, he left for Moscow to study at the Moscow Commercial Institute, graduating in 1917 with a degree in economics. Later that year, Sultanzadeh was in Petrograd helping to prepare for the All-Russian Congress of Workers and Clerks in Insurance and Transportation Enterprises, when, as he puts it in his autobiography: “The October Revolution found me.” Soon he rushed to Moscow to participate in the continuing fighting there, serving in the Red Guard and then on several committees hastily set up by the Bolsheviks: he became chairman of the local trade union committee, a member of the administration of the Union of City Workers and Clerks, and chairman of the City District Committee. In 1919, Sultanzadeh founded the Financial-Economics Institute and served as its first rector. Soon, however, the revolution again intervened, and Sultanzadeh departed for Central Asia to join Military Commissar Frunze in assisting the revolutionary movement in the region. In June of 1920, he participated in the first Congress of the CPI, where he was elected a member of the Central Committee and then dispatched to Moscow to represent the CPI at the Second Congress of the Comintern. While continuing his precarious political career, serving as a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern and at a number of other posts, [ГАРФ, Фонд 7668, опись 2, дело 2882, л. 3]¹⁸ as well as traveling abroad, he pursued academic work, giving guest lectures at KUTV on the political economy and history of Iran and advising students. In 1933 he began teaching full time at the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies.

Sultanzadeh was the pioneering figure in revisiting Iran’s long history through the prism of Marxist historical materialism, productive force and means of production. He divided the long and complex process of socioeconomic change in Iran according to distinctive modes of production characteristic of different epochs of Iranian history: the primitive commune, feudalism,

¹⁶ Tasked in the late 1920s with running a business in Iran as a front for funding the Iranian Communist Party and later accused of using the profits himself, Hassanov had been expelled from the Iranian Communist Party in 1931, reinstated a Sultanzade’s request, and then expelled from the Communist Party of the USSR in 1935.

¹⁷ Sultanzade’s case file at the Archive of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR includes a short autobiography written in 1935. [ГАРФ, ф. 7668, оп. 2, д. 2882, Committee Overseeing Scholarly and Educational Institutions, Qualifications Commission]

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 3. From 1923 to 1927, I was engaged in agricultural work, served as chairman of the Electro-exploitation Trust, chairman of Moskomvnutorg [Moscow Committee of Internal Trade], a member of the management of Gorbank [City Bank], etc.

After the eleventh Congress of the Iranian Communist Party, I was again elected as a member of the Central Committee and chairman of the Party in the Comintern.

Since 1932, I have been a member of the Presidium of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic] and head of the residential communal sector....”

capitalism and socialism. While recognising the persistence of the first modes of production in contemporary Iran, i.e. primitive communes and feudalism, Sultanzadeh argued that following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the division of the world into socialist and capitalist camps, Iranian society could avoid passing through the advance mode of capitalism and move on to socialism directly [Султан-Заде, 1931, с. 99–100].

The results of more than ten years (1920–1931) of Sultanzadeh's contribution to shaping Soviet oriental studies can be classified into two categories 1) general economic studies of the Orient and 2) the political development of Iran, chiefly during the twentieth century. In 1920, Sultanzadeh's first book, *Economic Policies of Financial Capital*, was published in Moscow¹⁹. In this book he presented his theoretical analysis of imperialism as a political form of financial capital along with a study of the competition between the imperialist powers of the day to monopolise international markets [Chaqueri, 1984(1), p. 219]. A year later, in 1921 while still a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, his second book, *World Crisis and the New Threat of War*, was published by the Comintern²⁰. In this book, by studying the economies of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, Sultanzadeh once more examined the rivalries between the "imperialist powers" while forecasting the outbreak of another world war:

In the East, Turkish nationalists refuse to sign the Treaty of Sèvres, and the allies cannot manage to share Asia Minor; in Syria, Mesopotamia, Iran and India, insurrectionist movements are growing in numbers without any end in sight" [Chaqueri, 1984(1), p. 220].

Both of these books were listed among the literature recommended by the Comintern for the revolutionary communist curriculum in the Soviet Union.

But Sultanzade's most important scholarly works would concern his native Iran. It was at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 that Lenin suggested to Sultanzadeh that he focus on the East. Interestingly, Sultanzade's presentation there was not consistent with Lenin's thesis, officially adopted by the Congress, that the Communists should work with bourgeoisie-democratic movements²¹. "Such a tactic in Iran," Sultanzadeh claimed, "will only push the masses into the embrace of the counter-revolutionaries." He argued that Iran was ready for full-scale revolution. [Ленин, 1970, с. 457] For his part, Lenin jotted down on his copy of Sultanzade's speech that "Both Soviet organizations and the Communist Party (its membership and specific goals) must be adapted to the conditions of the peasantry in the countries of the colonized East" [ibid.].

Whether as a result of the encounter with Lenin or changing circumstances in Iran, Sultanzadeh's views soon began to shift. In 1922, he published two books on the East, *Economics and the Problem of National Revolution*,²² and his first book on Iran, *Contemporary Persia* [Султан-Заде, 1922]. In the preface to the second, Sultanzadeh declares the aim of his work to be the compilation of an introductory guide to understanding the contemporary politics and economy of Iran with special attention to the agrarian question. He refers to his travels and fieldwork in Iran from September through December of 1921, during which he conducted exhaustive interviews with peasants in various parts of the country and studied documents and records, largely from the Persian Ministry of Finance. These two books present, although in an abridged form, the most detailed information about the political as well as economic conditions in Iran since the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1909. Finally, in his assessment of the contemporary politics in Iran, Sultanzadeh welcomes the coup d'état of February 1921 that paved the way for the gradual rise to power of the Cossack brigadier Reza Khan, later Reza Shah Pahlavi, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. According to Sultanzadeh, "only through such a surgical operation or national revolution is it possible to lead the country toward political progress and

¹⁹ [Микаелян А. (Султан-Заде), 1920]

²⁰ [Султан-Заде, 1921]

²¹ A detailed account of the diverging opinions of Lenin and Sultanzadeh at the Congress can be found in [Араев, 1977, с. 30–31].

²² [Султан-Заде. Экономика и проблема национальной революции. М.: 1922]

economic development” [Chaqueri, n.d., p. 96]. Sultanzadeh was not the only observer in the Soviet establishment, and Comintern in particular, who welcomed Reza Shah’s rise to power; but as we shall see, it was this event, the coup d’état of February 1921 and its aftermath, that clove Soviet Iranian studies in the 1920s and 1930s into two opposing camps.

In 1924, Sultanzadeh published the book *Persia* [Султан-Заде, 1924]. Here again he provided an encouraging assessment of Reza Khan’s attempts to consolidate power, such as the establishment of a republican form of the government in Iran. Sultanzadeh predicted that Iran would follow the same path of political development as neighbouring Turkey, where “a nationalist bourgeoisie, by leading change,” refashions the old establishment,²³ praising Lenin’s position at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 that such movements could be worked with – a position he had disputed at the time [Араев, 1977, c. 31]. Sultanzadeh’s stance on Reza Khan was indeed in harmony with the Comintern and general Soviet view on Iran and Turkey. For a variety of reasons, from fear of Balkanization and British intervention to safeguarding its national interests²⁴, Soviet policy in Iran and Turkey led it to avow that the simultaneous rise of Mustafa Kemal and enthronement of Reza Khan were triumphs in the surge of anti-imperialism unleashed by the Russian Revolution. The Comintern’s pro-Reza Khan stance was further consolidated in the years to follow. In 1924, a Comintern conference on Iran adopted a resolution praising Reza Khan as an anti-imperialist, democratic and nationalist champion of Iran’s sovereignty. He was applauded for protecting the country against imperialist domination. This was consistent with the assessment of the Soviet diplomatic mission in Tehran – consensus for a more accommodating policy towards Reza Khan was growing. Soon the Comintern called on the CPI and the Iranian labour activists to join the pro-Reza Khan circle in the country in order to facilitate his march to power. In early 1924, when Reza Khan launched a new manoeuvre to replace the constitutional monarchy in Iran with a formed republic, the CPI and its affiliated journalists joined the republican camp²⁵.

The new Comintern policy affected the Iranian diaspora in the Soviet Union, where a large community of Iranian labourers had lived for decades. Soviet authorities endeavoured to break any link between this community and their homeland. In 1924, when the new Constitution of the Soviet Union was introduced, all Iranians were called upon to abandon their Iranian nationality and accept Soviet citizenship. The CPI was called upon to “realize all of its revolutionary activities solely in Iran” and leave the task of working amongst the Iranians residing in the Caucasus to the Communist Party of Azerbaijan [Раванди-Фадая, 2014, c. 78]. Subsequently, all bureaus of the CPI were closed down and its properties handed over to the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the Central Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan called upon all Iranians working in these bureaus to leave the CPI and join the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

It seems Sultanzadeh’s stance on the political development in Iran in general and Reza Khan’s political record in particular altered when, in 1925, Reza Khan decided to leave aside all his other strategies, including the earlier republican scheme, and be crowned as the new king, Reza Shah Pahlavi. Sultanzadeh’s new position, however, was not welcomed by the Soviet authorities, including those Russian academics expert on Iran such as Iranski (Pastukhov)²⁶ or Irandust (Osetrov)²⁷ who simultaneously served as advisors to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was restructuring Soviet policy towards Iran.

²³ The latter is argued in [Chaqueri, 1984(2), p. 29]

²⁴ For Soviet support of Mustafa Kemal, see [Rustamova-Tohidi Solmaz, 2001, p. 100]

²⁵ For a study of the Reza Khan’s republican campaign see: [Atabaki, 2004].

²⁶ Gergei Konstantinovich Pastukhov (1887–1940). Known as Iranski, he studied Oriental languages and from 1918 until his arrest 1939 served at the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. During the period 1933–1935 he was the Soviet Ambassador in Iran. On his return to Moscow, he was appointed head of the Archive of the Eastern Department at the same Commissariat. Pastukhov was member of the Soviet Society for Oriental Studies and the editorial board of the renowned periodical “New East.” Pastukhov was arrested in 1939 and executed in April 1940.

²⁷ Vladimir Petrovich Osetrov (1893–1938). Known as Irandust, he studied law, and from 1918 until his arrest in 1938, served at the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. During the period 1920–1925 and 1928–1929, he worked

Reza Khan's accession to the throne persuaded the Comintern to reassess its earlier stance on Iran and declare the coronation of new king to be a project sponsored by "British imperialism" and a "significant impediment to the process of liberation for Iranians." Nevertheless, the Comintern was convinced that "the interests of British imperialism deeply contradict the national aspirations of unifying the Persian bourgeoisie" and that the compromise that emerged between Reza Shah and the British was "fragile" [ПГАСИИ, ф. 495, оп. 90, д. 128, л. 63–64]. Such a reconciliatory position even prompted the Comintern to call Reza Shah the embodiment of the "objective tendencies of the progressive (though weak) elements of the Persian community" and claim his dictatorship was aiming to "strengthen the movement for national liberation in the country" [ПГАСИИ, ф. 495, оп. 90, д. 128, л. 63–64]. The Comintern stance on Reza Shah, crafted by the Soviet immediate national interest, was strengthened when in 1927 after a year of complicated negotiations, finally a Persia-Soviet trade treaty was signed in Moscow. The Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the engineer of this treaty made every effort after the very turbulent period of negotiation not to jeopardise the final ratification of the treaty.

The signing of the trade treaty of 1927 with Iran persuaded Moscow that the two countries could enjoy coexistence with cordial, if not always warm, relations. This new mindset left no room at the podium of Soviet Iranian studies for Sultanzadeh and his radical anti-Reza Shah stance. Yet Sultanzadeh would not voluntarily quit the field: when the Comintern shifted to a more leftist stance following the failure of years of cooperative policy towards Chinese nationalists, the Kuomintang, in 1927²⁸, he published his last book, *Economic Development in Iran and British Imperialism* [Султан-Заде, 1930]. In this work, he revisits Reza Khan's February 1921 coup d'état and, contrary to his earlier assessment, reduces the coup to a British plot to isolate the Russian Revolution and prevent its shockwaves from penetrating Iran. Furthermore, he pointedly criticises Soviet Orientalists and Iran specialists for overlooking the true character of the Reza Shah's government as a British puppet regime.

It took some years, but the reaction of the other camp to Sultanzadeh's public denunciation, when it came, was unrestrained, paving the way for his isolation, arrest and final purge in 1938. Writing under the pseudonym of Ranjbar, G. C. Gelbras, an official in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Soviet trade representative in Iran, labelled Sultanzadeh an "anti-Leninist adventurer", a "leftist" and a "right-wing deviationist" in two successive articles published in the *Revolutionary East* [Революционный Восток, № 1, 1933, с. 54–73; № 2, 1933, с. 74–90; Chaqueri, 1984(1), с. 225–226]. In Stalin's Soviet Union, such accusations alone were potentially lethal, but there were also the scandals at KUTV and within the Iranian Communist Party under Sultanzadeh's leadership to bolster the case against him.

When the black cars came for Sultanzadeh on the night of January 17–18, 1938, he was at his dacha, or country cottage, on the outskirts of the city – one of the perks for a respected Party leader. The officers of the NKVD first woke up his neighbor because regulations required a witness to the search and arrest. Despite Sultanzadeh's many travels – Zaira remembers the gifts her father never failed to bring back for her from his travels abroad²⁹ – his personal belongings confiscated at the time of arrest were few: passport, Party and labor union identification, a Mauser pistol with bullets and a clip, a camera, some notebooks, correspondence, several books and other forms of identification. The arrest report notes "nothing special was found,"

at the Soviet Embassy in Iran. Osetrov was a teacher of the 19th and 20th century histories of Iran, Turkey and Far East in the Department of Oriental Studies at Moscow University. He was member of the Soviet Society for Oriental Studies. On the eve of his arrest in 1938, Osetrov headed the Second Office of the Eastern Department at the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. He was executed in August 1938 as an enemy of the Soviet people.

²⁸ For studying the Comintern policy towards Iran see [Atabaki, 2013, p. 298–323].

²⁹ From the interview by the authors with Zaira Korostilyova, daughter of Sultanzadeh, at her dacha near Moscow in September 2010.

indicating the officers did not consider the pistol unusual [ЦА ФСБ РФ, ф. 10291, т. 1, д. 16930. л. 1–2] Sultanzadeh was, after all, a high-ranking party member.

On June 16, 1938, after a trial of around 20 minutes, the judge of the Military Tribunal of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union ruled that the prosecution had established that the defendant was guilty: that he was an agent of the tsarist police from 1910 to 1917, engaged in provocateur work against the Russian Republic of the Soviet Union, and an agent of British intelligence. The sentence was confiscation of all property and HMP, or “highest measure of punishment”³⁰, as it was known at the time, carried out the very same day. The archives have yielded no information on any burial or cremation. Following the death of Stalin in 1953 and the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, in 1956 Sultanzadeh was cleared of the charges of treason and rehabilitated.

Zarreh

Like Sultanzadeh, Abulqasim Zarre began his career with hands-on revolutionary activities in his native Iran. But Zarreh would follow a more scholarly path, focusing on language and literature in addition to politics. Although he published mostly in his native Persian, Zarre spoke excellent Russian. He worked on Russian-Persian dictionaries, translated the works of Stalin and Marxist literature, wrote numerous articles and poems for the Iranian communist press, and attempted to rethink the history of Persian literature in terms of historical materialism in a Russian-language article examined below.

Zarre was born in 1900 in Iran. Following the completion of his higher education at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques in Tehran, he began a career as a teacher of Persian language and literature at the Aqdasiyyeh School in the same city. By the end of the First World War he had joined political circles in Tehran and published two newspapers, *Gol-e zard* (Yellow Rose) and *Enqelab-e Sorkh* (Red Revolution). When the Jangalis intensified their rebellious activities, Zarre left for Gilan take part in the movement, joining the Communist Party and in 1920–1921 serving as a member of the Revolutionary Committee and People’s Commissar of Industry in the Gilan Republic. In September 1920, he was a member of the Iranian delegation at the Congress of Peoples of the East in Baku. Following the fall of the Jangali rebellion, in 1922 Zarreh left for Moscow, joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and from 1922–1925 simultaneously studied and taught at KUTV, instructing students there in Persian language, history and geography. In 1923, he began teaching Persian at the Moscow Institute for Oriental Studies and in generally maintained a hectic teaching schedule throughout the early 1920s, also teaching Persian at the Military Academy (RKKA)³¹ the People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry (NKTP)³², People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (NKID)³³, and Industrial academy³⁴ [Люди и судьбы..., 2003, с. 177].

Zarre would later recall of his time at KUTV, where the experimental atmosphere encouraged students to form clubs and elect their own leaders:

I worked as editor of the wall-newspaper [internal newspapers hung on the walls of an organization] and a propagandist in my cell as well as a member of the Party-Trio [at KUTV three figures were elected as the leaders of each country group], while at the same time managing two clubs (the political and Persian group) [ГАРФ, ф. 5404, оп. 10, д. 9].

From 1931 onward, Zarre was the chief editor of all translations of Marxist-Leninist literature coming out of KUTV. In 1932, he became the Chair of the Persian-Afghan Department at KUTV; and from 1934 chaired the Persian-Afghan-Arab Department at the Moscow Institute

³⁰ ВМН: высшая мера наказания.

³¹ Военная Академия Рабоче-крестьянской Красной армии (РККА).

³² Народный комиссариат тяжелой промышленности (НКТП).

³³ Народный комиссариат иностранных дел (НКВД).

³⁴ Промакадемия.

for Oriental Studies. Parallel to this, he worked in the cryptographic department of the Joint State Political Directorate – OGPU³⁵ as a linguist and expert on Iran.

Zarre's introduction to a 1935 anthology of classical Persian literature in Russian translation, *An Overview of Iranian Literature*, reveals much about the spirit of Iranian studies in Moscow at the same. Zarre's text is not only an overview of the history of Persian literature but an ambitious call to reevaluate it using Marxist methodology, which he repeatedly emphasizes has yet to be applied seriously to the subject: "As a result of the hegemony of formalism and academicism, in Iranology we have no history of Persian literature; one must be built, beginning with the ABCs." The "collective efforts of all scholars of Iran" must be marshaled to accomplish this" [Зарре, 1935, с. 25–26].

Zarre challenges the standard periodization of Persian literature into Ancient (550–330 BCE), Middle (Pahlavi) and Modern (from the time Arabic script and literary models are introduced). These divisions, he argues, are wholly formalistic, ignoring the content and essence of literary production in favor of linguistic and orthographic markers. If, Zarre asks rhetorically, the change from the Pahlavi writing system to the Arabic one were sufficient reason to declare the appearance of a substantially new literature, then the Latinization of modern Persian³⁶ would undoubtedly also lead formalists to declare birth of a qualitatively different Persian literature, and "wise Iranologists" would no doubt register a new rubric: "Persian Literature Written in the Latin Alphabet."

In the case of the switch from the Pahlavi to the Arabic writing system, Zarre argues that continuity in substance trumps the changes in language and poetic form, pointing out that some poetic forms, such as the quatrain and hafif, carried over: The "simplicity of forms, clarity of language and absence of rhetorical flourishes in the strain of Islamic Persian poetry from the late 10th to the 11th centuries bear witness to its direct connection with Pahlavi literature and traditions." [Зарре, 1935, с. 25]. Moving forward in history, he charges Edward Browne with lumping all of "contemporary Persian literature" into a time frame of 1,100 years while ignoring the significant evolution and variety within that span.

The real paradigm shifts occur with changes in social-economic structure: the replacement of feudalism with capitalism, for example, which result in deeper changes in both literary substance and form, thus Zarre proposes a new periodization of the history of Persian literature:

1. Ancient Literature of Asian communities in the period of their social infancy.
2. Literature of the feudal period (from approximately the 2nd century BCE to the 19th century CE)
3. Literature from the period of the introduction of capitalist social relations in Iran and the appearance of the national liberation movements (from approximately the second half of the 19th century to the present).

Zarre breaks each of these periods into sub-periods as he deals with them in the body of the text. The longest, middle period, he divides thus:

1. Literature from the time of the appearance and consolidation of feudalism (from the 2nd century BCE to the 8th century CE)
 2. Literature from the era of feudalism (9th to 15th centuries CE)
 3. Literature from the era of feudal stagnation and decline (15th to 19th centuries CE)
- [Зарре, 1935, с. 24–26].

It is worth mentioning some other assessments Zarre extracts from his materialist approach to the history of Persian literature, which he narrates as a millennia-long process of the awak-

³⁵ Объединенное государственное политическое управление (ОГПУ).

³⁶ Latinization was not merely a hypothetical example for Zarre. In his brief autobiography he writes: "In 1930, I served as a representative of the Persian sector to the Comintern and was sent to the congress held in Stalinabad regarding the Latinization of the Tajik alphabet. I was a member of the congress presidium and actively participated in its work (my presentations were printed in several issues of the newspaper "Tajikistan-e sorh" at the time)" [ГАРФ, ф. 5404, оп. 10, д. 9]).

ening of class-consciousness. He describes as “communistically religious” the eruptions of popular discontent in the 5th century CE, known as the Mazdaki movement, against the landed gentry and property owners in urban areas is little reflected in Pahlavi literature “because the power structure of Iran always zealously destroyed all traces of ‘dangerous ideas’ (especially Mazdaki literature)” [Zappé, 1935, c. 43]³⁷.

In his account of the effects of the Arab conquest of Iran on the Persian language, Zarre asks what really caused the Iranian aristocracy of the 8th and 9th centuries to declare the need for “a renaissance of language” (i.e., a return to Persian)? He argues the motivation was not the grandly patriotic one trumpeted by the “Iranian former landlords” – and, Zarre notes, still accepted at face value by most Orientalists – but the need to martial the rural masses in a battle to reinstate feudal rule, which had lost its power under the Arabs [Zappé, 1935, c. 46–47].

When discussing the “national revival” of Persian culture in the 9th and 10th centuries, Zarre qualifies his usage of the phrase as necessitated by scholarly custom and explains that he uses it in quotation marks because “in this case one cannot speak about a ‘national revival’ in a meaningful way, since in the 9th and 10th centuries there was no nation in the sense as defined by Marx and Lenin and expressed with extreme precision by comrade Stalin in the following formulations:

A people is a historically durable community with a language, territory, economic life and mental character that is expressed in its shared culture. The process of the elimination of feudalism and the development of capitalism is simultaneously the process of forming nations and people” [Zappé, 1935, c. 48].

The *Overview* also provides evaluations of several key figures in Persian literature and thought. Regarding the works of Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Abu Hasr Farabi and Mohammed Zakariya-ya-Razi, Zarre writes: “Theirs was a metaphysical-scholastic philosophy that acknowledged the soundness of certain given religious maxims and relied not on facts and observation but on “truths” established by previous authors. Like the European scholiasts, the Arab-Iranian scholiasts engaged in studying texts rather than reality and combining and parsing concepts rather than analyzing the world’s concrete phenomena” [Zappé, 1935, c. 46–47].

While simultaneously proclaiming the greatness of the major Iranian poets, Zarre issues critical correctives to any romanticized view of them: Saadi is “a propagator of ‘pragmatic’ Sufism, essentially an unashamed opportunist” [Zappé, 1935, c. 70]; Khayyam is “a great skeptic-materialist casting doubt on the ‘holy truths’ and calling on his reader to enjoy life in this world instead of falling for the promises of the sheikhs, promising heavenly wines and hours” [Zappé, 1935, c. 66], Zarre observes that “the fine thread through all of Khayyam’s poetry is a richly deep pessimism and conviction in the vanity of the world” [Zappé, 1935, c. 67]; as for Hafez, Zarre recalls how in a letter to Marx, Engels referred to the Persian poet as “that old debauchee” [Zappé, 1935, c. 71].

It is worth lingering on Zarre’s presentation of Sufism, which is subjected to a strict materialistic examination: “As we have seen, the history of Iran had abundant preconditions favorable to the development of Sufism. The cruelest sort of exploitation, almost unending wars, famine and drought – against all of which the people found themselves powerless – pushed them toward asceticism, passivity, denial of everyday life, self-contemplation and the search for union – while still living – with god.

* * *

Already among the earliest representatives of post-Islamic poetry we meet the notes of this pessimism, which in the future will become the main or rather the overriding motif of

³⁷ The subject of Mazdak as a social reformer is treated in detail in the same anthology by one of Zarre’s colleagues, Vladimir Tardov, in an article “Firdowsi and Mazdak,” [Тардов, 1918, c. 126–147] Tardov was arrested and executed within days of Zarre.

Persian poetry. This condition is expressed vividly by the 9th century poet Shahid Balhskiy [sic!]³⁸:

If sadness produced smoke

The world would suffocate in eternal gloom.

Sufism in the East, like asceticism and monasticism in medieval feudal Europe, was born of the feudal economic system. Clearly then, the decay of feudalism meant the disappearance of the basis for the prevalence of Sufism.

In Iran, Sufi poetry was essentially a counter to panegyric court poetry... but its opposition was passive; it did not struggle against the court but ignored it, and in the end tolerated it [Зарре, 1935, с. 68].

A peer review of Zarre's scholarly work from 1935 is preserved in the Russian state archives³⁹ and signed by the members of the Qualification Commission: B. Miller, R. Golunov and K. Chaikin, all of whom were well-known scholars of Iran at the time. They wrote approvingly of the essay on Iranian literature quoted above:

Zarre's most important work is "A Brief Overview of Iranian Literature," printed in a collection of essays from the periodical "Vostok" This essay demonstrates the author's deep knowledge of primary source materials as well as of the major European and Persian works devoted to the literature of Iran. Zarre has made the first attempt to apply a Marxist analysis to the research of Iranian literature; he is the first to raise and attempt to resolve the problem of periodization. It can hardly be doubted that identifying this problem is a step forward in the study of the literature of Iran and sets Zarre's work apart from such pseudo-Marxist pieces as L.R. Zhirkov's article on Persian literature in the "Encyclopedia of Literature" (vol. 8) and Bertel's "Brief Overview of Persian Literature." Despite a few shortcomings: for instance, a disproportionate distribution of material among epochs... and the omission of several rather important poets of the classical epoch, etc., comrade Zarre's research is an undeniable contribution to the literary criticism of Iran.

Zarre has undoubtedly made a contribution to the study of Iranian literature. Several other articles authored by Zarre have appeared in Soviet publications: on the contemporary Persian poet Malek-osh-Shoer in the "Encyclopedia of Literature," and a sketch about Iran and article on the Mazdaki movement in the "Shorter Soviet Encyclopaedia." In addition, Zarre has made an excellent translation into the Persian language of comrade Stalin's "Lenin and Leninism."

* * *

At the present time, comrade Zarre is working on a Russo-Persian dictionary with explanations of political and economic terms. As far as can be judged by the first letters already completed, this dictionary will be of great value for acquainting Iranians with Marxist-Leninist literature. Returning to the work of comrade Zarre in the sphere of literary criticism, it should be noted that he needs to limit his researches in the future within a narrower framework: for example, focusing on studying particular periods of Persian literature or even particular writers (poets) and genres while employing his excellent knowledge of primary sources and great erudition. In view of the above, we consider comrade Zarre fully deserving of a PhD candidacy as well as the title of professor of the Department of Persian Language and Literature"⁴⁰.

³⁸ Zarre has Russified the name of the poet: Balhi. [Зарре, 1935, с. 68].

³⁹ The case file on Zarre in the GARF Archive [ГАРФ, ф. 5404, оп. 10, д. 9] from 1935 contains five pages of material: a peer review of his scholarly work, a list of publications and a short autobiography. Most likely the commission met regarding Zarre's doctoral dissertation.

⁴⁰ The review goes on to list a number of other works by Zarre: "Zarre has presented numerous papers in his native Persian language on social-economic and philosophical subjects, such as his articles "Idealism and Materialism," "The Ethnic-Tribal Question in Iran," "On the Parties and Conditions of Workers in Iran" and others published in the journal "Setareye sorkh" (an organ of the Persian Communist Party). In the journal "Farhang," published in Gilan, he pub-

This praise from his peers and Zarre's translation of comrade Stalin's book would be to no avail to him, however, once the Great Purge was underway.

Interestingly, Zarre's unpublished *Russian-Persian Dictionary of Political and Economic Terms with Explanatory Notes*, completed just prior to his death, has never been found. Konstantin Chaikin, whose signature is on the review quoted above and who was arrested on the very same night as Zarre, had also compiled an unpublished dictionary: *Persian Dictionary with Explanatory Notes*, that also disappeared upon his arrest [ГАРФ, ф. 7668, оп. 1, д. 2889]. Whether these works – which would have been “of great value for acquainting Iranians with Marxist-Leninist literature” – were accidentally or intentionally destroyed remains an open question.

On the night of February 21, 1938, Zarre was arrested at his home on Leont'evski side-street in the center of Moscow. On April 19, his court date was set. The prosecution sought “repression of the first category [firing squad].” Zarre was to be number 96 among 327 defendants on the “Moscow-Center” list according to an order by an I. I. Shapiro, head of the 8th Department of the GUGB NKVD (Head Directorate of State Security under the NKVD, in Russian: ГУГБ НКВД) bearing the signatures of Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich and Zhdanov. On April 27, 1938 the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR found Zarre guilty of espionage. As was the rule, the sentence was carried out the same day, along with the execution of his colleague Chaikin. Their bodies were buried at the “Kommunarka,” the site of firing squad on the grounds of a prerevolutionary country estate that became a mass grave for both Russian and foreign-born victims of the purges. Zarre was rehabilitated on September 15, 1956 [ГАРФ, ф. 7668, оп. 1, д. 2855].

ARCHIVES/ АРХИВЫ

ЦА ФСБ РФ – Центральный Архив ФСБ России, Особый Архив НКВД [*Special Archive of the NKVD*].

ГАРФ – (Государственный архив Российской Федерации) [*GARF* (State Archive of the Russian Federation)].

РГАСПИ – Российский Государственный Архив социально-политической истории [*RGASPI* (The Russian State Archive of Social and Political History)].

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lished the articles “The New Society” and “The New Language.” From 1920–1921, comrade Zarre edited the revolutionary journal “Enqelab-e sorkh,” publishing a series of articles in it on social economic topics.

Zarre has compiled a Russo-Persian dictionary of political-economic terms with explanatory notes that is of great value for acquainting Iranians with Marxist-Leninist literature. Among translated works:

- a technical book on aviation at the request of the Air Force Academy of the USSR, published in Moscow in 1925.
 - comrade Stalin's book “On Lenin and Leninism,” published by the Persian Sector of the Comintern in 1928 in Berlin.
 - “Political Economy” by Lapidus and Ostrovyanov (unpublished)
 - many periodical articles and brochures for the Central Organ of the Persian Communist Party and Communist Party of the USSR
 - From 1929–1935, many articles for the All-Russian Chamber of Commerce and, together with comrade Galunov, the book “*An Economic Reference Book on the USSR for Iran*,” published in Moscow in 1933 [«*Экономический Справочник по СССР для Ирана*» (справочник всесоюзной торговой палаты) М., 1933] (Zarre also left behind a *Persian language textbook* (co-authored with B. N. Zokhoder and A. M. Kasaev, Moscow, 1930).
- Zarre also wrote a Persian Language textbook in 4 volumes [Заппе. *Учебник персидского языка*. 1933–1934. 4 т.]

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