THE ART OF NATION-BUILDING:
NATIONAL CULTURE AND SOVIET POLITICS IN STALIN-ERA AZERBAIJAN
AND OTHER MINORITY REPUBLICS

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THE ART OF NATION-BUILDING:
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the role of national cultural production and consumption in Soviet nation-building, focusing on Stalin-era Moscow’s promotion of cultural interaction among Soviet ethnic groups as a strategy to build individual national identities and a unified Soviet multinational identity simultaneously. Through a case study of Azerbaijan, I trace the emergence in the 1930s of formal sites of national self-expression and cross-cultural exchange such as dekada festivals of national art in Moscow and all-Union celebrations of national poets, arguing that these activities provided the presenting group a valuable opportunity for national self-definition and affirmation. At the same time, the state-mandated sharing of one nation’s art with the all-Union audience was part of a Soviet agenda to demonstrate the universally accessible essence of all culture and to narrow cultural difference through cross-cultural familiarization. More concretely, these events were a means of generating a Soviet multiethnic artistic canon to be disseminated as the heritage of all Soviet people, binding them together through a common cultural identity.

These cultural celebrations depended on a purposeful and mutually reinforcing entwinement of the national and international that I identify as characteristic of the Soviet approach to nation-building. This interconnection is also informed by Russia’s nineteenth-century experience of developing its own national cultural identity, which emphasized foreign (chiefly European) acknowledgment of Russian artistic output. The imposition of a Russian-
derived model of national cultural development on non-Russian Soviet groups wrought profound change in native cultural production, but the required adaptations could be exploited by clever entrepreneurs of national culture to pursue their own nation-building agendas. Using the example of Azerbaijan, I show how narrowness of vision and cultural knowledge in the center created opportunity for a minority nation to accumulate cultural capital, claim a place in the cultural avant-garde, and raise its cultural profile internationally.

By tracing cultural themes across the revolutionary divide and identifying through-lines in Bolshevik nationalities policy from the 1910s to the 1940s, this study challenges previously asserted periodizations and contributes to our understanding of the cultural history of Azerbaijan, Russia, and the Soviet Union as well as to the general scholarship on nation-building.
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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION, TERMS, AND SOURCES

This work uses published and archival sources in Russian and Azerbaijani. For Russian, the Library of Congress transliteration system without diacritics is used except in cases where an alternate spelling is widespread in English. For such terms and names, the conventional English spelling appears in the main text but the Library of Congress system (including diacritics) is followed for bibliographic information. Hence, for example, ‘Maxim Gorky’ is used in the main text and ‘Maksim Gor’kii’ in citations. In addition, for ease of reading, I have dispensed with the extra ‘i’ in place names that end in ‘ия’ (e.g., ‘Turkmenia’ instead of ‘Turkmeniia’).

Various terms have been used to refer to the Turkic language spoken in Azerbaijan. From 1918, the language was commonly identified as Turkic (tiurkskii in Russian, türki or türk dili in Azerbaijani), but in the late 1930s Azerbaijani (azerbaidzhanski, Azərbaycan dili) became standard usage. In this work, the language is referred to as Azerbaijani (except in translations from original sources that use another term), even in historical contexts that precede the widespread use of the word. In addition, Azerbaijani refers here to citizens of Azerbaijan or to denizens of the territory known today as Azerbaijan, regardless of ethnicity. On occasion, Azeri is used here to signal or emphasize a subject’s ethnic Turkic identity as distinct from other ethnic identities present in Azerbaijan.

The adoption of various alphabets and changes to the vocabulary, spelling, and grammar of Azerbaijani over the 20th century complicate transliteration into English. For example, depending on their dates, sources may refer to the Communist Party of Soviet Azerbaijan as Qommunist Firqəsi, Kommunist Партиясы, Kommunist Партиясы, or Kommunist Partiyası.

I have transliterated material from sources written in the Cyrillic-based Azerbaijani alphabet into the Latin-based alphabet currently used in Azerbaijan. However, to illustrate the rapid changes in printed language in the 1920s and ‘30s, in bibliographic references I have preserved the original orthography of sources in the Latin-based Azerbaijani alphabets used in those years.

Names appear in various spellings and forms, depending upon context and period. For example, the composer known in Russian as Uzeir Gadhzhibekov (Узеир Гаджибеков) is called Üzeyir Hacıbəyov or Üzeyir Hacıbəyli in Azerbaijani. For this work, I have chosen the English transliteration of the version of the composer’s name most frequently used, by my observation, in Azerbaijani-language sources of the Soviet era. For quotations and bibliographic information, however, I transcribe from the original source. For most names of people and titles of artworks, I give an English transliteration followed by Azerbaijani in parentheses upon initial reference and use the English thereafter. In the preceding acknowledgments, I have given titles and affiliations in English and names in English or Azerbaijani, depending upon the language of the relationship.

Below are letters of the Azerbaijani Latin alphabet in use today that differ from English:

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c = j as in ‘jungle’
č = ch as in ‘chair’
ə = a as in ‘cat’
ğ = no English equivalent; often rendered in English as gh but transliterated here as g
x = ch as in ‘Bach’
i = i as in ‘hint’
q = g as in ‘guide’
ð = like ea in early
ü = similar to German ü

In an attempt to make pronunciation clearer to English-speaking readers, I have departed from conventional transliteration in some cases. For example, I render the suffix zadə at the end of names as zadeh (rather than zada).

For archival citations, I use cataloguing terms and their abbreviations in the local language (indicated below), but I give the name of each collection (fond) in Russian and Azerbaijani (for the latter using the spelling that is contemporaneous with the documents).

Russian: fond (f.), opis’ (op.), delo (d.), list (l.)
Azerbaijani: fond (f.), siyahı (siy.), iş, səhifə (səh.)

In this work, the words national and ethnic are used to refer to non-Russian populations of the Soviet Union. Many scholars have remarked on the polyvalence of the Russian word narodnyi, its double meaning of folk and people’s, and the particular complex of the term’s connotations in 1930s Soviet culture. I have translated narodnyi in this work as national, folk, or people’s, depending upon the context.

For place names that have changed, I use the term current at the time of the document or episode being discussed.

Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

All websites cited in this dissertation were last accessed on 5 June 2017 unless otherwise noted.

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iii The sound is described in linguistic terms as a “voiced velar fricative.” See Kurtuluş Öztopçu, *Elementary Azerbaijani*, 2-3.

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INTRODUCTION

ART FOR NATION’S SAKE

The themes of unity and diversity predominated at the first Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in late summer 1934. In his opening speech, Maxim Gorky emphasized Soviet literature as multinational, not just Russian:

Soviet literature is not only literature of the Russian language, it is all-Union literature. Thus, the literatures of the republics that are brothers to us, different from us only in language, live and work in the light and under the beneficent influence of the same idea that unifies the entire world of workers … It is clear that we do not have the right to ignore the literary work of national minorities only because there are more of us. The value of art is measured not by quantity, but by quality. If we have in our past the giant Pushkin, it does not proceed from there that Armenians, Georgians, Tatars, Ukrainians and other tribes are not capable of producing the greatest masters of literature, music, painting, architecture.  

The sentiment was echoed by various delegates from Soviet ethnic republics who subsequently took the podium to give speeches about their national literatures. Ukrainian delegate I.Iu. Kulik, for example, began his report on Ukrainian literature by quoting Gorky verbatim from earlier in the day. Later in his speech, Kulik quoted Gorky again, this time from a letter the author had sent Kulik before the first All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviet Writers in June 1934:

Do you have an overview of the history of Ukrainian literature, and, if not, are there plans to write such a thing? It’s very necessary for us Northerners [i.e., Russians] because our youth know nothing about Ukraine’s history. Mutual exchange of knowledge of the past is essential – it is necessary for all union republics, so that a Belorussian knows what a Georgian, a Turkic, etc. is, and everyone else knows what a Ukrainian, a Belorussian, an Uzbek, a Tatar, etc. is. Right?”

Kulik said the question made him blush with shame: There was no history of Ukrainian literature that could be recommended to a Soviet reader outside Ukraine. “There is not a single, solid

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2 The first All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviet Writers was held June 17-20, 1934, in Kharkiv.
textbook or just ordinary book on the history of Ukrainian literature that could cover even the general features of the process of its development from a Marxist-Leninist point of view.”

In another speech at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers, Gorky urged the audience of writer delegations from all over the Soviet Union as well as foreign guests to teach and learn from each other, to respect each other, as this, he assured them, would benefit all: “… the party and government are taking from us the right to order each other around, providing [instead] the right to teach each other. To teach,” he explained, “means to share experience mutually. Only that. Only that, and nothing more.”

Gorky’s statements at the Congress prompted a flow of new resources and energy devoted to answering this call for cross-cultural contact. The resulting increase in translations, publications, and events included a series of anthologies of non-Russian literature; the almanac *Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR (Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR)* and, eventually, the journal *Friendship of Peoples (Druzhba narodov)*; and festivals of national art and national poet jubilees, examples of which are discussed in later chapters of this dissertation.

While Gorky was subsequently considered the champion of cultural interaction among different Soviet peoples, the notion was a feature of Bolshevik thought from the inception of the Soviet project. In fact, the theme of cultural interaction among different nations is traceable to Marx and Engels, who described in their 1848 *Communist Manifesto* the exchange across national boundaries that had already arisen in the economic sphere and predicted its spread to the cultural. Instead of living in isolation, they explained, nations had become interdependent and integrated into an international economy:

> And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-

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4 “Rech’ Gor’kogo,” Ibid., 225.
mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.\(^5\)

In their theoretical works, Marx and Engels identified processes that they envisioned as occurring spontaneously, providing few clues as to what these processes might entail. The Bolsheviks were thus left adrift as they faced the task of initiating these processes in a setting quite different from that imagined by the theory’s framers. Narrowing gaps of many kinds – between theory and practice, between the circumstances described by Marx and Engels and those of the Russian Empire – was a challenge that preoccupied early Bolshevik thinkers. Compelled to consider the national question in the late Russian Empire, Lenin and Stalin accepted national consolidation and consciousness as a necessary historical phase, but determined that, with the support of the state, the process could be expedited. While internationalism and merger (sliianie) of nations was the inevitable endpoint of historical progress, a long transitional period of persisting national consciousness would precede it. This adaptation to Marx’s theory is one of the premises of early Soviet nationalities policy.\(^6\)

At the same time, the Bolshevik project was a deeply integrationist one. Bolshevik plans for integration called for a gradual process of bringing nations closer together (sblizhenie) –

\(^5\) Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Chapter 1 (“Bourgeois and Proletarians”). Accessed at www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm. Katerina Clark has explored this Marx-derived idea of world literature in the Soviet context, focusing on steps taken in the 1930s toward its realization, such as the establishment in 1933 of the Gorky Institute in Moscow, which recruited writers from ethnic minority groups, and the founding of the journal *Friendship of Peoples* (*Druzhba narodov*) in 1939. She notes earlier exponents of the world literature idea, such as Goethe, who influenced Marx, and the Soviet effort in the 1930s to include more representation of non-European cultures in the “world culture” idea. [Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome: Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 190-1]

\(^6\) In *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), Francine Hirsch documents the lengths to which Moscow went to gather scientific information about Soviet ethnic populations as the basis for the state’s subsequent definition of national groups and territories. She refers to the efforts and resources of the state devoted to helping less developed groups move along the Marxist evolutionary continuum at an accelerated pace as “state-sponsored evolutionism.” (14) Terry Martin documents the development of Soviet nationalities policy and its implementation through 1939 in *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). On the premises of early Soviet nationalities policy, including persistence of national consciousness, see his Introduction, esp. 5-6. Many scholars, too numerous to list here, have contributed to our understanding of the Bolsheviks’ treatment of the national question, both in general and in the context of specific nationalities.
leading eventually to the merger (*sliianie*) of national cultures into a unified, common international culture – that would begin at once and proceed simultaneously with the development of national consciousness among many ethnic minority groups. In 1919, Semyon Dimanshtein, an early Bolshevik who was active in the administration of Soviet nationalities affairs until his arrest in 1938, noted the lack of ties among the peoples of the former Russian Empire and wrote, “We are going to help you develop your Buryat, Votiak, etc. language and culture, because in this way you will join the universal culture, revolution, and communism sooner.”\(^7\) The concurrent development of national identities and of ties between nations was an ongoing process that linked the seemingly contradictory poles of diversity and unity that underlay Soviet nationalities policy.

The passage from Gorky’s letter that Kulik shared at the Writers’ Union Congress illustrates how the building of distinct individual nations and the fusion of these same nations into a single, universal entity were, in fact, complementary processes necessary for progress toward merger. In the standard theoretical literature on nation-building, the writing of a nation’s literary history – and of its cultural development, in general – is an exercise in canonization typically aimed internally at the national group to aid the consolidation of national identity. Gorky, however, stresses to Kulik that an articulation of national literary history is essential precisely for the audience beyond the Ukrainian nation, so that non-Ukrainians may learn about, and therefore grow closer to, their Ukrainian brothers. According to Soviet logic, increasing cultural exchange among brother nations was a key method of effecting the cultural

\[^7\] Quoted in Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53 (Summer 1994): 414-52, 420. Slezkine’s translation. Dimanshtein made these comments in 1919, before the Tenth Party Congress in 1921, which, according to Slezkine, “legitimized the policy of institutionalized ethnicity.” (422)
interdependence and integration that Marx and Engels foresaw as following in the wake of economic internationalization.

This ideal of mutual influence, or cultural change through cultural exchange, is at the core of this study, and the key to reconciling the elements of Soviet nationalities policy that may at first seem so paradoxical. I argue that Bolshevik ideas about nation-building were informed by Russia’s experience in the nineteenth century with national identity formation, in which national cultural production and its reception by audiences outside the nation played an important role. At the same time, by analogy with the *Communist Manifesto*’s description of economic internationalization, the integration of intellectual production proceeds through the exchange of cultural products across national borders and the synthesis of culturally diverse ingredients into new products that transcend national claims to become universal property. Building on the context provided in the Introduction and chapters 1 and 2, subsequent chapters of this dissertation illustrate the dynamics of cultural interaction among Soviet nationalities by drawing on examples from the cultural life of Azerbaijan in the 1930s.

**Culture, Nation, and Cultural Nationalism, Soviet-Style**

The enormous ethnic diversity of the populations living within Soviet-controlled territory was of great concern to early Bolshevik leaders. In a departure from Marxist orthodoxy, which saw national identity supplanted by class identity and hence the withering of nations, Lenin and Stalin developed an elaborate policy to “maximally support those ‘forms’ of nationhood that did not conflict with a unitary central state,” namely, “national territories, national languages, national elites, and national cultures.”

8 This reflected the Bolshevik commitment to nation-building – defined in cultural, not political, terms – among non-Russian ethnic groups. From the

Soviet perspective, providing a “backward people” with the same cultural trappings as those enjoyed by “more advanced” nations was a means of speeding progress through the prescribed stages of Marxist historical evolution. To this end, the early Bolsheviks adopted a policy of korenizatsiia (nativization), the indigenization of cadres through the creation of local ethnic elites, as the cornerstone of their approach to national minority populations.⁹

Soviet policy, then, confined national development to the sphere of “culture,” an expansive term that can encompass all manner of human endeavor, from dancing to farming. True to the word’s etymological roots, which link it with growth and development, especially as the result of conscious cultivation, Soviet discourse often employed the term “culture” in a very general way.¹⁰ The related Soviet concept of “being cultured” (kul’turnost’) was equally expansive, denoting the “proper” level of cultivation in all spheres of life, from knowledge to comportment and appearance.¹¹ The use of “culture” in this dissertation generally refers to expressions of artistic creativity, and “national culture” to artistic products that are generated by members of the national group and/or that express national identity. A number of considerations motivate my concentration on the arts: the important role in construction of national identity that the theoretical literature has assigned to artistic production; the emphasis on the arts in Bolshevik thought and practice; and the centrality of culture to Russian national identity.¹² For these reasons, I contend that a focus on cultural canon-building activities in the national arts as sites of national self-definition and exchange brings into relief particular dynamics of Soviet nationalities

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⁹ See the 1932 “Official List of ‘Culturally Backward’ Nationalities” in Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 167. It includes the various Muslim ethnic groups of the USSR; it does not include Armenians or Georgians, both Christian groups of the Caucasus.

¹⁰ “Culture” is derived from the Latin verb colo, colere, colui, cultus, to till or farm.

¹¹ Stalin-era kul’turnost’ is discussed in Chapter 1.

policy that are less visible from a broader perspective. Past scholarly analyses of Soviet nationalities policy have diagnosed the Soviet goal of cultural merger as Russification and the Soviet regime’s enthusiasm for ethnic particularism as “chronic ethnophilia.”\textsuperscript{13} I argue that an examination of Soviet celebration of national art reveals both characterizations as accurate, but perhaps not in the way typically construed. For example, Soviet nationalities policy, which was Russocentric, was Russifying not because it aimed at spreading Russianness \textit{per se} but because its framers were influenced by Russia’s experience of cultural development. The Soviet regime’s emphasis on ethnic particularism was part of a codification of national cultures designed to facilitate cross-cultural familiarization aimed at narrowing difference.

“If political nationalism is focused on the achievement of political autonomy,” writes E.T. Woods, “cultural nationalism is focused on the cultivation of a nation.” Cultural nationalism develops “during times of social, cultural and political upheaval resulting from an encounter with modernity,” which is often represented by another nation seen as more advanced.\textsuperscript{14} Many European intellectuals, for example, “became aware of their ‘backwardness’ in the face of French dominance and sought prestige in their own cultures, while simultaneously also embarking upon a programme of progress.”\textsuperscript{15} Cultural nationalism, then, is connected with a forward-looking vision of growth that is predicated on a sense of both pride and inferiority; it is a product of self-contemplation catalyzed by encounter with the other and emphasizes national

\textsuperscript{13} “Chronic ethnophilia” is Yuri Slezkine’s coinage and refers to the Soviet regime’s enthusiasm for promoting group rights on the basis of ethnicity. (Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 415) Audrey Altstadt, writing about Azerbaijan, asserts, “the term \textit{sliianie} (‘merging’) signaled Russification.” [Altstadt, \textit{The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920-1940} (New York: Routledge, 2016), 63] Slezkine makes a different but related point: “Russianness, because it was equated with modernity, was the default culture of the Soviet Union.” [“Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism,” \textit{Russian Review} 59/2 (April 2000): 227-34, here 231] Laura Adams, however, makes a compelling case for her claim that “in Central Asia the referent for modernity was broader than Russia and encompassed Europeanness writ large.” [Laura L. Adams, “Modernity, Postcolonialism, and Theatrical Form in Uzbekistan,” \textit{Slavic Review} 64/2 (Summer 2005): 333-54, here 340, citing Slezkine, “Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism”]


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
distinctiveness while also consciously seeking change, often in the direction of the more advanced other. In his landmark study of the formation of the French nation, Eugen Weber illustrates how national culture takes shape, especially when the resources of the state are invested in the task. Through processes of selection, transformation, and invention, a national standard is prepared for mass inculcation.\textsuperscript{16} Along the way, a measure of local specificity and variation is lost to standardization. In the arts especially, the definition of a stable canon of national cultural products often comes at the expense of the flexibility, diversity, and complexity of past iterations. At the same time, as Gorky’s question in his letter to Kulik points out, the codification of national culture helps make it more accessible to outsiders.

Cultural nationalism’s implications of transformation, progress, standardization, and scale dovetail with Bolshevik goals and views of culture.\textsuperscript{17} In particular, an impulse toward advancement derived from contact with others is a dynamic common to cultural nationalism as well as to Marxist and Bolshevik thought. According to Marx and Engels,

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations, into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations . . . to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1913, Stalin had written

The national question in the Caucasus can be solved only by drawing the belated nations and nationalities into the common stream of a higher culture . . . to cast off the shell of


\textsuperscript{17} In the 1920s, however, the Bolshevik camp was far from united on the question of culture, with divisions over how best to harness the power of culture to the revolutionary cause. In addition to differences of opinion on which arts were the most essential to socialist cultural transformation, there were rivalries within artistic fields about the proper direction for a given branch of the arts. In music, Amy Nelson points out that, despite differences, there was also overlap in personnel among organizations that were ideological rivals. She cites, for example, music educator Natalia Briusova and composer Reinhold Glière as having worked for both Narkompros and Proletkul’t. [Amy Nelson, \textit{Music for the Revolution: Musicians and Power in Early Soviet Russia} (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 26]

\textsuperscript{18} Marx and Engels, \textit{The Communist Manifesto}, Chapter 2.
small nation insularity . . . [N]ational cultural autonomy confines nations within their old shells, binds them to the lower stages of cultural development.\textsuperscript{19}

The two remarks share the idea of exchange and interaction among nations as spurring the elision of national boundaries and the absorption of all into a common cultural stream. At the same time, the distance between the statements quoted above and the nationalities policy the Soviets ultimately adopted highlights the adaptations Bolsheviks made to Marxist orthodoxy to accommodate the realities they inherited from the Russian Empire. Two adjustments, in particular, stand out: the Bolsheviks’ greater belief in the transformative power of culture, and their abridgement to Marx’s timeline of historical development.

Marx saw the bourgeoisie’s economic activity as forcibly dragging all nations in the same direction of “civilization” and violently tearing down national boundaries by compelling acceptance of the foreign. The Bolsheviks, in contrast, placed their faith in culture as an agent of change. While the self-awareness inherent to cultural nationalism can lead to withdrawal from outside influence, it can also sharpen impulses toward national self-betterment by following more advanced nations’ examples, assimilated through contact. If cultural nationalism could be properly directed – that is, toward interaction with other nations instead of retreat into “the shell of small-nation insularity” – then its power could be harnessed in pursuit of Bolshevik goals. In addition, the Bolsheviks’ policy of “state-sponsored evolutionism” aimed not only to speed up progress but to support the \textit{simultaneous} development of historical stages that Marx had identified as consecutive. For example, instead of deferring the merger of nations in order to focus first on hastening the development of national consciousness among “backward” groups,

the Bolsheviks contrived to pursue both at the same time. The combination of nurturing the ethnic particular and the multiethnic universal is one of the paradoxes of Soviet nationalities policy. A focus on Soviet attention to the national arts helps to unravel it.

The setting designated by the Bolsheviks for supporting minority nationhood was the cultural sphere, particularly artistic production and consumption. Cultural exchange was the mechanism devised to accommodate the two seemingly contradictory processes of promoting individual national identities and moving all groups closer together in preparation for eventual merger. The cultural arena was thus at the same time the place for expression of individual national identities and the mutual exertion of cultural influences that would lead to interdependence, integration, and ultimately synthesis. The first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 formalized the initial steps of both these interrelated processes. The Congress (discussed in Chapter 1) was an exercise in cross-cultural familiarization, with a delegate from each recognized ethnic group delivering an introductory lecture on the group’s national literary tradition. Gorky, who presided over the event, clarified the rules devised to maintain the delicate balance of processes at work.

The Bolshevik concession to national cultural autonomy, against which Stalin had written in 1913, was conditioned on the requirement that national cultural products be accessible to those outside the nation. This sharing of national cultures would foster interaction and guard against the progress-inhibiting cultural isolation that Stalin had condemned. The imperative to share national art also forced national elites to gear their cultural production to a multinational audience, which also encouraged cross-cultural borrowing and hybridization, and, in turn, facilitated the creation of a universal culture. The reward for obliging adaptation and “sharing”

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20 According to Slezkine, “The ultimate goal [of the Bolsheviks] was the abolition of all backwardness and thus all difference, but the fulfillment of that goal was postponed indefinitely.” (Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 424)
of its national art was others’ admiration for the nation’s cultural accomplishments. This recognition gratified national elites who “sought prestige in their own cultures.” It may also have held particular appeal for small nations whose cultures often had less opportunity for exposure to the international community and were therefore less known beyond the national group. Increased notoriety boosted national pride and therefore helped consolidate national identity. In this way, the presentation of national art for consumption and appreciation by cultural outsiders interlaced the national and international as partners in development.

Gorky’s calls for national literary histories and more translation of national literatures announced the enforcement of the sharing requirement. Writers were needed as producers but they were also to model participation in the cross-cultural exchange as consumers. Gorky’s emphases on the mutuality of teaching and learning and on quality over quantity were an attempt to flatten differences in demographic size and developmental level among nations. Assurances that every nation had something to teach and something to learn sought to undercut assumptions of cultural hierarchy and instead to present the cultural front as an equalizer. A multi-national Soviet literature, which was the cornerstone of a universal Soviet culture, required the contributions of all its nations, big and small. While Gorky implied that this mutuality was spontaneous, it was, of course, carefully managed by the state. In addition, despite the insistence on equality, Russia’s centrality and influence by virtue of its size, level of cultural and economic advancement, and European orientation were apparent at the Congress, which was held in Moscow and conducted in Russian.

The Bolsheviks turned to the arts not only to address national diversity but also to implement their stated goal of the “enlightenment” of the masses. Artistic organizations and activities were administered by the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment, guided by the
overarching conviction that “images, ideas, and feelings expressed in an artistic form are more easily absorbed (легче усваиваются) by the ordinary consciousness than those expressed in scientific or political theory.” The arts were an effective medium for delivering enlightenment because of their versatility – that is, their capacity for introducing the unfamiliar by combining it with the familiar. A related logic underlay the Il’minskii system of education developed by the Russian imperial government in the 19th century to convert non-Christian subjects to Orthodoxy. Il’minskii schools delivered curriculum not in Russian, but in the various native languages, on the assumption that content would be better assimilated by students if they encountered it in a familiar form. The People’s Conservatories, which offered a folk-based music curriculum, operated on a related principle. In this way, the arts were not only an instrument of enlightenment but of cultural exchange and merger, and therefore an ideal vehicle for the Bolsheviks as they set out to abolish difference through a campaign of familiarization.

An example of theatrical activity from 1920s Uzbekistan illustrates the Soviet reliance on art hybridized to serve the goals of local nation-building and internationalization, as well as the abiding cultural Russocentrism of the entire Bolshevik project. Moreover, it demonstrates the simultaneity of efforts at national consolidation and erosion, definition and ambiguity. Given the important role of theater in the Soviet agitprop agenda of the 1920s, the development of native theater troupes in the ethnic periphery, unsurprisingly, became a priority for the regime.

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23 See Nelson, Music for the Revolution.

Despite the existence of local traditions of theatrical art in the region, in 1924 a three-year course of study for young Uzbek theatrical talent was developed in Moscow, including training with actors from the city’s illustrious Vakhtangov and Meyerhold theaters. When the first group of actors completed their studies and returned to Uzbekistan in 1927, they opened the new theater season in Tashkent with a production of *Princess Turandot*, an 1801 play by Friedrich Schiller inspired by the poetry of Nizami Ganjevi. The performance was an act of cultural fusion: Uzbek actors with Russian training presented in their native language an interpretation of a nineteenth-century European play about a Turkic princess that re-imagines a twelfth-century work written in Persian by a classical Eastern poet, itself based on a legend familiar to the local audience. The result of this series of reinterpretations and transpositions was a product whose respective cultural origins were nearly unrecognizable for their hybridity and internationalism.

The 1927 performance of *Princess Turandot* also marked a step in the Europeanization of the theater and, consequently, of Tashkent’s cultural life. The Uzbek troupe returned from training in Moscow to introduce Uzbek audiences to European-style theater and repertoire; the choice of an Orientalist play used a familiar story as a scaffold. A 1936 book published to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the Uzbek Drama Theater named for Khamza (Hamza) characterized the 1927 premiere as a milestone in the development of modern Uzbek national culture and an

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26 Iras’, *Uzbekskii gosudarstvennyi teatr dramy im. Khamza*, 26. The second class to graduate from the Uzbek theater studio in Moscow, in 1930, formed the core company of a theater opened in Samarkand. (RGALI f. 962, op. 11, d. 418, l. 49)
act of nation-building for the young Uzbek republic, created only in 1924. At the same time, the book quotes Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky on the characteristics of national theater in Soviet times:

   a striving to create theater in its own language, in a style defined by the history of the people; then, a striving to rise above narrow national content and be inflamed by the fire of proletarian ideology, and, finally, not to disavow the theater of other nations but to look at its own national theater as one strand of world theatrical fabric.

The political and cultural landscape of 1936 was markedly different from that of the 1920s. Stalin was in control from the center of a growing personality cult, and a changing of the generational guard was underway, especially in the ethnic periphery, where national elites who came of age before the revolution were targeted for persecution. In nationalities policy, a reemergence of “Russian ethnic particularism” was in progress and “an increasingly russocentric, etatist orientation had come to the fore in Soviet society during the mid- to late 1930s without ever fully breaking with the previous two decades of communist idealism and proletarian internationalism,” necessitating “an awkward balancing act within the national Bolshevik line.

The quotation from Lunacharsky is an example of this balancing act. It is also an articulation of a different balancing act, the simultaneous pursuit of two goals through art: the development of national consciousness and the internationalist merger of culture.

   This last balance is a thread that runs through the Soviet 1920s, 1930s, and beyond. It is a striking feature of Soviet nation-building efforts. The mandated interaction of nations through culture is a particularity of the Soviet approach with a complex set of dynamics. Cross-cultural interaction sought to develop interconnectedness and unity among Soviet nations as part of a

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process that was to eventually resolve into international merger. At the same time, the national confidence derived from outsiders’ approbation of national cultural achievement helped solidify individual national cultural identities while drawing all nations closer together. Thus the dynamics of this interaction intertwined the national and international projects, helping preserve a balance between them while furthering both. The idea proceeds from the Russian experience.

**THE RUSSIAN MODEL: RED TRIANGULATION**

The Bolshevik view of modernity was a European one, and the cultural nation-building Moscow promoted for the Soviet Union’s minority ethnic groups was informed by Western models. More specifically, it was informed by Russian models, which were close at hand. Even before the April 1932 proclamation of socialist realism as the official aesthetic and the pursuant shift toward Russocentrism, Russian accomplishments in the arts were held up as exemplary, even by avowed Bolsheviks convinced of the need to combat Great Russian chauvinism. The Russian experience provided a model that was not only familiar but highly applicable, especially in light of Bolshevik goals and methods in the cultural sphere.

Descriptions of Russia’s literary tradition often emphasize its social orientation and speed of development. As Victor Terras asserts,

> [I]f there is one trait of Russian literature that distinguishes it from the major literatures of the West, it is its persistent claim to a social function … [O]nly in the early 18th century did Russian literature join the mainstream of Western literary life through translation and imitation of works then current in France, England, Germany, and other countries of Western Europe. Before the century was over, works had been produced whose intellectual and aesthetic value equaled anything produced in the West, and Russian literature began to be translated into the languages of Western Europe.30

John Garrard explains that Russia “did not leapfrog or reverse sequential patterns familiar in English or French literary history, but simply compressed them into very short periods of

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time."^^31 Gorky told a similar story at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934: “It is a well-known fact that the exceptional, unprecedentedly powerful development of Russian literature in the 19th century repeated – though with some delay – all the moods and currents of the literature of the West and then, in its turn, influenced it.”^^32 Russian literary history, then, epitomized Bolshevik cultural aspirations for all the peoples of the Soviet Union. Starting from a state of backwardness and isolation, Russian literature followed the developmental path of the West in double-time, catching up with mature European cultures and engaging in the mutual influence that creates the global interconnectedness and international conversation that facilitates the cultural merger and the Weltliteratur (world literature) predicted by Marx and Engels.

Russia’s music and opera, though perhaps not as influential abroad as Russian literature, demonstrated a similar developmental pace while evincing other characteristics that fit the Bolshevik agenda, namely a concerted push, catalyzed by the state, to create a national art. Glinka “consciously embarked on the project of creating Russian national music,” generating his first opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, in “direct response” to the imperial state’s new official nationalism.^^33 The work, which premiered in 1836, was “the first Russian opera that was really an opera (not a singspiel) and … hence the cornerstone of the national repertory.”^^34 Comparably, the need for the Central Asian republics to graduate from “dramatic work with musical accompaniment” to *bona fide* opera is discussed by Moscow music critics in the 1930s in connection with *dekady* (ten-day festivals) of national art held in the Soviet capital.

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32 Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s”ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 10.
34 Taruskin, “M.I. Glinka and the State,” 27.
Stylistically, Glinka’s “cornerstone” opera drew on a variety of sources and influences to create a new synthesis that was received in Russia (and later outside Russia) as emblematic of “Russianness.”\textsuperscript{35} Contemporary Russian reviews heralded the work as “the equal or superior of its European counterparts” and as ushering in “the era of Russian music … when Russia will be able to offer Europe the fruits of her spiritual life.”\textsuperscript{36} Glinka pursued the task of creating a Russian national music through such methods as “assimilating popular styles that already carried associations of nationality” and “essentializing a tradition (like chant or folksong) that would transmit Russianness to any art music that incorporated it.”\textsuperscript{37} Even if Glinka’s opera did not single-handedly initiate “the discourse of musical nationalism” in Russia, his works laid a foundation for subsequent efforts, led most notably from the 1860s onward by a group of St. Petersburg composers known as the ‘Mighty Five’ (known in Russian as \textit{Moguchaia kuchka}).\textsuperscript{38} The group sought to establish a “national school of Russian music” rooted in folksong and an empire-wide music education system based on a European model.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, while Glinka was later mythologized as the founding father of Russian national music, what came to be considered Russian music was the result of a group effort over multiple generations by a variety of players. Stressing the role of presentation and audience reception, Frolova-Walker explains that the characteristic features of Glinka’s innovative experimentation in his final work, \textit{Ruslan and Ludmila}, were “retrospectively essentialized” as “an expression of Russian nationhood.”\textsuperscript{40} The

\textsuperscript{35} Taruskin, “M.I. Glinka and the State,” 29. In Taruskin’s analysis, the opera draws “to a small extent on existing folk melodies” yet “is chiefly modeled on the idiom of the contemporary sentimental urban romance, in which the Russian folk melos had been put through an Italianate refinery.”

\textsuperscript{36} Frolova-Walker, \textit{Russian Music and Nationalism}, 91.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 138.

\textsuperscript{38} Frolova-Walker reminds that “critics had been searching assiduously for signs of Russian identity in operas” for decades before the appearance of Glinka’s contribution. (\textit{Russian Music and Nationalism}, 74)


\textsuperscript{40} Frolova-Walker, \textit{Russian Music and Nationalism}, 138.
mythic narrative of Russian national music resembled that of literature: In 1909, an official of the Russian Musical Society, pointing to the speed of Russia’s musical development, asserted, “In the first half of the nineteenth century, music practically did not exist in Russia.” While the latter statement may be lacking in historical accuracy, observers have pointed to the centrality of music to Russian identity by the dawn of the 20th century.

Describing imperial Russia’s increasing embrace of opera, Julie Buckler points out that “Western opera culture” (including both the artistic work itself and the social practice of opera-going) was appropriated and subsequently “domesticated.” She further notes that a distinguishing feature of Russian opera culture (within “world opera culture”) was the eclectic blend of repertory that included native and Western works, concluding that “Russian opera troupes ultimately identified themselves as part of the Western operatic tradition, while asserting their unique status within this context.” This positioning and self-perception is similarly apparent in the Russian narrative of its literary tradition. Dostoevsky, speaking at the 1880 unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow, pointed to “Pushkin’s capacity to assimilate foreign literary models and transform them into something quintessentially Russian” as a characteristic of Russianness itself and the very quality that makes him a national poet.

These narratives of Russia’s artistic development and place in the world shaped the cultural environment of the late imperial period that, in turn, produced the early Russian

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41 Quoted in Richard Stites, Serfdom, Society and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 54. Stites points out the absurdity of the statement, having documented that “in the twilight years of serfdom, music was very much a part of Russian life.”
42 Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans.
44 Buckler, The Literary Lorgnette, 10.
Bolsheviks, and have implications for how we interpret Soviet nationalities policy (and Soviet culture more broadly). Narratives of development point to a common “master plot” in which a backward, Asiatic Russia that lags behind Europe culturally is led by the state to apply itself to the task of rapid development. The process begins with borrowing and imitating European cultural forms, which Russia masters and adapts through innovative synthesis that reflects a unique Russian national sensibility. This new Russian art is then exported to Western Europe, where its national distinctness and high artistic value is recognized as a contribution to European culture, which leads the world. Central to Russian national pride is not only the quality of its cultural production, but the accelerated speed of its accomplishment: What took Western Europe centuries to achieve artistically, modern Russia managed in a fraction of that time through a deliberate compression of developmental stages. Moreover, Russia is seen not as isolated, but in dialogue with Europe and the world. It esteems and masters the products of European culture, with which it has a common link, but generates its own unique national artistic tradition that is the equal of any European art.

The narrative of Russian cultural development – attaining acceptance and admiration from abroad, and from Western Europe in particular – plaits together Russia’s artistic achievement, its greatest source of national pride and identity, and the acknowledgement of this achievement by an extra–national (in this case, chiefly Western European) audience. The presence of European forms and influences in Russian artistic output assures the target audience of Europeans a comforting familiarity when encountering the otherwise exotic product, highlighting the practical use of hybridity to make national art accessible to a foreign consumer. For example, Russia’s self-conscious approach to its 1909 Gogol centennial aimed to demonstrate “the recognition of Gogol and Russia by Europe” and make “Russian literature an
equal member in the family of West European literatures.” If the cultural merger theme is less pronounced in the pre-revolutionary examples, other themes and metaphors from the period – such as the validation of national art by cultural outsiders and of national cultures bound together as a family – not only cross the revolutionary divide but gain momentum in the leap.

The idea of Russia as a model of cultural development (and, therefore, of national identity formation, which Bolshevik policy confined to the cultural sphere) was operative from the early 1920s. The rhetoric of Russian superiority – its position as “big brother” and “first among equals” in the family of Soviet peoples – became even more pronounced as the 1930s progressed. Some observers point to the Pushkin Jubilee of 1937 as a watershed in the reemergence of Russian nationality, an “imperialist” move to impose Russian culture on the periphery. The Pushkin Jubilee did, in fact, set a standard for subsequent Soviet national poet celebrations, in which each poet-honoree was described as his nation’s Pushkin. Likewise, narratives of the development of musical culture among Soviet ethnic minority groups refer as early as 1922 to nations finding “their own Glinka.” For example, in a May 1922 report, the Russian head of the ethnographic section of the Society for the Study of the Kirgiz People (in what is now Kazakhstan) advocated for “musical schools in which Kazakh children can receive a European musical education with which in the future they can create their own works on the greater foundation of musical creation.” Such a path, he explained, “would lead [the Kazakhs] to their own Glinka,” adding, “[o]nly then can we expect the writing of Kazakh symphonies and operas.”

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47 Kathryn Schild wittily refers to this phenomenon as “a game of ‘Who’s Your Pushkin?’” Schild, *Between Moscow and Baku: National Literatures at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 30. I am aware of no female poets singled out for national poet jubilee treatment in the Stalin era, though certainly there were female poets included in many national literary canons.
Such formulations suggest that the path to cultural development the Bolsheviks envisioned for other Soviet groups was not only Europeanizing but based on Russia’s own example, filtered through a mythologized Russian experience. The imperative to Europeanize and to follow a Western path to development, nation-building, and modernization, mediated through Russia’s precedent is what I am calling red triangulation, and, I argue, it is in evidence from the start of the Bolshevik project. Along with the cultural bias underpinning such a vision, the belief in Russia as a model to emulate has many implications, not all of which proceed from a conviction of Russian superiority and agenda of imperial domination. As mentioned earlier, cultural Europeanization aided by state resources (including coercion) and accelerated artistic development in a compressed timeframe were features of the Russian experience that the Bolsheviks contrived not only to imitate but improve upon. If the Russian model is a telescoped (and therefore improved) version of the Western European one, then the Soviet path would be a telescoped version of the Russian one. In this sense, the Bolsheviks’ ambitions for the “backward” peripheries aimed to outdo the Russian example.

Moreover, according to both the internationalist Soviet and the westward-looking Russian imperial narratives, the pursuit of cultural progress through exposure to, borrowing from, and imitation of the “alien” is not a corrupting, subjugating, or self-negating methodology, but rather a means to identify and develop national distinctiveness. If, according to Dostoevsky, Pushkin’s genius derived from his ability to assimilate the foreign and transform it into something new and “native,” then Pushkin was an apt model for other Soviet nations. Rather than cultural purity, the philosophical emphasis was on mixing, with the resulting synthesis viewed not as compromise, adulteration, or diminution, but as progress, enrichment, and

composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov was often referred to as “Azerbaijan’s Glinka.” One example appears in Qara Qarayev, Nauchno-publisticheskoe nasledie (Baku: Elm, 1988), 205.
uniqueness. On a national level, synthesis is an opportunity to demonstrate autochthonous talent and ingenuity through a capacity for mastery and innovation. On an international level, synthesis is an act of progress because it is integrative and because it is leveling, using all cultural elements, imported and indigenous, as raw material to be fused and transformed into something new and more complex. On both levels, such a recipe held promise for fulfilling the Soviet era’s demand for new art.

The early Bolsheviks had great expectations for the transformational power of art. As a means of unifying, agitating, enlightening, and nation-building, the arts could catalyze all necessary social processes and thus serve to fill in the gaps around the ill-fitting joints where mismatched theory and circumstance came together. In the non-Russian periphery, new national art was encouraged as a means of raising national consciousness and countering the residual sting of Great Russian chauvinism. At the same time, national cultures were to develop in a particular direction – toward modernization, which was seen as Europeanization. The interlocking agendas of nationalization and internationalization meant that Russians, too, would be transformed and internationalized; interaction with brother nations would broaden the Russian cultural horizon, as well, extending it to include elements of the “East” as other members of the Soviet family were moving westward.

Enthusiasm for the Russian model did not necessarily signal a revanchist imperial inclination, a nationalist conviction of Russian cultural superiority, or Russification as the envisioned endpoint. Even in the increasingly Russocentric 1930s, the requirement that “all officially recognized Soviet nationalities … have their own nationally defined ‘Great Traditions’” served to mitigate Russocentrism.49 Yet the centrality of the Russian experience to

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49 Quotation from Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 448. On the Soviet demand for cultural development from each nationality as a factor limiting Russocentrism, see Serhi Yekelchyk, Stalin’s Empire of
the logic of Bolshevik cultural policy was an example of the many instances of Russian practice reframed as Soviet that imparted an undeniable Russocentrism to the Soviet experiment. In the ethnic periphery, even Westernizing, Bolshevik-sympathetic national elites did not necessarily agree with the premise, pace, or any other aspect of red triangulation. In the 1920s, debates about Europeanization in the arts raged among creative elites in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, for example.

**THE LANGUAGE OF CULTURAL UNION**

Like so many other aspects of the Soviet agenda, the public expression of progress toward Soviet cultural unity came to depend on a particular rhetoric that, once established, quickly became ubiquitous. Central to this rhetoric was the sense of mutuality, reciprocity, and exchange reflected in frequently invoked words like *vzaimodeistvie* (interaction), *vzaimootnoshenie* (interrelations), *vzaimosviazi* (interconnection), *vzaimopomoshch’* (mutual assistance), *vzaimoponimanie* (mutual understanding), *vzaimovliianie* (mutual influence), and *vzaimoobogoshchenie* (mutual enrichment). Along with these terms, the word *osvoenie* (together with its related verb *osvoit’*) became a fixture in the Soviet rhetoric of cultural exchange. The word derives from the root *svoi*, a reflexive personal pronoun meaning “one’s own,” an etymological association that is obscured in translation to English, which often renders *osvoenie* as ‘mastery,’ ‘appropriation,’ ‘assimilation,’ or, sometimes, ‘reclamation’ or ‘domestication.’

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While the English terms convey an imposition of control or change, the Russian svoi connotes intimacy or kinship – as in svoi chelovek (a loyalist or insider) or svoi liudi (kin, countrymen, “our kind”).

In the cultural realm, osvoenie was often used in the 1930s with regard to culture of the past, implying its absorption into a Marxist-Leninist narrative through the reworking or reframing of classics. In the context of cross-cultural interaction, the term osvoenie was often connected with the project of familiarizing the entire family of Soviet nations with one another’s art. The idea was to present national cultural products on an all-Union stage to be shared and loved by all Soviet peoples, and eventually become part of a single, common cultural heritage.

Making others’ art “one’s own” fosters an ever-increasing intimacy that renders everyone svoi – an insider, kin. The process was depicted as friendly and inviting, bathed in mutual affection and pride. Just as the rhetoric of Soviet culture euphemized all change as “development,” so osvoenie suggested a friendly expansion of personal horizons and identity rather than the loss or obliteration that ‘assimilation’ or ‘absorption’ can imply.

Art, then, was a potentially powerful agent of unification, but its effectiveness relied on accessibility. The linguistic translation that Gorky urged naturally played a major role in making one nation’s art accessible to all, but, contrary to Gorky’s claims, language was not the only barrier to the mutual understanding of nations. There was pressure to bring national art more in

52 An anecdote about nineteenth-century poet and salon host Countess Evdokiia Rostopchina and her reaction to Alexander Ostrovsky’s play Svoi liudi – sochtemia, conventionally translated into English as It’s a Family Affair – We’ll Settle It Ourselves, illustrates a use of svoi in a context relevant to the current discussion. Upon hearing a reading of an early version of the play, Rostopchina reportedly exclaimed, “It is our Russian Tartuffe! And it does not cede anything to its older brother in truth, power, and energy. Hurrah! Our own [svoia] theatrical literature is being born …” Cited in Vladimir Lakshin, A.N. Ostrovskii (Moscow: Geleos, 2004), 143.

53 Clark explains that “‘world literature’ as Soviet spokesmen used the term,” meant “a world-historical literature that assimilated the great literature of other nations and developed them further in a new Marxist-inflected canon vaunted as their consummation.” (Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome, 22) Clark’s study focuses on European contributions to this Soviet “world literature,” revealing connections with non-Soviet peoples and their cultures that challenge the Soviet isolationism others have posited as characteristic after 1934.
line with European (mediated through Russian) artistic tastes and techniques, a process that was considered “progress.” For example, many national groups were obliged to adopt Western musical forms and standards in the name of cross-cultural accessibility and ties. (See Chapter 2) National creative elites were challenged to produce art that would appeal to both local and universal audiences. (See Chapter 3) Officials were always on the lookout for such multi-purpose works of art. At an August 1950 meeting in Moscow with the Department of Provincial Theaters of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, A.I. Sultanova, head of Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs, reported on the new output of Azerbaijani playwrights. One member of the Provincial Theater Department inquired about any new works that had “not only local significance, but could be used in other republics” and should be “recommended for translation into Russian and other languages of the peoples of the USSR.” The question implies that not all national cultural products were suited for cross-cultural consumption and therefore suggests the complexities of the cultural merger project. Later on in the meeting, a Russian Arts Committee official recommended to Sultanova a play by a North Ossetian author that had recently been performed at Moscow’s Theater of Satire. “[I]t’s very close to you [Azerbaijanis] in color [po koloritu],” he said, adding that the Russian translator had improved the play significantly.

Another element of the vocabulary of cultural rapprochement was “exchange of experience” (obmen opytom). The phrase typically referred to personal interaction between national creative elites that occurred during trips organized expressly to facilitate such contact. The practice occurred in a variety of formats and carried a range of connotations. For example, in August 1933, the Organizing Committee of the new Union of Soviet Writers appointed groups of predominantly Russian Moscow-based writers to visit the national republics. Each “writers’

54 RGALI f. 962, op. 11, d. 372, l. 8.
55 Ibid., ll. 9-10. The conversation also revealed concerns at the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs about whether enough Russian plays were translated into Azerbaijani and produced.
brigade” was sent to a different republic with instructions to gather and familiarize themselves with the local literature, establish communications with local literary organizations, and arrange translation into Russian and publication of “the best literary works” of local writers. In addition, groups were to advertise their brigade activities, along with the national literatures they learned about, by writing articles for placement in the local and central press. The “brigade method” had long been a feature of Soviet organizational culture. In the 1920s and 1930s, brigades of engineers built infrastructure and even entire cities, while brigades of party workers fanned out across the new Soviet Union to spread literacy and other “enlightenment,” organizing the institutions, such as clubs and circles, that would continue the cultural revolutionary project when the brigades moved on. The approach emphasized involvement and direct contact rather than observation from a distance, and had been used before in connection with literary development in the periphery.

In March 1930 a writers’ “shock brigade” of “six well-established Russian literary figures” visited Turkmenistan at the invitation of the republic’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros), which wanted the brigade to produce a literary anthology in honor of the tenth anniversary of Soviet Turkmenia. During their stay, the group was given copious information about Turkmenia and its culture; interacted with the local population in the republic’s regions as

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58 Turksib, the 1929 film by Victor Turin that documents the construction of the eponymous railroad, has been described as a “metatext about the revivification of Turkestan through contact with representatives from the center.” (Holt, The Rise of Insider Iconography, 88)
well as its capital, Ashkhabad; and gave public readings of their own work. The trip yielded not only articles in the central Soviet press, but also a 1932 almanac (Turkmenistan vesnoi [Turkmenistan in Springtime]) of brigade members’ work inspired by their visit.59 Russian writers had been traveling to the empire’s ethnic periphery (sometimes at will, other times under force of exile) for at least a century before the October Revolution, publishing their impressions in literary works of all genres. The brigade of Moscow writers that visited Turkmenistan in 1930 may seem little different from the ethnographic expeditions of the imperial period.60

In the ethnic national periphery, however, in addition to the objective of “raising the cultural level,” the visits aimed at increasing mutual familiarity and influence. As part of a larger effort to familiarize all Soviet citizens with the cultures of the brother republics, the national commissions and literary brigades in 1933 were meant to “encourage writers to actively participate in the process of change rather than just facilitating it through mediation and documentation.” Their tasks included “strengthening ties between brother literatures” and “mutual acquaintance through creative experience.”61 Media coverage presented the brigades as redressing Russian ignorance of national literatures and as a collaboration between visiting brigade members and local hosts.62 In a sense, the collaboration made “progress” a mutually binding activity, and the new cultural products that resulted from this progress were a fusion of diverse elements. Unlike the ethnographer, whose role it was to collect information from a

59 Holt, The Rise of Insider Iconography, 112-8, 186. The group was Nikolai Tikhonov, Grigorii Sannikov, Vladimir Lugovskoi, Viacheslav Ivanov, Leonid Leonov, and Petr Pavlenko. All but Lugovskoi and Leonov had prior connections with the “East,” having spent time in one part or another as travelers, children (Ivanov), or correspondents.

60 See, for example, Susan Layton, Russian Literature and Empire: The Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994). At the Writers’ Union Organizing Committee’s first plenum in fall 1932, Chechen poet Said Baduev requested that brigades be sent to the periphery, invoking Tolstoy, Lermontov, and Pushkin as their precursors. (Schild, Between Moscow and Baku, 67-8)

61 Holt, The Rise of Insider Iconography, 118, 195. Quotation is from a speech by brigade member Grigorii Sannikov given at the All-Turkmenistan Congress of Soviet Writers in May 1934. (RGALI f. 3256, op.1, d. 100, l. 18, cited in Holt, 195, her translation) Holt further discusses the collaboration aspect on 157, 196.

position of scientific detachment, in the “creative exchange” of the brigade, everyone – guest and host alike – was implicated in and changed by the process of building socialism.\(^6^3\) In the cultural sphere, the brigade method was thus not only a means of engagement and change, but also of merger-oriented exchange and integration.

To forge a unified Soviet community out of a diverse and atomized population, ties were needed not only between center and periphery but between peripheries as well. Thus, center-to-periphery (or periphery-to-center) was not the only format for brigade cultural exchange.\(^6^4\) When national minority writers asked, “Why not send [a] Belorussian writer with the brigade to Kazakhstan, and Ukrainians to Belorussia? This would have great significance both in creating proletarian internationalism and helping the writer in general,” the Writers’ Union obliged.\(^6^5\) In 1934, a group of Belorussian writers visited Georgia, and numerous trips sponsored in 1935 by the Nationalities Section of the Writers’ Union were followed in 1936 by plans for Tatar-Uzbek and Armenian-Kazakh “creative brigades” along the lines of the earlier Belorussian-Georgian experience. The length of stay for the 1936 brigades was three months, with the central Writers’ Union and local republican writers’ unions each contributing half of the budget.\(^6^6\)

The brigade exchanges were not limited to the literary sphere. By the mid-1930s, there is evidence of periphery-to-periphery contact among musicians, both in brigade and individual formats, indicating that the Organizing Committee of the Union of Soviet Composers was taking

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\(^6^3\) From her longitudinal analysis of Russian-language depictions of Turkmenia over the 1920s and ‘30s, Holt concludes that there is a shift from “scholarly remove” – an “ethnographic” perspective contingent on the observer as outsider – to “integration and often simulation of native and non-Russian perspectives on Turkestan,” a trend we might call “moving closer” (sblizhenie). Holt, *The Rise of Insider Iconography*, 278, 281, passim.

\(^6^4\) The actors of Uzbekistan’s Khamza Theater sent to study in Moscow in the mid-1920s are an example of the periphery-to-center model. In addition, in the 1930s Moscow Conservatory ran special studios for training opera talent from several republics. On these opera studios, see Lilia Izvelevna Salikhova, *Gosudarstvennaia operaia studia pri Moskovskoi gosudarstvennoi konservatorii (1934-1938) v muzikal’noi kul’ture Tatarii 30-x godov XX veka*, kandidatskaia dissertatsiia, Kazanskia gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia im. N.G. Zhiganova, 2009.


\(^6^6\) İnqilab va Mədəniyyot No. 5, 1934, Khronika; Schild, *Between Moscow and Baku*, 80; RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 137, l. 5ob.
a cue from the Writers’ Union (although, unlike its literary counterpart, the Composers’ Union did not have a Nationalities Section). A brigade of Uzbek musicians had visited Baku in the mid-1930s, and at a meeting of republican arts workers in late 1938, an Uzbek singer was effusive about the usefulness of “creative ties” with brother republics, adding that her trip to Georgia had provided enormous inspiration for her “creative stores.” In addition to personal contact, there was a mandate for arts organizations to engage in the exchange of national cultural products as well. In October 1936 the board of Azerbaijan’s Composers’ Union discussed a recent letter from the director of Odessa’s conservatory requesting materials pertaining to the “history of the development of Azerbaijani music, Turkic melodies, the cultural development of Turkic music, etc., for the organization of an evening of the music of Azerbaijan.” A year later, the head of the music section of Ukraine’s Radio Committee requested recommendations of works by members of Azerbaijan’s Composers’ Union for broadcast on Ukrainian radio. Such queries were not unusual; records of them are plentiful in post-Soviet archives.

The 1938 charter of Azerbaijan’s State Philharmonic identified one of the organization’s main tasks as “popularizing the best works of Azerbaijani, Russian, and European musical and literary classics, the music of the peoples of the USSR, and folk art.” And at a January 1939 meeting of Azerbaijan’s Shevchenko Jubilee Committee, a representative of the republic’s Radio Committee suggested an exchange in which Ukrainian radio would broadcast the program Azerbaijan had prepared on Taras Shevchenko and Baku would air Ukraine’s Shevchenko

67 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 458, l. 19, 77.
68 ARƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 14, səh. 23-23 tərs tərəf. The determination of what music to send is given in f. 254, siy. 1, iş 14, səh. 30 tərs tərəf.
69 ARƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 16, səh. 118.
70 For example, the logbook of the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union’s correspondence from September 1939 through December 1940 shows numerous requests received from other republics and provincial cities in the RSFSR for scores of Azerbaijani music. Azerbaijan likewise sent reciprocal requests to other republics. (ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 82, passim; f. 345, siy. 1, iş 77, səh. 237-8; f. 345, siy. 1, iş 19, səh. 50)
71 ARƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 77, səh. 69-70.
program. Tajikistan’s opera repertoire for 1939 included the contributions of several brother republics, signaling progress toward an all-Union opera canon. In an indication that local Moscow institutions were not excused from the “creative exchange” requirement, a January 1937 resolution of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs criticized the work of the Moscow branch of the Union of Soviet Composers for weak ties “with the composers unions and creative musical life of the brother republics.” The resolution declared one of the main tasks of the Moscow branch to be “establishing contacts and exchange of work experience with union composers of the brother republics” and intended

to propose that the union’s presidium systematically invite individual composers from the Union republics and periphery of the RSFSR for familiarization with their works, to organize study of composers of individual republics, providing mutual enrichment of creative work and more successful development of Soviet music.

In June 1937, perhaps in response to the Arts Committee’s criticism, the head of the repertory department of Moscow’s State Philharmonic contacted Azerbaijani Composers’ Union chair Uzeyir Hajibeyov (Üzeyir Hacıbəyov) requesting suggestions from his works that the Moscow orchestra might include in a planned series of concerts featuring the music of Soviet composers of the brother republics.

There appears to have been a particular emphasis on repertoire-sharing among the South Caucasian republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Since 1923, the three had been equal partners in the Transcaucasian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (ZSFSR), arguably an arrangement designed to force cooperation among nations whose populations lived in ethnically mixed areas and among whom there was a recent history of friction. In 1936, with the ZSFSR’s abolition and the accession of its three members to the status of Union-level republics, cultural

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72 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 534, səh. 9.
73 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 582, l. 10. Works mentioned include, from Azerbaijan, Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s Arshin Mal Alan and, from Uzbekistan, Reinhold Glière’s Giul’sara.
74 Biulleten’ Vsesoiuznogo Komiteta po delam iskusstv No. 1, 1937: 15-17, in RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 169, ll. 9-10.
75 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 16, səh. 169.
ties were substituted for the recently cut political ones as a means of facilitating inter-ethnic harmony. In its 1939 report to the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs in Moscow, Georgia’s Directorate of Arts Affairs stressed “the special attention it had given to showing the accomplishments of the musical art of the neighboring brother republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.” The same year, the Azerbaijan State Opera’s opera studio included an Azerbaijani-language production of a Georgian opera in its student repertoire for the 1939-40 school year, alongside productions of *Tosca* and *Madame Butterfly*.76 Just as the Bolshevik plan called for national expression in the cultural sphere as a substitute for national political self-determination, so the increase in national political autonomy for the three largest ethnic groups of the South Caucasus was counterbalanced by an intensification of cultural ties (or at least a show of such intensification) among the three new union republics, each of which contained substantial minority populations who identified with the ethnicity of the other two.

A comment made by Uzbek singer Khalima Nasyrova at a December 1938 meeting of Uzbekistan’s arts workers in Tashkent may shed some light on the logic motivating the embrace of the repertoire of the Soviet brother nations. Discussing the harm done by “bourgeois nationalists,” Nasyrova claimed that these enemies of the people had encouraged singing in the old style, thus stalling “the development of vocal art” in Uzbekistan. She added that those who had fallen under their influence applauded when she and another artist sang in Uzbek, but when they sang songs in Armenian and Azerbaijani, the audience yelled, “Don’t give us these songs, give us Uzbek ones!” She blamed this lack of receptiveness on the bourgeois nationalist effort to “prevent us from developing our own art on the basis of the experience of brother republics.”77

Thus the incorporation and consumption of other nations’ cultural products was not only a sign

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76 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 537, l. 25; ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 25, səh. 18-20. The Georgian opera was Zakaria Paliashvili’s *Keto and Kote*.
77 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 458, l. 50.
of participation in the approved method of national development and merger, but also a rejection of the narrowness and isolation characteristic of bourgeois nationalism. In a July 1937 decree, the head of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, Platon Kerzhentsev, had identified neglect of the art of other nationalities as evidence of bourgeois nationalism. The decree coincided with intensified purges of national elites in the ethnic periphery that relied largely on accusations of bourgeois nationalism. At the same time, national republics were increasingly required to produce national art as evidence of their own cultural development. It was therefore a moment when national elites found themselves in the most perverse of situations. While the outlandishness of purge accusations meant that no behavior could guarantee sanctuary from the prevailing murderousness, demonstrative embrace of the cultures of brother nations was generally advised.

The requirement that “all Soviet nationalities be deeply moved by the art of other Soviet nationalities” has been associated with another staple of the rhetoric about the harmonious unity of the ethnically diverse Soviet population, the “friendship of peoples” (*druzhba narodov*). The phrase, often traced to a December 1935 speech Stalin gave to a delegation of Central Asian collective farm workers visiting Moscow, referred to the close bonds among the Soviet nations that made their union strong. The term immediately became part of obligatory Soviet fustian, especially in connection with public demonstrations of Soviet diversity, which, inevitably,

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78 Decree of 17 July 1937 “On the status of the Directorate of Arts Affairs under the SNK of the Armenian SSR,” *Biulleten’ Vsesoiuznogo Komiteta po delam iskusstv* Nos. 7-8, 1937: 18-9, in RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 169, II. 90-900b. Kerzhentsev blamed “nationalist elements” in Armenia for such “serious distortions of Lenin-Stalin national policy” as the absence of “plays from the life of the brother peoples of the Transcaucasus” from the repertoire of Armenian theaters and Armenian opera’s “neglect of Russian music and the works of Soviet composers.” As a result, the head of Armenia’s Directorate of Arts Affairs was sacked and the Armenian State Opera was required to include productions of one Russian classic opera and one new Soviet opera in its 1937-8 season.

79 Slezkin, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 447.

80 Stalin said, “The friendship between the nations of the USSR is a great and serious conquest. Since as long as this friendship exists, the peoples of our country will be free and invincible. We fear no enemies, internal or external, while this friendship lives and prospers.” The excerpt appears as an epigraph in a volume of the literary almanac *Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR* (*Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR*). (See Chapter 1)
doubled as celebrations of Soviet unity. Martin interprets the friendship of peoples “campaign” as Stalin’s solution to a “perceived lack of unity” that resulted from the policy of promoting minority national cultural identities. The “very existence of national culture was controversial,” Martin explains, because it downplayed the utopian idea of an international, or supranational, culture that would unite all groups. At the same time, “[o]ne of the major features of the Friendship of Peoples was the rehabilitation of traditional Russian culture and Russian nationalism as a force for Soviet unity.”

In contrast, I see the many cultural activities promoted under the friendship of peoples rubric – events such as festivals of national art and celebrations of national poets – as the systematization of cross-cultural interaction necessary to forge a unified Soviet identity and the ritualization of an ongoing process of cross-cultural rapprochement begun years earlier. Moreover, rather than a controversial presence, national cultures contributed the material for building international culture, just as national products were the building blocks of an integrated international economy. The consumption of national products – material and intellectual – by all nations effected the process of integration, and the friendship of peoples framework provided the multicultural audience needed to make national art universal. A nation’s presentation of its artistic product and the admiring consumption of it by the all-Union audience was a cultural transaction through which the individual nation contributed to building a common Soviet culture. In exchange, the individual “producer” nation was validated. Rather than the Russocentric remediation of a disunity problem, the friendship of peoples perpetuated the tensions inherent to Soviet nationalities policy, such as the coexisting drive to construct and erode national identities and elites that Martin cites. The emergence of the friendship of nations idea represents a

81 Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 182, 270.
82 Ibid., 22, 269, passim.
continuity and even intensification of earlier nationalities policy rather than a revision or reversal of it.\textsuperscript{83}

Likewise, the growing Russocentrism of the Stalinist 1930s can also be seen as an intensification of earlier Russocentric trends that had been a powerful presence in the non-Russian periphery in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{84} In 1923, for example, Azerbaijan’s ethnic Azeri Commissar of Enlightenment Mustafa Quliyev had invited Russian composer Reinhold Glière to come to Baku to compose an Azerbaijani national opera.\textsuperscript{85} In addition to exploring the extent to which the dynamics of the national and international were interdependent in the Soviet context, this dissertation argues that this interdependence was informed by Russia’s past experience and was therefore a manifestation of Russocentrism. The changes in the implementation of nationalities policy in the 1930s reflect a change in cultural infrastructure and resources. By the mid-1930s, Soviet establishment of arts institutions and cultivation of ethnic professional talent had Westernized (by default, Russianized) and codified national arts to a degree that would support more intensive cross-cultural interaction. National elites who objected to developments in this

\textsuperscript{83} Martin, for instance, cites the Skrypnyk affair in Ukraine as setting the precedent for a 1930s revision of korenizatsiia (nativization) into “a secondary, soft-line policy” prompted by Russian resentment over preferential treatment of ethnic minorities and Moscow’s fear of “national assertiveness” led to the redirecting of korenizatsiia. A shift toward emphasis on cultural production in the policy of promoting minority nations may have helped counterbalance what Martin sees as a shift away from other kinds of preferences for ethnic minorities and may explain the increased attention to national minorities in the mid-1930s, a development noted by many observers. In contrast, I argue that the cultural sphere (along, of course, with the economic) was always the site for national development and international cultural merger. Martin, \textit{The Affirmative Action Empire}, Chapter 9, here 393.

\textsuperscript{84} For example, David Brandenberger has elaborated the theme of Stalin-era Russification by explaining that the architects of party propaganda turned to “non-Marxist heroes drawn from the annals of the Russian national past” as a more effective means to deliver official ideology after realizing that earlier attempts at dissemination had little traction with the public. [Brandenberger, \textit{Propaganda State in Crisis: Soviet Ideology, Indoctrination, and Terror under Stalin, 1927-1941} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 5] At the same time, culture workers in the ethnic republics were populating their evolving national canons with figures from their own national pasts, reconfigured as the protagonists of operas and ballets. The Russian embrace of patriotism and national pride, Brandenberger contends, represents a withdrawal from ideology in the name of striking a chord with the Russian public. Analogous moves in the ethnic republics, however, do not necessarily have the same meaning. Promoting a pantheon of ethnic national heroes for the “backward peoples” seems to represent continuity with the ideology of the 1920s rather than repudiation or concession.

\textsuperscript{85} The practice of inviting composers from the European part of the Soviet Union to the ethnic periphery (especially Central Asia) to produce national operas is associated with the 1930s.
direction had been cowed or otherwise silenced. Further, the provision of socialist realism as a common guide for artistic expression in the entire country assured common reference points that helped make all art universally accessible. The conditions had been established for advancement to the next step in the process of cultural unification.

The Art of Nation-Building

As the promotion of non-Russian national cultures continued and even intensified in the late 1930s, some have remarked on a devolution to “highly clichéd” demonstrations of national art and a “new affirmation of the exotic” alongside a turn to the “prerevolutionary ‘classics.’” Martin argues that Soviet policy sought to promote not “national culture,” but rather “national identity” or “symbolic ethnicity,” relying on “symbolic markers of national identity” such as “national folklore, museums, dress, food, costumes, opera, poets, progressive historical events and classic literary works”; others describe the cultural production connected with these promotional efforts as “ethnic kitsch.” Such analyses suggest that in an increasingly Russocentric climate, interest in the cultural achievement of the Soviet Union’s non-Russian groups was becoming shallower. If the center’s commitment to ethnic particularism did not wane, its appetite was more easily satisfied by merely stylized expressions of ethnicity.

It is true that celebrations of ethnic culture were needed as performances of the friendship of nations ethos, and Moscow arts intelligentsia were obliged to fill newspaper columns with their reactions, typically as jubilant as they were platitudinous. Yet to dismiss the Soviet cultural products and practices developed in response to the various demands of nationalities policy as empty, essentialized, and coerced risks overlooking a valuable source of information about the

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Soviet center, respective peripheries, and the complex dynamics of the relationships between them. This dissertation analyzes examples of the institutions established in the 1930s to promote familiarization with national cultures as part of the Soviet nation-building agenda in all its singularity and multiplicity. As sites of national self-expression and cross-cultural exchange, events such as the *dekada* (ten-day festival) of national art in Moscow and the all-Union celebration of a national poet jubilee provide insight into the nature of cultural nationalism in the Soviet project. As exercises in self-presentation and consumption, these activities were characterized by a purposeful interweaving of the particular and the universal, of diversity and unity that lay at the core of the Soviet cultural experiment.

In the spirit of this interconnectedness of identity, the structure of this dissertation illustrates the interdependence of specific and general by alternating between these approaches. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on institutions and methods devised to implement and monitor the Soviet cultural agenda with respect to the development of minority nations as well as a unified all-Soviet nation. Two figures influential in shaping Soviet cultural life and the institutions they led are the focus of Chapter 1. Starting in the revolutionary period, writer Maxim Gorky and Bolshevik Platon Kerzhentsev were vocal about their visions for Soviet cultural life, but it was not until the 1930s that they were put in charge of two new country-wide institutions, the Union of Soviet Writers and the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, respectively. I consider the role of these organizations in forging a unified identity from the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Soviet Union, and the contributions Gorky and Kerzhentsev made (or did not make) to this project. A middle section discussing examples of all-Union cultural events held before the centralization of arts bureaucracy in the 1930s contextualizes the theme of continuity and change in mechanisms of cross-cultural interaction over the first two decades of Soviet life.
While discussions of Gorky and the Writers’ Union place literature at the center of analysis in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 is devoted to the role of music in the Soviet agenda of cultural exchange and synthesis, tracing the pre-revolutionary roots of Soviet ideas about the uses of music. This lens thus brings into focus continuities in Soviet nationalities policy that cross the revolutionary divide. In particular, the examples of vocal and instrumental folk ensembles reprise the idea of red triangulation presented in the Introduction as a feature of Soviet culture. These two chapters together convey a sense of the debates, themes, and projects that emerged in connection with Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s and into the 1930s as well as the centrality of cultural exchange and rapprochement to the entire enterprise.

Chapters 3 through 5 shift perspectives to consider the themes identified in previous chapters through a case study of Soviet Azerbaijan, which presents a particularly interesting opportunity for studying nation-building and modernization in the Soviet periphery. Located in the South Caucasus, the territory that became the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic had been part of a number of empires over its history, most recently the Persian and then, from 1828, the Russian. The Turkic language widely spoken among the local population provided a basis for cultural affinity with the Ottoman Empire, which had also once ruled the territory. At the same time, Persian cultural influence was strong, as a result of proximity, political history, and the Shia Islam that predominated among the area’s inhabitants. In addition, the area’s ethnically mixed population included significant numbers of Armenians as well as other ethnic groups of the South Caucasus. From the mid-19th century, the multilingualism of local cultural elites increasingly included Russian, and the provincial capital of Tiflis became a center of intellectual life for the entire region, increasing opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. From the 1870s on, the development of the oil industry in the Caspian Sea port of Baku drew a diverse
population from Europe, the Russian Empire, and the Middle East, making the city into the “ethnic kaleidoscope” described by Stalin, who had lived there before 1917.

The same period (mid-19th century through Sovietization in 1920) saw a modernizing cultural flowering known as the Azerbaijani Enlightenment, led by a progressive, reform-minded stratum of the urban secular elite (first active in Tiflis, but by the turn of the 20th century increasingly Baku-based as well). Turkic artists and intellectuals in these decades experimented with cultural borrowing and mixing, establishing a vibrant literary, theatrical, and musical scene in Baku that laid the foundations for future accomplishment in the arts as well as a nascent Azerbaijani national cultural identity. Following a brief period of independence, Azerbaijan joined the Soviet world, where it occupied “an intermediate position on the Soviet spectrum between established nationalities that were primarily concerned with protecting their cultural heritage, like the Georgians, and newer ones that were still determining that heritage, like the Turkmen.” With Azerbaijan’s multiethnic society, cultural polyvalence, and historical affinity for innovative creative synthesis, the republic’s political and cultural leaders saw opportunity in the value the new regime placed on cross-cultural interaction and claimed a position at the forefront of this aspect of Soviet cultural development.

My case study of Azerbaijani national culture includes three chapters, one devoted to each of three events: the 1938 Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in Moscow, the 1940 Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow, and the 800th jubilee of poet Nizami Ganjevi. Attention in each chapter to the origins and connotations of such celebrations of national culture yields insight into the dynamics and priorities of Soviet policy, such as the interconnection between the

88 While the term ‘Azerbaijan’ was used as a territorial designation in the Russian imperial period, ‘Azerbaijani’ did not come into use as an ethnonym until 1937. Before that, both the ethnicity and language were referred to as ‘Turkic’ (Azerbaijani: türk; Russian: tiurkskii). See Notes on Transliteration, Terms, and Sources.
89 Schild, Between Moscow and Baku, 5.
production of national art and its consumption by an audience outside the nation and the simultaneous construction of national identity on multiple levels. At the same time, the chapters consider the particular circumstances that conditioned Azerbaijan’s self-presentation and reception along with the meaning of these experiences for the development of Azerbaijan’s modern national identity. Taken together, the final three chapters show how talented Soviet Azerbaijani nation-builders managed to put the tensions of Soviet nationalities policy to use in pursuit of their own national goals by staking out a national identity as pioneers of internationalism.

In Chapter 1, however, the narrative returns to Old Bolsheviks in Moscow and the role of culture in creating a united Soviet nation.
CHAPTER 1

INSTITUTIONS OF ART AND NATION

The Soviet 1930s are noted as a period of intensive socialist construction and crystallization of Soviet culture – especially public culture – when many institutions and rituals were established that endured for decades, some even until the end of the Soviet Union. In the creative fields, the introduction of socialist realism and reorganization of the arts bureaucracy are associated with increased centralization and canon-formation. This chapter examines two organizations introduced to the Soviet arts bureaucracy in the 1930s and the men who initially led them from the perspective of nationalities policy: Maxim Gorky at the Union of Soviet Writers and Platon Kerzhentsev at the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs.

As creations of the 1930s, these cultural organizations are usually examined in the context of that decade, an approach that tends to illuminate differences rather than continuities with the 1920s. As early Bolsheviks who had been active thinkers and leaders of Soviet cultural life since the revolution, both Gorky and Kerzhentsev provide an opportunity to focus on connections between the 1930s and previous decades from the perspective of the Soviet agenda for national cultures. As all-Union organizations, the Arts Committee and Writers’ Union were headquartered in Moscow and led mostly by Russians but oversaw a network of local branches in the national republics. They were therefore at the center of the challenge of navigating Soviet national diversity and unity.

This chapter discusses the approaches to this challenge demonstrated in all-Union activities organized by the Writers’ Union and Arts Committee. In order to contextualize how these organs and their leaders understood, shaped, and implemented the Soviet agenda in national arts, this chapter also examines two all-Union events that occurred before the formation

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90 Of course, they are also noted as a period of intensive demolition and destruction, especially of human life.
of these organizations: the All-Russian Agriculture and Craft Exhibition of 1923 and the First
Olimpiada (Olympiad) of the Arts of the Peoples of the Soviet Union in 1930. This chapter’s
juxtaposition of these intercultural activities and encounters illuminates the influences on Soviet
nationalities policy discussed in the Introduction from a new angle. The result is a view of Soviet
interethnic relations in which the continuities across decades are visible and the reversals that
have governed past periodizations of Soviet nationalities policy recede.

GORKY AND THE GATHERING OF NATIONS IN PRINT

At the first Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934, Gorky had called for more
translation and anthologizing to help the Soviet nations get to know each other and become
closer. Thereafter he was associated with this ideal of sharing literary culture across national
lines and with Soviet initiatives to realize it. In fact, Gorky had been working at this project of
cross-cultural interaction for years. In 1918-19, along with Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly
Lunacharsky, he had initiated the World Literature (Vsemirnaia literatura) publishing house in
Petrograd (after 1924, Leningrad). The enterprise was created with the intention of publishing
the best works of world literature of the eighteenth through twentieth centuries in Russian
translation. 91 Describing the goals of the World Literature project, Gorky said the books
published would serve as a

broad historical-literary compilation, which would give the reader a chance to become
acquainted in detail with the emergence, creative output, and demise of literary schools … the mutual influence of various nations, and generally with the process of literary
evolution in its historical progression. 92

dugward.ru/library/hodasevich/hodasevich_gorkiy2.html; Maria Khotimsky, “World Literature, Soviet Style: A
abc/default.asp

41
The project reflected Gorky’s notion of “literature as a path to universal humanism,” described in the publishing house’s catalog:

There is no universal Literature because – as yet – there has never been any universal language common to all mankind; but all Literature, both prose and poetry, is saturated with sentiments, thoughts, ideas, which belong to the whole human race and express the one sacred longing of Man for the joys of spiritual freedom …

Writing to Lenin about the uses of the project, Gorky suggested

I think we would do well to translate [the publishing house’s catalog] into all European languages and to send them to Germany, England, France, the Scandinavian countries, and so forth, in order that the proletariat of the West, and all people such as Anatole France, H.G. Wells […] could see for themselves that the Russian proletariat is not simply barbarous, and that we understand internationalism much more broadly than they, cultured people, do. Under the most dire conditions possible, we could manage something that they should have thought of long ago.

Gorky’s comments demonstrate the Bolshevik intelligentsia’s cultural and social orientation toward the West: the World Literature project focused on European thought, and its publisher was concerned with what Europeans were thinking (specifically, about Russia and the Soviet regime). Europe’s tradition of progressive thought had produced Marx, but now Russia had surpassed it to take its place in the avant-garde, exporting its cultural product to Europe. Gorky’s letter shows a strategic awareness of how Russia is perceived from the outside.

While initial plans for the World Literature series included only Western European and American authors, the list was soon expanded to include “Eastern” literature, and prominent

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96 It also exemplifies how a single initiative can be projected to different audiences in pursuit of different goals. As demonstrated in chapters 3-5, both these habits were adopted by Soviet republican governments.
Russian Orientologists “with European names” were enlisted to participate. The publishing house’s Eastern Department produced volumes in a series entitled ‘Literature of the East’ \((\text{Literatura Vostoka})\) with the express aim of familiarizing the Russian audience with Eastern cultures and uniting East and West. The introduction to the first volume of the series explained,

> Russian readers have long viewed world literature as the literature of the West. Now with the help of Russian specialists on Eastern studies, the World Literature Publishing House is the first to make masterpieces of Eastern literature an integral part of world literature, and to connect them with the heritage of the Western literatures.\(^9^8\)

While the effort to create a more inclusive literary canon is notable, the reliance on Russian Orientology to curate the texts limited the presentation of non-Western voices, and Gorky’s other comments make clear his focus on French, British, and German literature.\(^9^9\)

Plagued by ongoing financial difficulties, the World Literature publishing house officially closed in January 1925, but Gorky continued to advocate for literature as a space for universal human interaction, and this stance became part of the Soviet “ideological agenda to facilitate mutual exchange between Soviet Peoples.”\(^1^0^0\) In September 1928 Gorky had published an article in \textit{Pravda} announcing the state publishing house’s (Gosizdat) new series of “almanacs of the artistic literature that is growing and developing in all our union republics.” Such publications are needed, he explained, because “the art of the word – artistic literature” promotes people’s mutual understanding of one another “from the inside.” He called on the writers’ organizations of the Union republics to create editorial groups that would provide Gosizdat in Moscow with works of national poetry and prose. Contrasting the Soviet present with the tsarist


\(^9^9\) Soviet Eastern republics’ struggle with the Soviet Orientology establishment over control of the presentation of what they came to identify as their own national heritage is addressed in Chapter 5 in the example of Azerbaijan.

past, Gorky declared that for the worker-peasant state, there are no “aliens [ino_rodtsy].”¹⁰¹ The 
Pravda article was republished as the introduction to a 1929 issue of The Soviet Land (Sovetskaia strana), a short-lived almanac established by the Soviet government for the tenth 
anniversary of the October revolution. The aim of the almanac was “to familiarize the 
multinational USSR with the literary accomplishments of individual peoples of the Union.”¹⁰² 
Gorky’s article was republished again in 1937 as a prologue to the first volume of the almanac 
Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR (Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR), another publishing 
project aimed at making the cultures of the Soviet brother republics more accessible to one 
another.¹⁰³

The establishment of the Union of Soviet Writers following the Central Committee’s 
April 23, 1932 resolution marked the start of a new stage in the drive toward cultural 
rapprochement.¹⁰⁴ The union not only provided administrative infrastructure to coordinate 
translation efforts and facilitate interaction among literati of the Soviet nations, it also exerted a 
unifying force through the introduction of a new official aesthetic, socialist realism. Gorky was 
named honorary chair of the new union’s Organizing Committee, which, between its formation 
in 1932 and the 1934 Congress that marked the fulfillment of its assignment, held three plenums 
at which representatives from the national republics voiced their concerns.¹⁰⁵ They complained

¹⁰² “Maksim Gor’kii i literatura narodov SSSR,” in Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR, Al’manakh 1 (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 
¹⁰³ The Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR project is discussed later in this chapter. Another effort in the same vein was 
Literature of the Nationalities of the USSR (Literatura natsional’nostei SSSR), a “critical-bibliographical bulletin” 
published between 1932 and 1935 by the Critical-Bibliographical Institute in Moscow. It contained summaries of 
fiction and criticism published in national languages.
¹⁰⁴ The resolution, “On the Restructuring of Literary and Arts Organizations,” dissolved all existing writers’ 
organizations and ordered the establishment of a single union for writers, to be followed by the same reorganization 
in other branches of the arts.
¹⁰⁵ In her detailed study of the 1934 congress and the years of organizational work that preceded it, Kathryn Schild 
describes how the Organizing Committee used the period from its formation in 1932 to the Congress in 1934 “to 
reconcile Moscow’s vision of national literatures with the experience of national writers.” (Schild, Between Moscow
of lack of resources and attention from Moscow and indifference on the part of central publishing organs such as the journal *The Literary Gazette* (*Literaturnaia gazeta*), dominated by Russians with no interest in national literatures. When Russian writers did devote some attention to minority nations, they represented the periphery through “ethnographic sketches” and stereotypes.  

In an attempt to address these objections, the Organizing Committee created a nationalities sector in 1933, whose role was to help coordinate the promotion of national literatures and the directing of resources (material, attention, and professional) to the peripheries. With the enthusiastic support of national delegates at the 1934 Congress, the nationalities sector became a permanent feature of the new Writers’ Union bureaucracy, continuing its role as facilitator between Russian center and non-Russian periphery.  

As mentioned in the Introduction, one of the nationalities sector’s activities was organizing trips for “brigades” of writers to various republics in visits that aimed at cross-cultural familiarization, exchange, and interaction.

Members of local literary communities reportedly appreciated the brigades for the assistance they provided in securing resources and exposure for national literatures. For the national republics, it was useful to have prominent and influential Russian literati on the brigades, as their involvement helped draw attention and prestige to particular national literatures. For example, in 1934, upon the brigades’ return to Moscow, they organized literary evenings, exhibitions, and concerts in the capital to popularize the culture of one or another national republic. In addition, brigade members helped raise the profiles of national literatures by

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106 Schild, *Between Moscow and Baku*, 41, 47.
107 Ibid., 127.
writing about them. Their experience in the periphery led them to be considered by Moscow as “experts” on a given region, and they helped advocate for Moscow publishing houses to print Russian translations of national literatures. A number of brigade veterans worked on translations of national poetry. Even though few knew the language(s) from which they were translating (they worked from Russian line translations, a practice discussed in Chapter 4), their participation and advocacy were important to the republics’ goals of developing the reputation and audience for their national literature. Eventually, the Writers’ Union established national commissions to represent republican literatures in Moscow, on which a number of original brigade members served along with republican representatives.

The 1934 Congress itself, which officially launched the new Union of Soviet Writers, was an emphatically multinational affair, “a two-week performance” that invented and institutionalized “Soviet multinational literature.” National delegates spoke and an exhibition was organized to equip visitors with some background knowledge about each national literary tradition and, naturally, its growth under Soviet rule. Despite prior warnings that “national promotion could be interpreted as bourgeois nationalism,” delegates insisted that their “national literatures deserved world recognition, and frequently already had it.” Gorky’s opening speech may have set “Russian literature as the progressive outcome of world literature and the universal standard to which inherently specific national literatures should aspire,” but the national delegates’ presentations implied challenges to narratives of Russian centrality and of cultural

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108 “Literatura bratskikh respublik – v tsentr vnimania,” Pravda, 9 September 1933, 4. Schild points out, however, that the stability and productivity of these brigades varied widely.
109 Schild makes these points as well. (Schild, Between Moscow and Baku, 73-5) On evenings of national culture organized in Moscow, see also Holt, The Rise of Insider Iconography, 184-6.
110 Petr Pavlenko, Vladimir Lugovskoi, and Petr Skosyrev are examples of brigade veterans who became poet-translator-advocates. They resurface in Chapters 4 and 5 in connection with the promotion of Azerbaijani culture.
112 Schild, Between Moscow and Baku, 82.
113 Ibid., 62, 97.
flowering only after socialism.\textsuperscript{114} Kazakh poet Saken Seifullin criticized misrepresentation of Central Asia by Russian writers, citing several prominent ones by name as examples of this problem. Knowing nothing about Soviet nationalities and not bothering to learn, he charged, they present what they have invented as real.\textsuperscript{115} The Congress gave national writers an opportunity to define their national goals and agendas, assert their national canons and narratives, and practice presenting them to a multinational (especially Russian) public. The gathering in Moscow was also an opportunity to pick up strategies from one another and devise new ones.

Despite the mixed signals sent by a fundamental Russocentrism, the larger message of the Congress was clear: brother nations must learn more about each other and the best way to do this was to learn about one another’s literature; Gorky himself admitted that he knew too little on the subject of other nations’ literary traditions.\textsuperscript{116} For Party ideologues, exposure and familiarity across cultures was part of the plan for cultural merger. Rather than promoting the development of national cultures until the exhaustion of the national impulse signaled the time for an international socialist culture (as Stalin had described the policy in 1929), the state was in fact already nudging national cultures closer together under the rubric of encouraging national expression.\textsuperscript{117} While the rhetoric and resources supporting national cultures appealed to ethnic minorities, these were strategies intended to make the various cultures more understandable and accessible to each other, and thus ultimately more assimilable. The stages of national cultural development and construction of transnational Soviet socialist culture were not consecutive but

\textsuperscript{114} Schild, \textit{Between Moscow and Baku}, 87.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s”ezd sovetskih pisatelei}, 606-7. Seifullin was executed in 1938.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 679-80. Other themes included the importance of folklore and group work and how to make use of the literature inherited from the past.
\textsuperscript{117} Stalin’s description was part of a speech to a delegation of Ukrainian writers visiting Moscow in February 1929. The text of the speech is reproduced in Andrei Artizov and Oleg Naumov (eds.), \textit{Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsia. Dokumenty TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b), VchK-OGPU-NKVD o kul’turoi politike, 1917-1953 gg.} (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond “Demokratia,” 1999) and appears in English translation in Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), \textit{Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).
pursued simultaneously. They were also interconnected: cross-cultural interaction and mutual appreciation provided a basis for unity and cultural diplomacy while satisfying minority nations’ craving for a larger stage and external recognition, an impulse the Russians had modeled. In terms of reaching an internationalist ideal, Russians were the source of the theory and of the audience required for its implementation.

Although the shared aesthetics of socialist realism would help increase cross-cultural intelligibility of Soviet national literatures and could guide the reframing of a nation’s literary tradition for presentation to non-nationals, translation was still required to access the “universalism” of the various Soviet national literatures. In his closing speech at the 1934 Congress, “Gorky emphasized the need for translations in the process of ‘organizing the all-Union literature as a whole.’” He expressed support for an “All-Union Theater” in Moscow “in which artists of all nationalities [narodnostei]” of the USSR “would have the opportunity to familiarize us, Russians, with their dramatic art and through it with the past and present of their cultural life.” The theater’s company, he said, would be Russian and perform the plays of other nationalities in model Russian translations. Returning to his 1929 idea for a regular publication devoted to Russian translations of national literatures, Gorky also proposed a quarterly almanac to showcase the current literature of the brother republics, suggesting ‘Union’ (Soiuz) or ‘Brotherhood’ (Bratstvo) as titles.118 On 2 September 1934, in his speech to the first plenum of the board of the new Union of Soviet Writers, of which he was chair, Gorky made clear that he saw his theater and almanac proposals as central to the “process of unification [ob’edineniia] of all-Union literatures that was begun at the congress.”119

By summer 1934, before the Congress had taken place, plans for publications of national

118 “Maksim Gor’kii i literatura narodov SSSR,” 13; Pervyi vsesoiuiznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 680-1.
119 Pervyi vsesoiuiznyi s’ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 710.
literatures in Russian translation were underway and had been for some time. In early 1932, the nationalities section of the State Publishing House for Artistic Literature (GIKhL) was assembling materials for “nationwide collections” (obshchenatsional’nykh sbornikov) and was in contact with the Organizational Bureau (Orgbiuro) of Turkmenistan’s Association of Proletarian Writers (APP) about publishing a collection of contemporary Turkmen literature.\(^{120}\) By summer 1933, GIKhL’s nationalities section was in regular contact with the central Writers’ Union’s Organizing Committee, as well as with the organizing committees of the new writers’ unions that were being formed in each republic, about submitting material for publication in Russian. As already mentioned, the writers’ brigades arranged by the central Organizing Committee’s nationalities section to visit and study the literature of each republic often facilitated publishing plans. In February and March 1934, for example, the groups assigned to the republics of the South Caucasus approved plans to publish a Russian-language anthology of Georgian poetry, and the Organizing Committee of the central Writers’ Union was monitoring work on “fulfilling the plan for translations of Ukrainian Soviet literature.”\(^{121}\) In the latter part of 1933, months before Gorky’s closing speech to the 1934 Writers’ Union Congress, production plans of GIKhL’s nationalities sector called for a book series of Russian translations of national authors called ‘Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR’ (‘Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR’).\(^{122}\)

\(^{120}\) The central publishing houses in Moscow typically had a “nationalities sector.” For example, the publishing houses OGIZ, ONTI, and GIKhL each had a nationalities sector. (RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4720, ll. 1, 9, and passim) Through the early 1930s, some of these nationalities sectors focused on publishing technical material and literature in languages of small minorities within the RSFSR (such as Karakalpak and Mari) that did not yet have their own printing establishments, but they also worked on collecting, translating, and publishing national artistic literature. The “nationalities sector” was not unique to publishing: state music publisher Muzgiz had one, as well. In October 1934, it was assembling an album of songs of the peoples of the USSR. (ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, şah. 69; RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4720, l. 10). The Turkmen project was connected with a brigade trip to Turkmenistan in 1930, initiated by the republic’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). The Association of Proletarian Writers (APP) and its republican branches was one of the literary organizations dissolved by the 1932 resolution “On the Restructuring of Literary and Arts Organizations.”

\(^{121}\) RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4720, ll. 26-9.

\(^{122}\) This was in addition to Gorky’s quarterly almanac idea. (RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4730, l. 44) For the book series, each volume was devoted to a single national literature or author. For example, the plan for Azerbaijan’s literature
Gorky’s almanac project, also named ‘Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR,’ was given a home in the eponymous editorial department at state publisher GIKhL. Reportedly, Gorky emphasized that the almanac should not be limited to Soviet-era works but also include the classical literature of the brother peoples (“especially Ukrainian, Georgian, Armenian”), and suggested that each issue have a regular section with overview articles and rich illustrations devoted to a different type of art (theater, film, music, handicrafts). Because the Tvorchestvo narodov editorial department supplied texts for the almanac as well as for anthologies and titles representing individual national literatures, it was on a perpetual hunt for material. For example, in late 1936 its theater section set out “to systematically cover the activities of theaters of national art and study their experience,” soliciting articles from republican theaters. Minutes of production meetings in Moscow indicate recurrent problems from the start. Editorial had an annual target for each national literature specified by number of titles and number of pages, and fulfillment was uneven for a variety of reasons. Sometimes a national writer did not deliver product as agreed, or it was of poor quality. Contact with the republics was difficult, with Moscow-based editors rarely making trips to the periphery. Each volume of the almanac was assigned a different editor, and it was difficult to draft talent because of low pay and the heavy workload involved.

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123 Susanna Witt, “The Shorthand of Empire: Podstrochnik Practices and the Making of Soviet Literature,” *Ab Imperio* 3/2013: 155-90, here 167. To clarify: The publishing house GIKhL had a department called ‘Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR,’ which issued Russian translations of literature by ethnic minority nations of the Soviet Union. Its projects included a book series and a separate almanac, both also called ‘Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR.’ In addition, it provided materials about national cultures for other uses, such as radio broadcasting.

124 “Максим Горький и литература народов СССР,” 26. The almanac’s format included sections devoted to particular nations as well as thematic sections such as “Lenin and Stalin in the poetry of the peoples of the USSR” or “Poets on the Stalin Constitution.”

125 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 19, sƏh. 244.

126 RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4720, ll. 36-40; f. 613, op. 1, d. 4721, *passim*.

127 RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4720, ll. 36-40.

128 Ibid., ll. 49-50.
On 11 June 1936, at a meeting in Moscow, a state publishing official reported to representatives from union and autonomous republics that the literature publishing house’s nationalities sector aimed to issue 25-30 books as a “golden fund” of national literature in Russian translation. The goal was “gradually to bring the national classics to the attention of the Russian reader” along with new works published as part of the ‘Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR’ series. Although ten months had passed since the approval of the plan for the almanac’s first volume, the book had yet to appear. The publishing official assured the group that the first issue had been put together by an editor under Gorky’s supervision, and was awaiting Gorky’s approval. In the ensuing discussion, a Chuvash representative voiced skepticism about the almanac: it lacked an organizing principle and collection of material was haphazard. Such a project requires an editor who knows each national literature well, he added. Another representative mentioned the previous attempt at the all-Union almanac format, The Soviet Land (Sovetskaia strana) in the late 1920s, which, he said, ceased publication after a few issues due to lack of reader interest. The new almanac seemed to have the same problem. A further difficulty was competition from another project, Two Five-Year Plans (Dve piatiletki), a volume apparently planned for the 20th anniversary of October in 1937. One national representative complained that the almanac seemed assembled from scraps and castoffs from the nationalities sector. Another commented that readers do not like excerpts; they prefer to read a work of literature in its entirety. Several others expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the translations, the extent of contact between center and periphery, and the knowledge of the people

129 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 132, ll. 3-7. The editor’s name was Bolotnikov. Gorky died days later, on June 18.
130 Ibid., ll. 12-3.
131 Ibid., ll. 16, 29.
132 Ibid., ll. 33, 15.
133 Ibid., l. 44.
making editorial decisions. In response to the latter issue, the publishing house wanted the republics to take more responsibility for collecting the best material.

The project struggled, releasing its first almanac only in late 1937. It contained Soviet-era works as well as excerpts from national epics such as Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli’s *Knight in the Panther Skin*. Another volume, for the twentieth anniversary of October, was released in different editions: 15,000 copies of a larger, more lavish one had four-color plate illustrations and sold for 25 rubles; a smaller, one-color version with a print run of 115,000 appeared in early 1938, selling for 12 rubles. Materials collected for the volume were adapted for radio use as part of a series of programs called “Our Motherland” (*Nasha Rodina*), which covered each republic in sequence. The Tvorchestvo narodov editorial department also generated radio scripts about national culture such as a 1936 collection of literary works from the Soviet republics for a series of broadcasts under the title ‘Friendship of the Peoples of the USSR’ (*Druzhba narodov SSSR*). 134 All of this material was published under the Radio Committee’s own imprint, Radioizdat.

By summer and fall 1938, the nationalities sectors at the state publisher and the Union of Soviet Writers were discussing how to discontinue the almanac and replace it with a regular journal, which would provide more continuity in editorial staffing and a more solid funding base through subscriptions. In addition to the perennial concerns of translation quality and contact with the various republics, questions were raised about egalitarianism, standards, and the role of Russian writers living and working in the republics. Instead of aiming to represent all eleven republics in each edition and picking substandard work in order to do so, the almanac should print only quality material, even if that meant omitting one or another republic from a given

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134 For example, one radio script, about the life and work of Soviet Azerbaijani poet Samad Vurgun, provided instructions for adapting the text to fit programs of various lengths.
The almanac failed to live up to Gorky’s vision, and a reorganized publication was needed to resurrect his ideal. All sides of the argument seemed to invoke Gorky’s legacy in support of their positions. An article in the first volume of the almanac cited Gorky’s desire to include the classical literature of Soviet nations, but a year later, in October 1938, the new head of the publishing house’s nationalities sector opined that the almanac’s inclusion of ancient epics had discredited Gorky’s initiative.135 Russian writer and critic Petr Skosyrev, speaking as a representative of the nationalities sector of the Union of Soviet Writers, argued that the almanac failed because of scattershot execution by the publishing house, which assigned staff with no knowledge of or connection to national literatures to the project. Skosyrev cited Gorky’s aim of lifting up all the national literatures so they “truly felt themselves like brothers, as they should.” Because the complexity of the project required vast knowledge, it called for the resources of the entire Writers’ Union and should be an organ of it, even if the nationalities sector runs it. “Publishing this journal,” he maintained, “is one of the [Writers’ Union’s] most important tasks on a union scale [na soiuznom massahtbe].”136

The almanac was reorganized under the title ‘Friendship of Peoples’ (‘Druzhba narodov’), and in 1938, the head of state publishing house Goslitizdat, Solomon Abramovich Lozovskii, approached Petr Pavlenko to be the editor of the new publication. A Russian writer who had grown up in Tbilisi and “always regarded Georgia with particular intimacy and warmth,” Pavlenko had been among a group of Russian writers who visited Turkmenia in 1930 and was a veteran of the brigade of the Writers’ Union’s Organizing Committee sent to Georgia in October 1933. According to one memoirist, “Like no one else in those times, Pavlenko saw the significance of the literatures of the peoples of the USSR for the entire process of developing

135 “Maksim Gor’kii i literatura narodov SSSR,” 26; RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 293, ll. 7-29; f. 631, op. 6, d. 252.
136 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 293, l. 18.
a single multinational Soviet literature … Pavlenko knew the brother literatures firsthand; he followed them attentively …” In this way, Pavlenko embodied the relationship between Russian and national cultures Gorky had prescribed at the 1934 Congress and was therefore a good candidate to implement Gorky’s vision for a publication that could draw others into such cross-national interconnectedness. Pavlenko agreed to take the job (though he expressed concern about the project’s complexity, noting the previous failed attempts to realize it). The first volume of the revamped almanac was released in April 1939 under its new title, *Druzhba narodov*, and subsequent issues continued to appear regularly until 1955, when it became a journal, which is still published today.

Despite the failure of its earlier incarnations, *Druzhba narodov*, which was conceived as an instrument of the Soviet cultural integration project framed in the early Bolshevik agenda, came to function in this capacity. For example, the May 1941 issue of the almanac featured literature from the Baltic republics, an act of demonstratively introducing these newly Sovietized states for induction into the unified culture of the Soviet family of nations. As a portal through which national cultures entered onto the all-Union stage, the almanac compelled each ethnically-defined nation to think about its self-presentation to a community of non-ethnics. While the almanac strove to showcase Soviet talent, it also celebrated national pasts by printing articles and excerpts that introduced national cultural icons and honored national poet jubilees. In this way, the almanac (and later journal) was an institution for creating an all-Union cultural canon. As a mechanism through which classic and new ethnic talent gained all-Union notoriety, *Druzhba narodov* facilitated the sharing of national cultures toward the goal of making the literary legacy

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138 *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 20 April 1939 and 26 July 1939; magazines.russ.ru/druzhba/site/history/139.html (website of the journal *Druzhba narodov*).
of various Soviet ethnic groups into the common heritage of all 170 million members of an emerging Soviet nation that had its own “style of multinational Soviet literature.” The suggestion of publishing the *Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR (Tvorchestvo narodov SSSR)* almanac in national languages as well as Russian had been raised in June 1936 but quickly set aside as too big a challenge at the time. As the almanac developed into the more stable *Druzhba narodov*, the publication remained a Russian-language affair, attesting to Soviet reliance on Russian as a *lingua franca* for the multinational Union and its unified culture.

At root, Soviet nationalities policy revolved around the goal of integration and therefore around interethnic relations. The creation story of the journal *Druzhba narodov* highlights the essential role of all-Union institutions in implementing Soviet nationalities policy. The formation of the central Writers’ Union hinged in large part on a negotiation between exponents of national literatures and the Russian-dominated Organizing Committee. If the sharing of national culture with other groups was to be the foundation of Soviet culture, then it was in all-Union arenas such as the writers’ organization and *Druzhba narodov* that interethnic relations played out and the “merging” direction of Soviet culture was determined. The nationalities sector was therefore central to the formation of the Writers’ Union and the sharing of national cultures. Even the failure of the *Creative Work of the Peoples of the USSR* almanac provided a learning experience, revealing the extent of the project’s complexity and the need for leadership by those (Russians) with experience and investment in the ethnic periphery.

The April 1932 resolution cast literary organizations as pioneers of the restructuring that other branches of the arts would follow and, as part of this, as a model for implementing

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140 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 132, l. 9.
141 The publication did, however, become a source from which republican officials drew examples of brother literatures to translate and publish on the local level in their own national languages.
strategies of cross-cultural interaction. For example, the Writers’ Union Organizing Committee practice of presenting literary evenings in Moscow to promote national literatures endured systematically after the Union’s formal establishment. The charge of the Writers’ Union’s nationalities section was vaguely described as “providing creative assistance” to the republican writers’ unions – in short, continuing the role the section had played in the run-up to the 1934 Congress of mediating between the demands of center and periphery. In practice, this included making sure Moscow’s wishes were honored in the periphery as well as advocating for republican literary cultures in Moscow.

Following the example of the Writers’ Union, organizational infrastructure was increasingly put in place in other branches of the arts to support intensified efforts at cross-cultural interaction. For example, in 1935 the state record factory was working on a series devoted to the songs of each republic. A new textbook on the history of the USSR included the minority nations as well as Russia. In 1938 the Writers’ Union’s nationalities sector was involved in producing a history of the literatures of the USSR for the Russian reader. In 1939, Moscow State Conservatory’s department of the music of the nationalities of the USSR developed a course on the history of Soviet music, with a section on each republic, that was to be part of the curriculum in music schools Union-wide. Of course, while the special organs and institutions devoted to nationalities helped raise the profile of national cultures, they also helped

142 For example, on 5 May 1934, the Organizing Committee presented a literary evening devoted to Azerbaijan. (İngilîb və mədəniyyət No. 3-4, 1934, Xronika; RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 137) A series of evenings of Azerbaijani poetry was held in Moscow in February 1936, and in 1940 a ten-day festival (dekada) of Azerbaijani literature was held in the Soviet capital. (See Chapter 4)
143 The nationalities sector monitored the progress of preparations in the republics for the Pushkin Jubilee and other activities glorifying Russian culture to ensure that they were sufficiently grand. It also helped other republics with the Union-wide aspect of their own national poet jubilees. National poet jubilees are discussed in Chapter 5.
144 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iš 15, soh. 70-1; RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 56.
145 Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome, 174.
146 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 133, l. 24; ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iš 11.
147 RGALI f. 962, op. 1, d. 618.
divide Soviet culture into two categories, the Russian and the non-Russian. This scheme lumped all “national” art together as cultural production often more valued for its diversity and “authenticity” than for its artistic merit, a prejudice some tried hard to overcome.

As the father of Soviet literature and guiding light of socialist realism, the influence of Gorky on Soviet culture is difficult to overestimate. Upon its formation, his Union of Soviet Writers became the seat of the country’s literary activities, and the importance of national literatures to the proceedings of the 1934 Congress attests to their centrality to the Soviet literary project. The almanac (and later journal) *Druzhba narodov* was touted as the fulfillment of Gorky’s dream of creating a unified Soviet literature that developed through the mutual interaction of the various national literary cultures of the USSR. As discussed in the Introduction, the periodical’s title was a staple of 1930s rhetoric reconciling Soviet diversity and unity, and for this reason the ‘friendship of peoples’ idea is often viewed as a creation of 1930s Stalinist culture. Yet, just as the establishment of *Druzhba narodov* was the realization of a vision whose roots extend back to Gorky’s 1919 World Literature publishing project, so the friendship of peoples notion was another step toward the ideal of a unified international culture that had long attended Bolshevik thought. Efforts to effect such cultural merger are detectable from the formation of the Soviet Union, and the friendship of peoples mantra outlived Stalin by decades. The next section examines the evolution of efforts at cross-cultural exchange from the formation of the Soviet Union to the mid-1930s through examples that reveal the continuities across these years.

**THE MEANS AND MEANING OF EXCHANGE**

Marx’s prediction of the merger of all national literatures into a single world literature was the cultural analog of his observation about economic development, which we might today call economic globalization:
The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country … In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations.

The interdependence Marx observed was destroying national industries, which could no longer depend upon “indigenous raw material” alone to satisfy consumer demand. According to his own analogy, the same would happen with national cultures, which, like national economies, would presumably require “raw material drawn from the remotest zones” and whose output would be “consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe.”

But what is the raw material of culture, be it national or international?

The Bolsheviks are noted for their instrumentalist approach to the arts, which they put in the service of their overarching goal of social transformation, and which included cross-cultural contact eventually leading to fusion into a common universal world culture. The complexity of this challenge was multiplied by the enormous diversity of every aspect of the vast Soviet expanse, from climate to culture. This section treats the sites Moscow created to promote cross-cultural encounter and thus strengthen ties among the various parts of the Soviet Union and their inhabitants in pursuit of the goal of integration, both economic and cultural. Examples of such sites include the All-Union Agriculture and Craft Exhibition of 1923 and the 1930 Olimpiada of National Theater and Art.

In August 1923, less than a year after the establishment of the Soviet Union, the First All-Russian (sometimes referred to as All-Union) Agriculture and Craft Exhibition opened in the Soviet capital. The enormous exhibition, mounted in a spot that later became a park named for

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149 Until the establishment of the Soviet Union in late December 1922, the term ‘all-Russian’ had included the constituent republics of Belorussia, Ukraine, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (ZSFSR), which then became Union republics.
Gorky, featured pavilions representing various parts of the new country, highlighting local economic and daily life. There were theatrical and musical performances, including by the Piatnitskii choir and a folk instrument orchestra.\textsuperscript{150} In an early example of the Soviet penchant for manipulating time and outcomes, the event sought simultaneously to effect unity and present it as a \textit{fait accompli}.

The exhibition took its cue from the world fairs, international expositions, and colonial expositions of the nineteenth century “that combined features of trade and industry fairs, carnival music festivals, political manifestations, museums, and art galleries.”\textsuperscript{151} At those events, “[v]arious architectural styles were presented, and after 1885, the arts became a recurrent theme. The idea was to show progress in all fields – not only in industry, trade and transportation, but also in the arts, the sciences, and culture.” As hybrid affairs where the latest technology was exhibited alongside colonial raw materials and archeological artifacts, these ecumenical events “quickly became inseparable from imperialism and nationalism.”\textsuperscript{152} The mechanism at work was imperial difference, propping up the “progress and civilization” of Western bourgeois society by juxtaposing it with the primitive Other.\textsuperscript{153} Moscow’s 1923 event followed the precededented model: There was an international pavilion, which featured technology demonstrations by foreign companies, and a “real Buryat kibitka” with all its furnishings, on loan from the ethnographic department of the Russian Museum in Petrograd.\textsuperscript{154} One can see the 1923 exhibition as an extension of an “exoticizing” colonial approach to representing diverse peoples

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Pravda}, 3 August 1923. On the Piatnitskii choir and folk orchestras, see Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 339.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 341.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Pravda}, 13 July 1923. According to Greg Castillo, in “its segregation of displays of modernity from those of ‘primitivism’ and the exotic,” the layout of the 1923 Exhibition “conformed to the practices of Western colonial exhibitions.” In contrast, the layout of the 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition did not. Greg Castillo, “Peoples at an Exhibition: Soviet Architecture and the National Question,” in Lahusen and Dobrenko (eds.), \textit{Socialist Realism Without Shores}, 91-119, here 93.
that was inherited from the Russian Empire and persisted into the 1930s. The distinctive “national” architecture of different pavilions (which were designed and built by Russians) reflected the insistent themes of national diversity (raznoobrazie) and national uniqueness (svoeobrazie) – “both useful as paradoxical prerequisites for ultimate unity but also as values in their own right” – that dominated the display.

While an open letter to exhibition committees published in Pravda insisted that “the exhibition is not a museum,” it also indicated that a visit to the exhibition was to be a directed experience. Guides, the letter instructed, should “be ready to answer questions” and steer visitors to “those forms and branches of the economy tied with the restoration and building of the agriculture of a given region.” The purposes of the exhibition, as suggested in press coverage, were several. One was to proclaim a new country, risen from the fragments of empire and ashes of civil war, made up of independent republics that were at once culturally distinct and essential to each other as “parts of a unified economic whole.” Abkhazia, for example, highlighted its lumber industry and tobacco production as well as its “famous Sukhumi plums” and orange cultivation. The chair of the republic’s Council of Peoples’ Commissars (Sovnarkom) stressed, “We must present ourselves well at the exhibition.” It was the choice of each republic and oblast to attend, but one Pravda article pointed out that the exhibition helped a region or republic link itself with the rest of the union, strengthen its market, and “attract the attention of the center.”

Thus, in serving the goal of drumming up business and knitting the different parts of the Union

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157 Pravda, 17 June 1923.
159 Pravda, 26 July 1923.
together, it behooved each participant to make the best impression possible with its self-presentation by underlining its economic contributions to the whole and “what the unified all-union agriculture plan expects it to develop.”

As always, the overarching goal was “enlightenment of the masses,” a phrase that encompassed a variety of meanings and components, such as encouraging healthful habits. For example, a model of a Penza peasant courtyard was displayed – and critiqued as unhealthy. One aspect of this enlightenment was instilling in visitors and participants the principles that structured the new country, including the two-part formula of cultural diversity and economic unity. According to Marx, the latter would eventually spill over into the former, eroding the national and bringing about cultural unity along with economic. One article about the exhibition was organized around the point that the diversity on display distinguished the event from all previous (i.e., tsarist-era) ones, where everything national and distinctive was hidden and repressed. Before, any countrywide exhibition looked ethnic Russian. In opposition to its imperial precedents, the 1923 exhibition gave an impression of an international event “in which European and Asian countries participate,” and “it is difficult to tell” the more economically dominant. In contrast to yesterday, today “purely eastern” Central Asia, with a culture so foreign to Russia and Europe, can live together in the Union of SSRs [Soviet Socialist Republics], express its national distinctness and at the same time develop culturally, economically, and technologically.”

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161 Pravda, 17 June and 4 October 1923.
162 The vocabulary used in the article makes a distinction, lost in English translation, between ‘Russian’ as a civic designation (rossiiskii) and ‘Russian’ as an ethnonym (russkii).
groups and to reassure non-Russians of its sincerity by celebrating the new freedom to express cultural distinctiveness that resulted in the diversity on display at the exhibition.

Observers of international and colonial expositions had identified consumption as the fulcrum of such events. As noted earlier, Marx saw the decline of national identity and rise of international culture prefigured in the habits of European consumers who, no longer satisfied by local output, craved “the products of distant lands and climes.” The 1923 exhibition likewise revealed cosmopolitan consumption to be at the heart of the Soviet formula for uniting diversity into a harmonious whole. The profiles that participating republics like Abkhazia presented at the exhibition familiarized visitors not only with images and features of local life and culture, but local economic production. Planting visions of Abkhazia’s plums and oranges in the minds of exhibition-goers was a way of expanding consumer taste beyond the local, of unifying the Soviet Union by whetting the population’s appetite for the products of an integrated economy. Not unlike the World Literature project of Gorky and Lunacharsky, the exhibition’s demonstration of cultural diversity was meant to expose visitors to the “other” as a step toward unity. Similarly, the demonstration of agricultural (and other industrial) diversity was geared toward promoting an economic interdependence that would bind the Union’s diverse components together. While one might dismiss this idea as a figment of the NEP economy and therefore a fleeting remnant of bourgeois consumption habits, the emphasis on “cultured” consumption that many have noted emerging in the mid-1930s as a sign of the success of socialist construction suggests the staying power of this theme as a unifying force.

The Soviet standard of kul’turnost’ (culturedness) ascendant in the 1930s – the quality of being cultured or the notion of “the civilization of everyday life” – encompassed every aspect of life, public and private, work and leisure, physical and mental, material and behavioral.
Promptness, efficient performance at work, a neat and clean appearance, a well-kept apartment stocked with appropriate books, correct speech, and Bolshevik consciousness all fell under the rubric of *kul’turnost’*.¹⁶⁴ The prescription also included intellectual self-cultivation: the *kul’turnyi* (cultured) person was expected to have a basic Soviet cultural literacy, augmented by regular visits to museums and the theater.¹⁶⁵ The consumption of material products, as well as artistic ones, was a “way to culture.”¹⁶⁶ In other words, *kul’turnost’* “offered a way of legitimizing what had once been thought of as ‘bourgeois’ concerns.”¹⁶⁷ By the mid-1930s, consumption of the cultural products coming from the brother republics had become a feature of *kul’turnost’*, which thus served, in this respect, as a means of cultural integration. In the description of the 1923 exhibition, we can detect the seeds of these developments – the spread of an integrationist trend from economic life to cultural life and the related conflation of material products and cultural ones consumed across national lines.

The cross-cultural familiarization was mutual, with visitors to Moscow from the rural periphery exposed to urban life, industrial production, and demonstrations of the latest technology, while the Russian urban public, represented chiefly by denizens of Moscow and its environs, were encouraged to glimpse the village and learn about the ethnic diversity of the Soviet world. This new knowledge was acquired not as it would have been in an imperial museum, but rather with a sense of overarching connection with their fellow citizens born of the acts of exchange (of culture, goods, etc.) that bound them together. This emphasis on acquainting

the all-Union audience with the diversity of the Union’s national production, both cultural and economic, persists as an organizational theme in Soviet culture, aimed at unity and integration. Other all-Union events, such as the arts competitions and festivals discussed below and in subsequent chapters, followed a similar model. The All-Union Agricultural Exhibition (Vsesoiuznaia sel’sko-khoziaistvennaia vystavka, abbreviated VSKhV) that opened in Moscow in 1939 is an iteration of the form established at the 1923 event, and therefore invites comparison.\textsuperscript{168} Although times and policy had changed, the motives behind the 1939 display were similar to those of 1923. Instead of proclaiming a new country and demonstrating a return to stability after civil war, the 1939 extravaganza proclaimed Soviet unity and demonstrated the results of socialist construction — happy nations living a prosperous, harmonious, and interconnected life across a vast and diverse land, all under one flag. Like its 1923 precursor, the 1939 All-Union Agricultural Exhibition featured pavilions for individual union and autonomous republics designed in the “national style” of each, evidence, as 16 years earlier, of the Union’s diversity and freedom of national expression. The pavilions featured live demonstrations and exhibits populated by artisans, peasants, animals, flora, and other items shipped to Moscow from all corners of the Soviet Union. Thousands of Soviet citizens came to staff and visit these exhibits, which continued for several seasons (closing in winter and reopening in spring).

Between 1923 and 1939, life in the ethnic periphery had undergone substantial changes. As fearful paranoia infected leadership in the center, national cultural elites suffered through waves of persecution, culminating in the Great Purges that decimated the ranks of ethnic intelligentsias. Since 1932 and the declaration of socialist realism as the defining Soviet aesthetic, national artistic elites were under pressure to develop national versions of this style in

\textsuperscript{168} Originally slated to open in 1937 for the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the October Revolution, VSKhV’s opening was delayed by two years. A proposed plan for the main pavilion to open in 1937 can be found in RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 50. The plan was sent to All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs chair Platon Kerzhentsev in August 1936.
all branches of art, from opera to architecture. Western scholarship often views these developments as the loss of national authenticity to Russification. In this narrative, the relative freedom of national expression that was possible in 1923 had by 1939 been squashed by the ever-tightening vise of the imperial party-state, leaving national art reduced to Orientalist tropes and essentialized folk forms. In contrast, a vein of scholarship in post-Soviet republics hails as heroic the accomplishments of native artistic elites despite national oppression and abridgement of creative and other freedoms. Azerbaijan’s pavilion for the 1939 Exhibition was designed by ethnic Azeri architects, and Azerbaijan’s finest craftspeople were brought to Moscow to execute the intricate stone and tile work ornamentation. Whereas before the revolution there was allegedly only one ethnic Azeri architect working in Baku, by the 1920s and ‘30s national cadres of architects worked alongside Russian and European ones to reshape the built environment of their country. As the product of national talent, the pavilion of the Azerbaijani SSR that opened in Moscow in 1939 was in some sense more authentically national than its predecessor in 1923. By this measure it was a triumph for the nation and for Soviet nationalities policy.

By the time of the First Five-Year Plan, all-Union events, particularly those featuring the art of Soviet ethnic groups, were fast becoming a mainstay of public life. In late 1927, the Jubilee Committee of the All-Union Executive Committee in Moscow (VTsIK) had charged the State Academy of Artistic Sciences (GAKhN) with organizing an exhibition of the art of the peoples of the USSR, a goal of which was to show the “entire” artistic life of each nation, without

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170 Nazar Pashaev, Pobeda kul'turnoi revoliutsii v Sovetskom Azerbaidzhane (M.: Izd. Nauka, 1976), 136-7. Architecture in particular was considered a field of great national accomplishment, owing to the architectural achievements of Azerbaijan’s “Golden Age.”
Figure 1.1. Draft design for Azerbaijan pavilion, 1923 All-Union Agriculture and Craft Exhibition. The architect is Ia.M. Syrishchev. Gorky Park Archive, reproduced in *The Moscow News*, No. 72, 6-12 November 2012, 20.

Figure 1.2. View of Azerbaijan’s pavilion, All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow, circa 1939. The design is by the team of S.A. Dadashev and Mikael Useinov. Disput.az.
divisions into high and low, intelligentsia and folk. On 15 June 1930, the First All-Union Olimpiada of Theater and Arts of the Peoples of the Soviet Union opened in Moscow, lasting for three weeks. It was timed to coincide with the Sixteenth Party Congress (scheduled for 26 June-13 July 1930, in Moscow), and tickets to Olimpiada performances were reserved for Congress delegates. The arts in general, and national art in particular, were very much a means for measuring the pace and progress of socialist construction, and the Olimpiada’s purpose was expressly stated: “The cultural-enlightenment work around the first all-Union olimpiada of the arts of the peoples of the USSR is being held under the slogan ‘The Olimpiada is an accounting [otchet] of Soviet art to the XVIth Party Congress of the VKP/b.’” Anticipating Stalin’s words at the Congress, Olimpiada rhetoric framed the event as showcasing the cultural flowering under Soviet rule of “even the most backward nationalities,” presenting the starkest possible contrast to the oppressive conditions of the tsarist era. The Olimpiada program, which included theater, film, national music and dance representing fifteen Soviet nationalities, promised to show “the proletariat of the entire Union the successes and accomplishments of our socialist construction.”

For the June 15 opening, Olimpiada participants, numbering more than 1000, gathered at Moscow’s Theater of the Revolution, where speeches were given. Lunacharsky, who spoke on

171 Revoliutsiia i kul’tura, 1927, No. 1 (15 November); D. Aranovich, “Iskusstvo narodov SSSR,” Revoliutsiia i kul’tura, 1927, No. 2 (5 December): 77-82.
172 Literaturnaia gazeta, 9 June 1930, 4. On June 10, Gosplan had held an all-Union meeting on planning for the arts.
174 Izvestiia, 16 June 1930, 2; Literaturnaia gazeta, 16 June 1930, 4.
175 Ibid. The Olimpiada’s “honorary presidium” (which included Gorky) as well as the entire Politburo of TsK VKP/b/ and foreign guests were in attendance. Apparently, the inclusion of foreign guests, such as a Norwegian theater director and head of the German theater workers union, was a riposte to the Congress of the Artistic International being held in Vienna, which the USSR had declined to attend after being instructed to refrain from political speeches.
behalf of the Communist Academy, said the Olimpiada must be not only a competition (it had a jury that awarded prizes), but also promote “brotherly collaboration [sotrudnichestvo]” of all national theaters. The “mutual exchange of experience [vzaimnyi obmen opytom],” he said, “will help these theaters create a truly international art.” The next day, June 16, a “great celebration of the nationalities of the USSR” was held at the Park of Culture and Rest, with speeches and performances of songs, dances, and plays by “clubs of national minorities.”176 Over the remainder of the Olimpiada, multiple Moscow locations hosted performances by participating groups, with an emphasis on theater.177 For example, the First State National Theater of Georgia named for Rustaveli performed at Moscow Art Theater 2 (MKhT 2), while Azerbaijan’s Turkic Artistic Theater performed at the Korsh Theater (today Theater of Nations) with a repertoire that included Azeri and Armenian classics (Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Jafar Jabbarly, Alexander Shirvanzadeh) as well as Shakespeare and Victor Hugo. Other arts were represented as well. There was a meeting with a writers’ organization, and a subsidiary stage of Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater presented the premiere of Alexander Spendiarian’s (Spendiarov) opera Almast, about Armenian heroism in the face of an eighteenth-century Persian attack and based on a 1902 poem by Armenian national poet Hovhannes Tumanian. An article about the Olimpiada production described the opera as “the first great contribution of an Eastern (Armenian) national culture … at the same time enriching the common musical heritage of our Union.”178

The preceding comment should be considered in light of Stalin’s repudiation of Russian cultural dominance during the Sixteenth Party Congress:

176 Opened in 1928 on the territory where the 1923 exhibition had been held, the park was renamed in Gorky’s honor in 1932.
177 Izvestiia, 16 June 1930, 2; Literaturnaiia gazeta, 16 June 1930, 4. Reportedly, the idea for the Olimpiada had originated in 1928 with the Proletarian Theater group, though approval to organize it had been granted only in early 1930, 3 ½ months before the opening.
178 Literaturnaiia gazeta, 26 June 1930, 4. The article also noted that Spendiarian, who died in 1928, had been a student of Rimsky-Korsakov.
The theory of the fusion of all nations of ... the USSR into one common Great Russian nation with one common Great Russian language is a nationalist-chauvinist and anti-Leninist theory that contradicts the main thesis of Leninism, according to which national differences cannot disappear in the near future but will remain in existence for a long time.\footnote{I.V. Stalin, Sochineniia (Moscow: Politizdat, 1952), 13:4. Quoted in Sleszkin, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 437-8.}

A unified socialist nation with one common culture was being built, and the presence and cultural contributions of non-Russians kept the nation and its culture from being Great Russian. On the other hand, the example of the Armenian opera indicated that the non-Russian elements fused into the unified Soviet culture should reflect European tradition, ensuring compatibility and accessibility to a Russian audience. In this sense, the Olimpiada \textit{did} have a Russian focus—namely, to cajole creative Moscow into recognizing non-Russian Soviet national cultures and thus reaffirming the idea of Soviet cultural multinationalism. For the future fusion of cultures to occur, Russian artists and critics had to become aware of non-Russian contributions.

A lead article in \textit{The Literary Gazette} from the Olimpiada’s first day delivered pointed criticism of the view—prevalent, it charged, among writers’ groups in the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (RSFSR)—that “all high accomplishments of literature and art are entirely concentrated in Moscow and Leningrad, as if the centers of the union republics (Khar’kov, Tiflis, and others), are provinces, following Moscow examples.” The time is past, the writer warned, when Russia’s creative intelligentsia see national art as merely exotic, holding interest only from an ethnographic point of view, rather than an aesthetic and a socio-cultural one. No longer is the “cultural interaction [\textit{vzaimodeistvie}]” between Moscow and “the cultural centers of the union republics” one in which the latter simply assimilates [\textit{usvaivaet}] the cultural

\footnote{179 I.V. Stalin, Sochineniia (Moscow: Politizdat, 1952), 13:4. Quoted in Sleskine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 437-8.}
accomplishments of the former. Yet the Russian creative community, the article charged, have still not recognized or accepted that they have something to learn in Kharkov, Tiflis, etc.  

In a reversal of the usual rhetoric, the writer suggested that Russian culture now suffered from backwardness, lagging because of its insularity. The Olimpiada was part of an effort to help the Russian community by familiarizing it with the new multinational art. Olimpiada participants “came to Moscow not as exotic guests, but as representatives of the art of the proprietor-peoples of the country” and debunked Moscow as the “theatrical Mecca” it had been considered just a few years before. Many Moscow theater participants were prompted to rethink their understanding of theatrical art. If two years earlier Muscovites were unfamiliar with the name (of leading figure of Ukrainian avant-garde theater Les) “Kurbas,” now they knew it. Together, these new ethnic cadres were laying the foundation of a common Soviet art, genuinely unified, characterized by the “mutual interpenetration” of Soviet nations’ cultural products. More than demonstrating the cultural flowering of nations, the main goal of the Olimpiada was to remove the partitions that divided individual cultures and replace them with strong, close ties: “TO BRING TOGETHER THE SCATTERED DETACHMENTS OF SOVIET ART, TO GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENRICH ONE ANOTHER WITH THEIR DIVERSE EXPERIENCE.” Rather than a euphemism for assimilating Russian culture, the cultural exchange and interaction among republics was multidirectional and mutual. Comments aimed at Russian readers made clear that Russian culture

180 “Usilim vzaimodeistvie kul’tur narodov SSSR,” Literaturnaia gazeta, 16 June 1930, 1. In 1930, the capital of the Ukrainian SSR was Kharkiv; Kyiv became the republic’s capital city in 1934. Tiflis was the Russian imperial name for Tbilisi, the capital of the Georgian SSR. Use of “Tbilisi” replaced “Tiflis” in the 1930s. While chiding Russians for ignoring the cultural accomplishments of the national republics, the article carefully selected its examples of diversity: Ukraine and Georgia, both historically Christian nations on the culturally Western end of the Soviet cultural spectrum. No mention is made of the Soviet nations residing further east.

181 Izvestiia, 16 June 1930, 2.

had a role as both influencer and influenced. While Russian theaters tour throughout the Soviet Union such that other republics know them, “it still seems strange for NON-RUSSIAN theaters to tour Russian cities,” one article said plainly, suggesting that Russians have still have not grasped the idea that “the art of the brother Soviet peoples is ‘svoi’ [theirs]” to the same degree as the art of their own nationality. The rhetoric and sentiment prefigure Gorky’s urgings at the 1934 Writers’ Union Congress that all nations learn from each other.

Nationalities policy during this time of rapid and radical change in all spheres of Soviet life, sometimes called the Great Transformation, has been characterized as demonstrating “a dramatic escalation” of the nation-building drive. Yet one Moscow critic, Anatolii Glebov, reflecting on the “results” of the Olimpiada, maintained that its extremely lively, truly reciprocal cultural exchange dealt a blow not only to great power Russian chauvinism but to other local nationalisms as well. This was because the hallmark of old-style nationalism was cultural isolation and disconnectedness [razobshchennost'] in artistic growth. Commentary on a Georgian play presented in Moscow by Tbilisi’s Rustaveli Theater during the Olimpiada helps shed light on the logic that reconciles these seemingly contradictory claims. A reworking of Viacheslav Ivanov’s 1927 play Bronepoezd, the Georgian play, Anzor, was not merely Ivanov’s work “transplanted onto Georgian soil,” but a great step forward in comparison with the Moscow Art Theater’s production as both more national (in this case, Georgian) and more revolutionary than the Russian version. National theaters in general, Glebov remarked, were better at innovation than Russian theaters, which were burdened by the passé bourgeois theater culture of

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184 An important difference, however, is Gorky’s assertion that other national cultures differ from Russian only in language. See “Rech’ Gor’kogo,” Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s”ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 15.
185 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 438.
186 Glebov, “K itogam pervoi vsesoiuznoi olimpiady,” 151.
187 “Usilim vzaimodeistvie kul’tur narodov SSSR.”
Russia’s past. In contrast, a national theater that is actively developing its national form consciously rejects the paths already taken and searches for new ones. The less advanced Soviet nations, then, were better positioned to create the new, international socialist culture than Russia.

In the same way, rather than a mere linguistic translation of Ivanov’s play, the Rustaveli Theater’s Anzor brought the work closer to the viewer, appealing to the familiar but narrower perspective while at the same time broadening it. This is how world classics were “translated” by each nation, so that the German Hamlet is not a copy of the English Shakespearean Hamlet, and Chekhov’s interpretation of Hamlet is completely new and original as well as Russian.  

Borrowing repertory from other nations, “osvoenie” of historical cultural tradition, reworking classics (of one’s own nation and others) – all promote the development of national identity, enhancing national color (kolorit) and innovation. While slavish imitation (epigonstvo) is to be avoided, borrowing is an essential route to national cultural development. Arguably, this explanation is informed by Russia’s narrative of its own national cultural development, as described earlier: models and material borrowed from the West were reworked by local talent into art considered quintessentially Russian. That art was then exported from Russia and shared with the outside world as a Russian national cultural product that exerted influence in its own right. Cross-cultural interaction, then, was a mechanism of national progress. Conversely, without cross-cultural interaction and mutual influence, a nation would be left in the darkness of isolation to develop a “narrowly national” culture that “stews in its own juices” and does not advance.

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188 Glebov is referring to the actor Mikhail Aleksandrovich Chekhov (nephew of Anton Chekhov), who had earned plaudits for his performance as Khlestakov in a 1921 production of Gogol’s The Inspector General directed by Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko. He was also known internationally for his 1924 turn as Hamlet at Moscow Art Theater 2.

189 Glebov, “K itogam pervoi vsesoiuznoi olimpiady,” 159-62.

190 The expression “stew in its own juices” is a pejorative description that appears in reports to Moscow about the activities of arts organizations in the periphery.
Returning to Marx’s description of international economic integration, Glebov’s analysis posits individual national cultures as developing through imported elements that are used as raw material to be synthesized into more complex cultural products in order to satisfy the increasingly evolved cravings of a developing nation. Building on the idea that cultural borrowing augments what different nations have in common while cultural exchange maintains mutual familiarity and closeness, Glebov concludes, the “[p]rocess of internationalization of language and culture goes in parallel with the process of developing national form.” Echoing Stalin’s speech in February 1929 to a delegation of Ukrainian writers visiting Moscow, Glebov criticizes foreign observers’ inability to understand the “combination of national and international” that underpins Soviet culture. For Glebov, however, the development of the national and international occur simultaneously, rather than in the discrete stages Stalin suggests. The base for international culture was being laid in part by the Olimpiada, which “heralded a period of the synthesis of national forms.”

Yet the press surrounding the Olimpiada sent mixed signals. The same article that scolded Moscow cultural elites for their ignorance of brother republics from which they should learn also praised the February 1929 visit to Moscow by a group of Ukrainian writers as an important step that “had great significance for the exchange of experience (obmen opytom) of two of the greatest literatures of the USSR.” The same Olimpiada that had supposedly debunked Moscow as a “theatrical mecca” also revealed a “crisis in national theater cadres” that should be addressed by establishing in Moscow a theatrical advanced training institution (VUZ) with a

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191 Stalin said, “Marxists, who think too simply ... cannot digest the fact that we want to prepare the elements of an international socialist culture by means of maximum development of national culture, just as they don’t understand … that we want to unify the nations of various countries by dividing them … Whoever doesn’t understand this vital formulation of the question doesn’t understand that we are conducting a policy of maximum development of national culture so that it can exhaust itself completely and then a base can be created for organizing an international socialist culture not only in content, but also in form.” Katerina Clark and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), Soviet Culture and Power: A History in Documents, 1917-1953 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 62.

special department to train national cadres. Furthermore, not only were all the non-Russian arts lumped together (and in competition) at the Olimpiada, but in academic study as well. A reorganization at the Communist Academy (Komakademiia) gave the new Institute of Literature, Art, and Language one department for contemporary Russian and foreign literatures and another for the art and literature of the peoples of the USSR (excluding Russia). For all the progress made by the brother nations, and for all the rhetoric of commonality, mutuality, and closer ties, cultural hierarchy remained intact, with Russia as a European culture perched at its top. Similarly, the disapproving declarations against Russocentrism not withstanding, this prejudice was still prominent in instances of red triangulation reflected in discussions of the Olimpiada. As already mentioned, cultural exchange (particularly with Russia and Europe), in which models are borrowed, indigenized, and re-presented as national art on the international stage is an ideal based on Russia’s narrative of its own cultural development. As the linchpin of both national and international development, this sort of cultural exchange, even when mutual, is an idea informed by Russian experience and therefore bears an indelible Russian stamp.

**PLATON KERZHENTSEV AND ART BY COMMITTEE**

In December 1935, the Secretariat of the Presidium of the Soviet of Nationalities took up the question of developing the arts of Soviet peoples, inviting representatives from a range of arts organizations to form a committee to report and advise on the issue. The group identified the recording of music and publishing of literature in the languages of the Soviet Union as particular

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193 Glebov, “K itogam pervoi vsesoiuznoi olimpiady.” Though the suggestion included the stipulation that the teaching be done by natsmen – “otherwise we, like before, will stand before the fact of unwilling russification of young nats theaters.”

194 RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4719. The commission included representatives from various publishing houses, the Radio Committee, the composers’ and writers’ unions, the state record company, the central film industry organizations, the Museum of the Peoples of the USSR, and the Institute of Nationalities.
areas for improvement, emphasizing the need “to organize a systematic exchange of experience of the cultural accomplishments of the peoples of the USSR through translation.” Russian classics should be translated into the national languages and national classics into Russian, thus rendering all of it “the mutually accessible, international property” of all Soviet people. The Soviet of Nationalities’ Presidium also recommended measures such as having authorities in the union and autonomous republics ensure that libraries improved their collections in local languages and that books in minority languages did not cost more than those in Russian. Likewise, they resolved to ask the Union of Soviet Writers to increase honoraria paid to national writers and to have music publisher Muzgiz expand its lists of national music. Other proposals included asking the All-Union Radio Committee, State Philharmonic, and Composers Union to organize annual orchestra festivals of national music.195

At the same time, the Politburo was decreeing the creation of a new body, the All-Union Committee of Arts Affairs.196 In keeping with the centralizing impulse characteristic of the party-state in the mid-1930s, the express purpose of the new committee was the unification of all arts activities under one central authority.197 The newspaper Soviet Art (Sovetskoe iskusstvo) printed the texts of the 17 January 1936 decrees that established the new committee and appointed its leadership. Platon Kerzhentsev was to chair it.198 These texts were accompanied by a profile of the new arts chief and an article describing the new committee’s assignment. In particular, the new unified leadership of all arts organizations would “facilitate the closest ties of all our arts,  

195 RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4719, ll. 13-5. 
196 Artizov and Naumov (eds.), Vlast’ i khudozhestvennaia intelligentsiia, 281; RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 16; Leonid Maksimenkov, Sumbur vmosto muzyki: Stalin’skaia kul’turnaia revoliutsiia 1936-1938 (M.: Juridicheskaia kniga, 1997), 61. 
197 According to Maksimenkov, Stalin wanted to concentrate all arts direction in one “megacenter.” (Maksimenkov, Sumbur vmosto muzyki, 67) 
198 Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 23 January 1936. Although Sovetskoe iskusstvo existed already, it became the organ of the new arts committee. The decrees were issued by the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) and the Council of People’s Commissars (SNK) of the USSR. The latter body oversaw the new committee. Ya.I. Boiarshii and B.Z. Shumiatskii were named Kerzhentsev’s deputies.
which have heretofore operated haphazardly, create all the conditions for their mutual
enrichment and genuine creative exchange of experience, [and] rally all our artists behind the
single task of creating an art worthy of our era.” The article stressed participation in artistic life
not only by cities but the countryside as well, asserting that “the workers of Soviet art are now
not only ideologically but organizationally united in a family of many thousands, melded into a
single creative collective,” which the new committee would lead in building “the most
magnificent edifice of socialist art.”

The restructuring of Soviet arts administration was nothing new – there had been
numerous reorganizations throughout the 1920s and 1930s – and there is some evidence
suggesting the idea for the committee had existed for some time. Maksimenkov asserts that the
idea for the Arts Committee dates back to 1932, while a 1930 article in the journal Revolution
and Culture (Revoliutsiia i kul’tura) about the recently concluded First Olimpiada of Theater and
Arts of the Peoples of the USSR in Moscow refers to plans for a permanent committee on ties
between the arts of the peoples of the USSR. The creation of the committee meant the transfer
of entire institutions and departments – along with their resources – from Narkompros to Arts
Committee oversight (in some cases rendering the former suddenly subordinate to the latter). An analogous process occurred in the Union and autonomous republics, where the all-Union
committee’s local branches, directorates of arts affairs, were set up to carry out the policies of
their parent committee in Moscow.

200 N.L. Golovkina, “Institutsional’nye izmeneniiia v sisteme upravleniia khudozhestvennoi kul’tury v SSSR (30-e
201 According to Maksimenkov, the committee’s formation was supposed to happen in 1932 but was held back by
the objections of Andrei Bubnov, Commissar of Enlightenment at the time. (Maksimenkov, Sumbur vmesto muzyki,
23); O. Litovskii, “Predvaritel’nye itogi,” Revoliutsiia i kul’tura, 1930, No. 13-14: 67-77, here 73.
202 Golovkina, “Institutsional’nye izmeneniiia,” 4-5; RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 44, ll .4-6.
These local branches did not wield even a local version of the power granted to the all-
Union committee in Moscow, which was, by some accounts, a function of the new chair himself.
In Maksimenkov’s analysis, the All-Union Arts Committee “was created for and by”
Kerzhentsev, who became a sort of “extraordinary commissar in the area of arts” with
considerable independence to pursue his own agenda.²⁰³ His power, according to Maksimenkov,
was augmented by disarray in the culture department of the Central Committee. The committee’s
arts kingdom was vast, stretching from “the Bolshoi Theater to kolkhoz clubs, from provincial
circuses to the Russian Museum,” and Kerzhentsev was always trying to extend it.²⁰⁴ For
example, soon after his appointment, Kerzhentsev made a play to fold the All-Union Radio
Committee (VRK), of which he was also chair, into his new committee. Though this attempt did
not succeed, Kerzhentsev did manage to have high-profile musical groups such as the Radio
Committee’s Sveshnikov choir transferred to the control of the new All-Union Committee on
Arts Affairs.²⁰⁵ The one area of the arts not subordinated to Kerzhentsev’s committee was the
literary sphere, which remained under the control of the Union of Soviet Writers, well-
established and highly influential by 1936.²⁰⁶

Kerzhentsev grew up in Moscow, and his doctor father had been a Kadet member of the
First State Duma. When political activism forced Kerzhentsev into emigration, he worked as a
journalist in London (where he purportedly knew Lenin), with shorter stints in New York and
Paris. Returning to Russia after the February Revolution, Kerzhentsev was active in the Soviet
press, working for Izvestiia, ROSTA (which became TASS), and Pravda before being sent as

²⁰³ Maksimenkov asserts that Kerzhentsev’s main targets were theater director Meyerhold (not composer
Shostakovich) and ballet/opera libretti (not music).
²⁰⁵ RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 20, l. 31; f. 962, op. 3, d. 44, l. 2; f. 962, op. 3, d. 30, ll. 28-9.
²⁰⁶ Maksimenkov, Sumbur vnesto muzyki, 23. There was some overlap, though, particularly in the area of
dramaturgy: playwrights belonged to the Writers’ Union but their careers depended on theaters, which fell under
arts-committee control. Maksimenkov implies there was some rivalry between the two organizations.
Soviet plenipotentiary to Italy, where he met Gorky. In addition to being an ardent Bolshevik, Kerzhentsev’s career trajectory reveals him to be a manager, propagandist, and “numbers man.” His published works include treatises on organizational questions, such as the 1917 How to Lead a Meeting (Kak vesti sobrаниia) and the 1923 Organize Yourself (Organizui samogo sebia), as well as a 1929 editorial about the First Five-Year Plan in which he urged that production in the arts must be sped up, just as in other spheres. Posts he held before his appointment as head of the new All-Union Radio Committee in January 1933 included deputy secretary of the Central Statistics Directorate (from 1927, when he returned from Italy); deputy head of the Central Committee’s agitprop department (1928-30); director of the Communist Academy’s Institute of Literature, Arts, and Language (1930); and chief administrator at the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR (1930-33). As chair of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, Kerzhentsev is perhaps most noted in historical scholarship for his role in the Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk affair and his persecution of theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold. Kerzhentsev’s records and correspondence from his tenure at the helm of the Arts Committee reflect a meticulous concern with statistics and charts as well as an apparent special interest in theater. The Arts Committee chair’s cultural grounding was unremittingly Western, and he evinced little interest in, and even less knowledge of, national culture beyond the Russian and European canon.

207 V.V. Niyakii, Platon Kerzhentsev: Nachalo revoliutsionnoi i zhurnalistskoi deiatel’nosti (Gor’kiii: Volgo-Viatskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1990), 9-10, 123, 6, 131-2. On Kerzhentsev’s biographical background, see also Golovkina, “Institutsional’nye izmeneniia,” 7; Maksimenkov, Sumbur vmesto muzyki, 62-5.
208 Platon Kerzhentsev, “Piatiletka bor’by,” Literaturnaiia gazeta, 17 June 1929, 1. In the piece, Kerzhentsev declared, “Writing should be included in the five-year plan.”
209 The Shostakovich opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk was criticized in a Pravda editorial on 28 January 1936, setting off a campaign against “formalism” in the arts. Maksimenkov attributes the authorship of the piece, which was headlined “Sumbur vmesto muzyki [Muddle Instead of Music],” to Kerzhentsev.
210 Both Maksimenkov and von Geldern have noted that for Kerzhentsev, the most important of the arts was theater, including opera. In particular, he was an admirer of Wagner.
As the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers demonstrated, the centralization of artistic life meant integration of national minorities. In a June 1936 address to the Presidium of the Soviet of Nationalities, Arts Committee deputy chair Boiarskii outlined the committee’s priorities for national art, which included dekady of national art for the republics, Moscow tours for republican theaters, and plans to release collections of the songs of a “wider circle of the nationalities of our Union than ever before.” Boiarskii gave his speech less than two weeks before the death of Maxim Gorky, the national culture and folklore champion (though he had disappeared from public view many months earlier), a loss that left the Writers’ Union and Arts Committee to don the folklore mantle. Kerzhentsev’s personal commitment to national art is not clear. In June 1930, while at the Communist Academy, he organized a meeting to discuss the outcomes of the First Olimpiada of the Arts of the Peoples of the USSR. Beyond that, there is sparse evidence of Kerzhentsev’s exposure to or knowledge of Soviet national minority cultures, particularly non-Western ones, or of any efforts in this direction. Kerzhentsev’s biases were on display in a December 1936 Pravda article, in which he acknowledges orchestras of folk instruments as an important part of non-Russian musical life, but clarifies that it would be quite wrong to regard such instruments “as superior to the violin or the oboe.” Given Kerzhentsev’s European orientation, one may conjecture that cultural rapprochement for him meant the “backward” republics following Russia’s West-looking example.

A reported conversation between Kerzhentsev and Shostakovich in February 1936, offers another glimpse of the Arts Committee chair’s attitude toward the national republics.

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211 Ya. Boiarskii, “Iskusstvo narodov SSSR,” Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 5 June 1936, 1. The article is excerpted from Boiarskii’s speech at a session of the Presidium of the Soviet of Nationalities on questions of the development of art in the USSR.

212 Pravda, 12 July 1930, 6; Glebov, “K itogam pervoi vsesoiuznoi olimpiady teatra i iskusstva,” 150.

Kerzhentsev advised the besieged composer, whose opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* was at the center of the anti-formalism campaign that rippled throughout the country, “to follow the example of Rimsky-Korsakov and go around the villages of the Soviet Union recording the folk songs of Russia, Ukraine, Belorussia, and Georgia, and then select from them the hundred best songs and harmonise them.”

The message to Shostakovich was clear: lie low and take on a low-risk, politically acceptable project. Such “ethnographic” work, which had been going on since before the revolution, reflects Kerzhentsev’s paradigm of progress in the cultural life of the ethnic republics: send a well-known, expert composer from European Russia to collect folk songs in the periphery, write them down, and harmonize them for Muzgiz to publish. In his early June 1936 presentation to the Presidium of the Soviet of Nationalities, Arts Committee deputy chair Boiarskii had reported the preparation of seven volumes of folk music for the series “Musical Folklore of the Peoples of the USSR,” with songs arranged by Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky, and other great Russian composers.”

This example of red triangulation was typical of the Arts Committee’s treatment of national art. In his *Taming of the Arts*, Yuri Elagin refers to a 1932 decree on sending young graduates of the capital’s elite arts training institutions to the provinces to serve for five years, a mandate that, he says, musicians had ignored until Kerzhentsev began to enforce it in 1937.

Archival documents dated July 1936 indicate the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs had plans to send June graduates of GITIS (State Institute of Theater Arts), Moscow Conservatory, and other arts training establishments to provinces of both

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214 Brooke, “Soviet Musicians and the Great Terror,” 406; Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vnesto muzyki*, 111. It is not entirely clear why Kerzhentsev suggested to Shostakovich the particular republics he did, but it was well-known that Stalin had a particular penchant for the folk music of these nations. It is also possible that Kerzhentsev named spots comparatively close to Moscow that he thought Shostakovich might consent to visit. Records show that folk music collections were in the works in each republic, including “Eastern” ones such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan. *Biulleten’ Vsesoiuznogo Komiteta po delam iskusstv* 1937, No. 1: 15-7. (RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 169)

215 Boiarskii, “Iskusstvo narodov SSSR.”

the Russian and non-Russian periphery, and Boiarskii had mentioned the practice in his June speech to the Soviet of Nationalities.\footnote{RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 25, ll. 5-6, 45-47; also f. 962, op. 3, d. 30, ll. 80-1; Boiarskii, “Iskusstvo narodov SSSR.”}

While some scholars argue that the centralization mission represented by the Arts Committee meant the narrowing of opportunities for the national republics to lead their own national cultural development, others observe that regional elites retained some autonomy on cultural questions for some time after the Committee’s establishment because the new system lacked sufficient representation in republican capitals to be effective locally.\footnote{Golovkina, “Institutsional’nye izmeneniia”; Maksimenkov, \textit{Sumbur v mestu muzyki}, 163.} Maksimenkov points out that the 1936 Constitution does not delegate cultural questions to the highest organs of the Soviet government, so that “formally, even after 1936, the union republics maintained sovereignty in the sphere of culture.”\footnote{Maksimenkov, \textit{Sumbur v mestu muzyki}, 58.} The structure of the new All-Union Arts Committee included a council of representatives from union and autonomous republics, charged with “coordination of plans for the development of all branches of artistic culture in the national republics.” While archival documents show that the republics appointed their representatives to this body, it “practically never met” under Kerzhentsev. One scholar interprets this as evidence that “questions of culture and art were removed from the jurisdiction of the union republics,” but it is likely that Kerzhentsev’s lack of engagement in this direction allowed the ethnic republics a greater measure of control (within certain parameters, of course) over artistic questions.\footnote{Golovkina, “Institutsional’nye izmeneniia,” 6; RGALI f. 962, op. 3, dd. 577, 582; 549, 458, 459, 582; f. 962, op. 11, d. 372; f. 962, op. 10, d. 24, l. 30; f. 962, op. 3, d. 40; ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 75, sah. 64. Given the political climate of the era, the corollary of a greater measure of control was a greater measure of risk.} (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of the 1938 Dekada of Azerbaijani Art as evidence for this position.) Absent Kerzhentsev’s interest and a convening council of republican representatives, there was little guidance on what “the alignment of party and art” meant in the republics, where local
creative and party elites were left to reconcile the competing impulses that defined nationalities policy.

When Kerzhentsev was removed as Arts Committee chair in January 1938, accusations against him included neglect of the periphery and national theaters. 221 According to Maksimenkov’s account, Kerzhentsev had been the target of attacks by Andrei Zhdanov in 1937, with heightened hostility beginning in September of that year, when Kerzhentsev was accused of shoddy leadership in preparations for the 20th anniversary of October. In November, an exhibit of Georgian art at the Tretyakov Gallery was singled out for criticism. Upon reviewing the exhibit before its opening, representatives of the Central Committee’s department of cultural enlightenment found that it did not “give a full sense of the richness, history, and diversity of the art of the Georgian SSR.” 222 The Central Committee’s agitprop department became involved, and word reached Zhdanov and Andreev, who were asked to reprimand Kerzhentsev for his committee’s inattention to the Georgian exhibit, especially the section depicting the role of Stalin as the leader of Bolshevik organizations in Georgia and the Caucasus. Kerzhentsev responded that the Arts Committee had organized the Georgian exhibit in close consultation with Comrade Beria and the Central Committee of Georgia’s Communist Party: objets d’art were collected locally under the guidance of the party organization, and that the exhibit’s character had been precisely defined in agreement with Beria. Kerzhentsev added sourly that the exhibit’s contents had been ready for review by the end of October, and if the department of cultural enlightenment had waited until November 11, the eve of the exhibit’s opening, by which time the exhibit

221 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 470, ll. 6-7; Maksimenkov, Sumbur v mesto muzyki, 294-7. One document cites the poor performance of every section of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, including Glavrepertkom (central repertory committee, a censorship organ that reviewed repertoire), which lacked staff to review plays in the languages of the nationalities. It also cites the poor state of the Museum of Eastern Cultures, which the Arts Committee had allegedly sought to liquidate in November 1937. (RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 470, ll. 8, 14)

222 RGALI f. 962, op. 10, d. 21, ll. 92-7, 149-51; Maksimenkov, Sumbur v mesto muzyki, 168-81.
catalog had already been printed, “that was their own fault.”\textsuperscript{223} In December 1937, the Arts Committee-organized Dekada of Soviet Music was criticized for “insufficient exchange of creativity between national republics.”\textsuperscript{224} While the music dekada offered performances of works by ethnic composers for their own national audiences, the cross-cultural aspect of the event had been less developed. The dekada program’s selection of music by non-Russian composers had been meager.

Archival documents reflecting Kerzhentsev’s treatment of the ethnic periphery present a mixed picture. His committee certainly did not ignore the national republics: Aside from the dekady of national art and other all-union arts events, the Arts Committee under Kerzhentsev helped establish and develop arts institutions in the republics and Russian periphery, committing not insubstantial (in relative terms) resources to them. Examples include plans for building or renovating theaters in Minsk, Ivanovo, Novosibirsk, and the Kirgiz SSR, and for the donation of items from the collections of various Moscow arts institutions to Alma-Ata’s new art museum.\textsuperscript{225} At the same time, the accusation of neglect, even if it was not the main motivation for Kerzhentsev’s removal, had some basis.\textsuperscript{226} In addition to Kerzhentsev’s failure to convene the Arts Committee’s council of republican representatives, a look at his interactions with Azerbaijan’s leadership provides more insight. During Kerzhentsev’s tenure as committee chair, the Directorate of Arts Affairs of the Azerbaijani SSR lost two heads. The first, Rukhulla Akhundov (Ruhulla Axundov), was arrested in December 1936, relieved of his post, and executed in 1938.\textsuperscript{227} Akhundov’s replacement, Davud Rasulzadeh (Davud Rəsulzadə), was

\textsuperscript{223} RGALI f. 962, op. 10, d. 21, l. 154.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., l. 178.
\textsuperscript{225} RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 30, ll. 94, 95, 101; f. 962, op. 3, d. 16, l. 30; f. 962, op. 3, d. 30, l. 54.
\textsuperscript{226} Maksimenkov, \textit{Sumbur vmesto muzyki}, 61.
\textsuperscript{227} RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 169, l. 37ob. Ruhulla Axundov was also the director of Azerbaijan’s branch of the Academy of Sciences (AzFAN); he was dismissed from both positions. The removal of Ruhulla Axundov was part of a systematic purge of old Bolsheviks and an older generation of ethnic elites throughout the national republics in
dismissed in mid-December 1937, just weeks before a delegation of performers was to leave for Moscow to present the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art.\textsuperscript{228} In a letter dated 14 December 1937 to Azerbaijani Party First Secretary Mir Jafar Bagirov (Mir Cəfər Bağırov), Kerzhentsev enumerated the shortcomings of the performance of the republic’s Directorate of Arts Affairs and its head, Rasulzadeh. At the same time, he demonstrated his ignorance of Azerbaijani art and culture, referring to “mugamat” as “the Azerbaijani epic,” and then proceeding to misspell Rasulzadeh’s name.\textsuperscript{229} By December 1937 Kerzhentsev was under siege by powerful figures in the Kremlin, and perhaps his letter to Bagirov firing Rasulzadeh was an act of desperation in hopes of forestalling his impending ouster from the Arts Committee. The choice of Azerbaijan and Bagirov may have been a riposte to Beria for his complicity in the November incident over the Georgian art exhibit at the Tretyakov. Bagirov’s closeness with Beria is well known, and some have speculated that Bagirov owed his longevity at the helm of Azerbaijan’s Communist Party – especially his survival of the late 1930s, when turnover of party chiefs in ethnic republics was rampant – to Beria’s protection.\textsuperscript{230} In December 1937, Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs had sent the final program for its upcoming dékada (at that point scheduled for February 1938) directly to the culture department of the Central Committee in Moscow, bypassing its own

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{228} On the purges of native elites, personnel turmoil, and their effect on Azerbaijani arts planning (including the postponed dékada), see Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{229} ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, ışlar 100-1. Muğamat is a musical term, referring to the Eastern melodies that form the basis for muğam, an improvisational style of instrumental and vocal music traditional in Azerbaijan.
\end{footnotesize}
organizational superior, the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs and breaching bureaucratic etiquette. Perhaps this move had drawn Kerzhentsev’s ire.231

In any event, it is striking that the head of the committee tasked with the development and dissemination of national art could not keep straight the most basic information about Azerbaijani national culture. Equally striking is that a man who had fashioned himself as an authority on efficient management and had been recently criticized for neglect of the ethnic periphery would allow correspondence containing errors betraying cultural ignorance and insensitivity to leave his office with his signature. Given that both ‘mugamat,’ and ‘Azerbaijani epic’ (in reference to Hajibeyov’s opera Koroglu [Koroğlu]) had made frequent appearances in the central press in late 1937 as part of the publicity preceding Azerbaijan’s upcoming dekada of national art, one can conjecture that perhaps Kerzhentsev (or an underling) simply conflated the two. Regardless of the mistake’s origin, it does convey a sense that Kerzhentsev was neither interested in nor knowledgeable about the cultures of Soviet minority republics – or of Azerbaijan, at least. His interactions with artists from other republics, discussed below, hardly give reason to modify this impression.

Ultimately, Kerzhentsev lost his job after Zhdanov’s excoriations in a speech delivered at the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in January 1938. Zhdanov accused Kerzhentsev, among other things, of endeavoring to close down Moscow Conservatory’s section of national cadres. At the same session, Bagirov echoed Zhdanov’s dissatisfaction with the performance of the Arts Committee leadership.232 While it is not clear who wrote Bagirov’s

231 Azerbaijan’s arts dekada was subsequently postponed to April 1938.
232 Maksimenkov contends that Kerzhentsev lost his position as a result of Zhdanov’s speech. Sumbur vmesto muzyki, 61. The speeches are mentioned by Uzeyir Hajibeyov (Uzeir Gadzhibekov) in his article “V starom i novom Azerbaizdzhane,” Sovetskaia muzyka No. 2 (Feb.), 1938: 57-61, 57. As a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Hajibeyov was present at the session to hear both speeches in person. The text of Bagirov’s speech, along with those of Zhdanov and others who spoke at the session, was printed in Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 18 January 1938, 2. Bagirov
speech, Stalin certainly read and commented on it in advance: a draft bearing Stalin’s handwritten edits survives in a Baku archive. This is not to imply, however, that the agendas of the diversity-indifferent Kerzhentsev and those of national culture entrepreneurs in the periphery had nothing in common. One point of intersection was interest in that most venerable and canon-defining of Russian (and Soviet) arts institutions, Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater. When tapped to lead the new All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs in January 1936, Kerzhentsev was given control of the theater, entrusted with making repertory and personnel decisions. Kerzhentsev was thus in a position to restructure the institution in pursuit of his own goals – namely, to break the theater’s tradition of academism and use its stage as a platform for the promotion of young creative cadres. Kerzhentsev appointed a new director of the theater and made plans to include both a Ukrainian and a Georgian opera (most probably Zacharia Paliashvili’s *Abesalom and Eteri*) in the theater’s repertoire for 1936. The series of national art dekady that began in Moscow in 1936 brought a parade of new, Soviet national operas – and young national cadres performing them – across the Bolshoi’s stage, with a goal of giving the theater’s repertoire a Soviet, multi-national complexion. Thus, the dekady helped Kerzhentsev dislodge the repertoire traditions of the Bolshoi of which he disapproved; for creative elites and performers from national republics, the dekady gave access to the Bolshoi, which served as a gateway to a venerated cultural canon.

For the center, the linked themes of “all-Union scope” and the development of national art were on display throughout 1936, while the draft of the new Soviet constitution was discussed

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mentioned Kerzhentsev and the Arts Committee briefly before spending the bulk of his time at the podium inveighing against People’s Commissar of Justice N.V. Krylenko. 

233 ARDSPİHA f. 1, sır. 88, is 292, no page number.
234 The new director was Tbilisi native S.A. Samosud.
235 The Bolshoi Theater, explains Maksimenkov, “was a bastion of academism and instinctively opposed the Stakhanovite inculcation in its repertoire of political operas.” On Kerzhentsev’s activities at the Bolshoi, see Maksimenkov, *Sumbur v mesto muzyki*, 114, 119-22.
and propagandized. While all-Union events were not new (evidenced by the 1923 Exhibition and 1930 Arts Olimpiada), their frequency and reach increased with the advent of the new All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs under Kerzhentsev. For help in orchestrating these all-Union extravaganzas, Kerzhentsev relied on the All-Union Radio Committee (VRK), of which he remained chair for some time after his appointment to the Arts Committee. For example, the All-Union Olimpiada of Choral Capellas and Choirs in late June and early July 1936 drew heavily on Radio Committee resources both organizationally and financially. The choral Olimpiada began with a unison rendition of the *Internationale* by 2500 people, the combined effort of all those on stage and in the audience of the concert hall at the Moscow Conservatory. The opening concert also featured a performance by a choir and orchestra of folk instruments from Dagestan. One article about the choral Olimpiada noted that, while the country had seen an array of olympiads in recent years, this was the first all-Union examination of choral singing. The Olimpiada’s goal was “to increase the attention of our brother republics” to this area, which was one of the country’s weaker arts. Another goal of the choral olimpiada was to provide an opportunity for exposure and exchange: music critic Evgenii Braudo commented that the mutual acquaintance of groups with examples of folk art would doubtless lead to an expansion of artistic experience and enrichment of the programs of individual choirs. A 17 April 1936 planning meeting indicated the participation of 23 groups from the RSFSR, the other Slavic republics and the Caucasus. The lack of representation from Central Asia prompted a decision to recruit a group “from Uzbekistan or Tajikistan.” In addition, the event’s organizing committee had secured the participation of the popular Sveshnikov and Piatnitskii folk choirs, which

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236 Ibid., 61. Kerzhentsev’s successor as Radio Committee chair, K. Mal’tsev, was appointed on 1 October 1936.
237 The Radio Committee and the Arts Committee each contributed a portion of the roughly 600,000 ruble budget. RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 30, l. 34, 36-9.
Kerzhentsev knew well from his work at the Radio Committee and now reported to him at the Arts Committee. Each participating group was permitted to send a maximum of 40 people to Moscow, and the groups were required to perform several songs all together, including the *Internationale*, a Ukrainian folk song, and a Kazakh song honoring Stalin (even though Kazakhstan sent no choral group to the Olimpiada), which was performed on the Olimpiada’s final day.240

Responses to the event were markedly less triumphal than those national art dekady and other festivals typically elicited. In part, this may have been a function of the format, as the Olimpiada was more of a review of the country’s choral art (though the dekady of national art were also framed as assessments, and this did not put a damper on the ecstatic notes of reaction struck in the press). Rather, the Choral Olimpiada seems to have been a way for the center to communicate expectations. The jury lamented that not one of the participating choirs – both amateur and professional, urban and rural, representing 19 nationalities – could be held up as a model. Repertoire was the main concern. For example, the choir from Armenia’s State Conservatory performed very well, the jury said, but its repertoire was faulted for not presenting any “genuine works of national art” but only arrangements by composers. A choir of auto workers from the Ivanovskaia oblast’ was criticized for its “random” repertory of Italian songs and entertainment numbers, while a Saratov choir was chastised for its “circus-like … pseudo-Russian stylization.” Music critic Braudo summed up the most pressing challenge for Soviet

240 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 30, l. 35; Braudo, “Olimpiada khorovogo iskusstva.” It was probably not coincidental that the two non-Russian republics furnishing songs for the group sing had just presented their dekady of national art in Moscow, a detail that points to the dekada of national art as a sort of cultural debut on the all-Union stage, after which each national art would become a part of a new multinational cultural heritage common to the entire Union. The Dekada of Ukrainian National Art and the Dekada of Kazakh National Art took place in Moscow, 10-21 March 1936 and 17-25 May 1936, respectively.
choral art: some national ensembles were struggling with the arrangement of monophonic folk song for a polyphonic choir.241

At the Olimpiada’s conclusion, Kerzhentsev held meetings with choir participants and directors, the proceedings of which were summarized in the press and transcribed. Speaking to the choirs, Kerzhentsev urged the spread of choral singing, stressing Stalin’s penchant for it (especially folk song) and pointing out that, unlike other countries, where art is a luxury, art in the Soviet Union was part of the daily life of every citizen. He added, in a reflection of the mid-1930s campaign to proclaim the happiness of Soviet life, that choirs should sing more joyously, and more often in a major key. On repertoire, Kerzhentsev pointed to the goal of incorporating more of the “classical heritage,” pledging Arts Committee support for improvement via local directorates of arts affairs and publication of a wider range of songs. He started the meeting by identifying the Olimpiada’s first task: “for the best songs of the peoples of the USSR to become the songs of the entire Union. The task of the jury and of the Olimpiada in general is to promote the exchange of songs between choirs.”242 Topping the agenda was the theme of exchange and familiarization with other nations’ art, to be integrated into an all-Union culture that belonged to all Soviet citizens. Somewhat ironically, there was little reciprocity at the meeting: the transcript does not show any questions from the audience of choir participants, though with a group numbering over 1000, Q&A with the rank-and-file was clearly not the meeting’s purpose.

At a meeting two days later with choir directors, however, there was genuine interaction: the visitors voiced their concerns, and the Arts Committee chair responded. The transcript of the

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241 Braudo, “Olimpiada khorovogo iskusstva.”
July 7 meeting provides valuable insights into the challenges faced on the ground by those charged with implementing Soviet cultural and nationalities policy. The transcript also reveals the lack of clarity surrounding the practical interpretation of policies that in some cases were based on needle-threading theory. A consistent theme of the choir directors’ comments was the lack of support and direction from authorities. One choral leader, responding to the general criticism of repertory presented at the Olimpiada, was plain: If someone had reviewed the selections beforehand and told us what to sing, that is what we would have presented. Another asked for a clear explanation of correct breathing methods for singers, explaining he had consulted all available textbooks only to find that each gave different instructions. A number of choir directors complained of a shortage of qualified workers in provinces and kolkhozes – even when young graduates were sent there, they stayed for only a couple of months.243

Another issue raised at the meeting was the difficult task of culturally uniting a given population. For one kolkhoz choir director, differences were generational: in his group, the older people continued to sing old ethnographic peasant songs, while the kolkhoz youth preferred mass Soviet song. A choral leader from Dagestan, where choral singing was a Soviet introduction, was caught between linguistic divisions and Moscow’s demands:

We have 36 nationalities and dialects in Dagestan. … You have two villages [auls] with a mountain stream between them, and this village doesn’t understand the language of the village on the other side of the stream. … If I take something in Avar and prepare it, then in Moscow they’ll ask, why is this in Avar and not in Kumik or Lezgi?

Another Dagestani pointed out the difficulty his republic’s linguistic diversity presents for higher education: We can’t have a music school (tekhnikum) just for one nationality, but we can’t have

243 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 94, ll. 4, 14.
one for all of Dagestan because there is no common language in the republic. He hoped to secure the Arts Committee’s help in organizing a music tekhnikum.244

On a positive note were a number of comments that the Olimpiada had been beneficial – choir members liked watching other groups rehearse and had picked up useful tips from them. Flattering Kerzhentsev, one choir director said that choral art in her town used to be ignored, but now, under the Arts Committee, it was getting more attention. Kerzhentsev urged all present to write pieces about the Olimpiada for their local newspapers when they got home. Transparently drawing on his managerial logic, he predicted that the Olimpiada would be a boon to choirm-formation in the regions because if Chuvashia, for example, had a good choir and other republics did not, then they will be spurred to choral action by fear that they will fare poorly in comparison.245 On the question of repertoire, which had been the main grounds for criticism of Olimpiada choir performances, Kerzhentsev was less than clear; even the newspaper summary of his remarks was confusing. He noted the significance of groups such as the Piatnitskii choir as “preservers of the repertoire of performance traditions of ancient [starinnoi] folk song,” saying that “a song is kept alive because it is mostly not written down, not harmonized.” At the same time, he expressed his disapproval of stylized folk song, though it is not clear how this category differed from the new music composed in a “folk style” that the professionalized Piatnitskii choir had adopted by this time. The mainstay repertoire of amateur choirs, he said, should be “folk song not only of its own nationality but of other nationalities of our country,” though “stylization

244 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 94, ll. 15-6, 19-20. The issue of Dagestan’s ethnic diversity arises in the context of other organizational work in the field of culture as well: The organizing committee of Dagestan’s Union of Soviet Writers faced the challenge of representing all the republic’s literatures in the new writers’ union. (Schild, Between Moscow and Baku, 61)
245 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 94, ll. 12, 27, 24.
and pseudo-folk style” were to be avoided. He added that the term “ethnographic” (which the Olimpiada jury had used freely in its public remarks) was passé.246

When the director of a Volga German choir that had sung Wagner in the Olimpiada and received criticism for “weakness in folk song,” asked for guidance on repertoire, Kerzhentsev responded that writing folkloric material was “the way to create new national music, German in form and socialist in content.”247 The recommendation to take shelter in folk material is reminiscent of the advice, quoted earlier, that Kerzhentsev had dispensed to Shostakovich in the wake of the Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk affair and the ensuing anti-formalism campaign. Yet the rush to folklore led to criticism of its overuse and still did not meet the needs of the creative intelligentsias of national republics, who struggled to produce art that was “new” and “national,” and now “socialist realist.” The limits of Kerzhentsev’s ability to provide meaningful direction for the development of national arts was on display at his 9 July 1936 meeting with the company of Uzbekistan’s Khamza Theater, which had just completed two weeks of performances in Moscow. Coverage in the Arts Committee’s newspaper, Soviet Art (Sovetskoe iskusstvo), begins provocatively: “Should Soviet Uzbek theater orient itself toward European theatrical culture, or does such an orientation risk the loss of its national distinctiveness?” This question was a major theme of the discussion at the meeting.248

Addressing the visiting artists from Uzbekistan, Kerzhentsev warned that while the theater should not lose is “national specificity,” it would be “the gravest mistake” to limit itself to national classics and national themes. Echoing Anatolii Glebov, who reviewed plays presented

247 “V komitete po delam iskusstv”; RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 94, ll. 7ob.-9.
248 V. Anov, “Uzbekskii teatr v Moskve,” Literaturnaia gazeta, 15 June 1936, 5; “V komitete po delam iskusstv.” The tour dates were 21 June to 5 July 1936. (RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 31, l. 21)
by national theaters during the First All-Union Olimpiada of National Theater and Art in 1930, Kerzhentsev dismissed the idea of using costume and make-up to make a foreign classic more accessible to a national audience. For example, putting Uzbek robes on actors performing Gogol’s *Marriage*, he said, does nothing to help an Uzbek audience grasp (*usvoit’*) the play and only distorts Gogol’s art, reflecting a simplistic understanding of the “national in form, socialist in content” directive. It is a mistake that “[a]ll nations – including Russia and France” have made, Kerzhentsev explained, citing the example of ancient Greek plays presented by actors dressed in European clothing of the 16th and 17th centuries. Yet where Glebov urged each nation to make world classics their own through adaptation and not mere linguistic translation, to create something new, original, and national as the Germans and Mikhail Chekhov had done with Shakespeare, Kerzhentsev declared, “To transpose a classical Russian, Ukrainian, or other nation’s work not only into one’s own language but entirely into one’s own historical perspective would be the greatest nonsense.” Works of art are tied to the place and time of their creation, Kerzhentsev argued: “If you do *Hamlet*, then through this production you must acquaint the viewer of Uzbekistan with the real Shakespeare, with that era, with those themes addressed by Shakespeare, and it must be Shakespeare, with the exception that it is in Uzbek.” Likewise, Gogol’s plays *The Inspector General* and *Marriage* reflect Nikolaevan Russia, to which characters like Khlestakov and the mayor are specific: “such types could not exist in France, Uzbekistan, etc.,” Kerzhentsev said. The Uzbek theater should present Gogol as Russian and Soviet theaters do, Kerzhentsev advised, “to acquaint the masses of Uzbekistan with our classical works, with … our past.” For Kerzhentsev, “national in form” is reduced to linguistic translation, which, he admits, does change the character of a work of art but “does not distort, only adds a bit of unique color.”

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249 RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 93, ll. 1-7. (Transcript of Kerzhentsev’s speech to the collective of Uzbekistan’s Khamza
Unsurprisingly, Kerzhentsev’s answer to the question of whether Uzbek theater should be oriented toward European theatrical culture, was, and had always been, “Yes.” Going beyond orientation, the views Kerzhentsev expressed at the July 1936 meeting with the Khamza theater troupe advocate imitation of European – and, in the specific case discussed, Russian – models. His support of minority nations’ wholesale adoption of Russian national culture coincides with the reemergence of an “ethnically marked” Russian nationalism that many scholars identify with the mid-1930s. This “rehabilitation of traditional Russian culture” led to increasingly open Russocentrism. A Gogol play in Uzbek that imitated Russian performance taught its audience about Russian history and culture; it did not allow the Uzbek theater to tap into Gogol’s universal dimensions to make his work its own. In this way, Uzbek artists and audiences remained guests of Russian culture rather than participants in the development of a new, international culture. Kerzhentsev’s attitude implies that Gogol should be present in Uzbek theaters because he is Russian; his greatness derives from his Russianness and not his universalism. This position was out of step with the principles of cross-cultural exchange and influence as a basis for integration and development that figured prominently in the rhetoric of Gorky and other all-Union events. In Kerzhentsev’s cultural landscape, art was not universal but distinctly national, suggesting a hierarchical and unidirectional subtext that betrays the notion of an all-Union canon that promotes the interconnectedness of all Soviet cultures.

His mechanical statement at the Choral Olimpiada about making the best songs of each nation into songs of the entire union notwithstanding, Kerzhentsev viewed formats like the art festival or olimpiada as managerial tools to encourage professional development. They were events where participants might learn “best practices” from each other and be motivated by competition, and where “management” could determine a baseline from which to measure

Theater on 9 July 1936. Contents of the speech are paraphrased in Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 11 July 1936.)
progress and convey expectations. In typical five-year-plan fashion, Kerzhentsev’s plans for artistic development in the national republics generally amounted to measurable goals such as the number of performances given and number of spectators served by an arts organization.\footnote{RGALI f. 962, op. 3, dd. 138, 140, \textit{passim}.}

For all his admiration of Wagner and the aesthetic ideal of \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} (a synthesis of all arts), Kerzhentsev did not manage to reconcile his own inner Apollo and Dionysus. Instead of the goal of merger through fusion and recombination, Kerzhentsev’s understanding of the international apparently hinged on assimilation of ethnic minority nations into a dominant Russian culture. Beyond the clarity of numbers and Russocentrism, Kerzhentsev provided little interpretive direction for the development of national art. Therefore, at a time when Soviet nations were expected to present themselves to Moscow, national creative intelligentsias were left largely on their own to generate acceptable artistic products, as their numbers and options dwindled, lost to purges.

Eighteen months after making his comments to the members of the Khamza theater, Kerzhentsev was ousted from the Arts Committee on charges that included neglect of national art. Whether or not this stated concern with national art figured in the Kremlin’s genuine motivation for sacking Kerzhentsev, there are indications that cultural figures in the periphery resisted his convictions and methods. In a discussion of the value of cross-cultural interaction at a December 1938 meeting of republican arts workers in Tashkent, Uzbek actress Sara Ishanturaeva pointedly commented, “Take such characters as in Gogol’s \textit{Inspector General} or \textit{Marriage}. Were there really no such types in pre-revolutionary Uzbekistan? There were.”\footnote{RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 458, l. 27.} A clear reference to Kerzhentsev’s July 1936 comments to the Khamza Theater group, Ishanturaeva’s jibe reflects an attempt to recover the idea of human interconnectedness through
art. This notion of art’s universalism had currency with the regime and held significant appeal for ethnic minority nations eager to share their art. The universal relevance of a national master was a basic principle of multiethnic canon-building and a feature of rhetoric connected with national poet jubilee celebrations. Notably, Kerzhentsev’s successor, M.V. Khrapchenko, was more conscientious about convening the Arts Committee’s council of republican representatives, an indication that Moscow was interested in input from minority nations (or at least in seeming so).

**CONCLUSION**

In interpreting the trajectory of nationalities policy and Soviet culture, a number of events and utterances are seen as bellwethers or turning points (e.g., the April 1932 resolution on restructuring arts organizations; the establishment of the Union of Soviet Writers Union in 1934; Stalin’s first recorded public reference to *Druzhba narodov*, the friendship of Soviet nations, in December 1935). Likewise, the changes ushered in have been characterized as a Great Retreat from socialism, a realization of socialism, and a reemergence of Russian nationalism. While there is validity and value to these observations, periodizations, and interpretations, the rhetoric of the 1923 Exhibition and 1930 Olimpiada, of Gorky’s World Literature project and 1934 speeches, reminds us of the continuities and reveals that the various strands of nationalities policy that came into focus in the 1930s were present earlier on. In many ways, the post-1932 developments, including the proceedings of the 1934 Writers’ Congress, were attempts to address the issues raised by the Olimpiada.

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252 These jubilees were themselves a means of pursuing the simultaneous development of national and international culture by intertwining these processes. Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee is an example discussed in Chapter 5.

253 A.I. Nazarov was Arts Committee interim chair from Kerzhentsev’s removal in January 1938 to Khrapchenko’s appointment in April 1939.
Similarly, the 1930 Olimpiada helps clarify the meaning and value of the “national” to the regime in Moscow, making a distinction between proletarian nationalism, which seeks a path of cultural exchange, and bourgeois nationalism, which seeks a path of isolation. The persecution in the 1920s of ethnic intellectuals who advocated different, culturally specific routes to development that did not emphasize facilitating engagement with other groups, indicates that this cultural criterion as a basis for distinguishing nationalisms was not new in 1930. For example, Mir-Said Sultangaliev, who envisioned a culturally Muslim version of Bolshevism for Tatarstan, was jailed in 1923 and 1928, and freed both times before a final arrest in 1937 and execution in 1940. Abdurauf Fitrat, who aspired to create a “separate but equal” national culture for Soviet Uzbekistan, was not arrested until 1938, but efforts to marginalize him through censorship were already underway in 1926, even though the state continued to rely on his contributions to the framing of Uzbek national culture.²⁵⁴

When ideas prominent in 1930 fell out of the mainstream of nationalities policy later in the decade, they still left a mark: The precedent and vocabulary they furnished remained in the minds of entrepreneurs of cultural nationalism in the periphery. When “exchange” devolved into Russianization, the rhetoric of mutual influence and reciprocal learning persisted among some national elites and their allies in the center, as an ideal they could continue to exploit for their own nation-building agenda, promoting national identity and pride among their national groups. In 1940, after the Russianizing switch to Cyrillic-based alphabets for Soviet Turkic languages, Azerbaijani poet Samad Vurgun (Səməd Vurğun) criticized Moscow’s lack of interest in

Azerbaijani art, and Russian writer Petr Skosyrev took his comrades to task for ignoring non-Russian literatures. (See Chapter 4)

Alongside its enlightenment and agitprop aims, the new Soviet state, especially after the creation of the Union in late 1922, pursued the goal of economic integration and cultural unification of a geographically vast territory inhabited by an ethnically diverse population. One strategy for achieving this was familiarizing Soviet citizens with the variety of the country’s products, economic and cultural. Starting in the 1920s, Soviet cultural leaders, Bolshevik and non-Party alike, praised the value of cross-cultural encounter. Speaking about a recently published collection of Kazakh folk songs, musicologist Andrei Rimsky-Korsakov (son of composer Nikolai) commented in 1925 that such a work “becomes a fertilizing source for composers of other nationalities.” Lunacharsky contended that the “wide use of creative work of different nations brings us closer to the secrets of a socialist culture.”

Yet even as official rhetoric settled on terms like osvoenie (assimilation) and vzaimootnoshenie (interrelation) in connection with the hoped-for cultural unity of Soviet nations, their practical meaning was imprecise, reflecting the vagueness surrounding the Marxist idea of cultural merger and its translation in Soviet practice. How the process would unfold and what its progress (and, for that matter, its endpoint) would look like remained murky. Did cultural merger mean the accession of selected contributions from each nation to a universal canon that would become native to all? Glebov offered Shakespeare as an example of

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257 Esperanto, created in the late 19th century as an international language, suggested such a model of cultural merger. It drew on Indo-European languages used in Europe, with each language family (Germanic, Slavic, Romance) contributing elements of grammar and vocabulary that were combined into a new language that also contained familiar elements (that is, familiar to everyone who knew one of the contributing languages). In the 1920s,
international culture, but in his description, *osvoenie of Hamlet* meant reworking the play with the addition of each nation’s particular creativity. Each result, he said, was completely different from the original – hardly a blueprint for universal cultural merger. Alternatively, was the new international culture to consist of alloys produced by cultural synthesis and hybridization, each individual artistic product reflecting a range of cultural influences that rendered the output beyond the claim of any single nation? Did a merged culture mean singing in unison? In harmony? In succession or at the same time? In marked contrast to Soviet aspirations to scientific exactitude, the rhetoric of Soviet cultural unity remained as polyvalent and fungible as it was overused. This vagueness, along with the rhetorical vestiges of ideals articulated in 1930, provided national republics a measure of space to maneuver in pursuit of their own agendas.

Meanwhile, instead of linguistic and ideological precision, the center offered metaphor. Gorky had importuned national writers to learn from one another and thereby become a unified literary community. Since before the revolution, social reformers had regarded music as a means of enlightening the masses. Theorists have likewise identified music as a potent method of building national community. The next chapter considers music as both national and international language. In particular, it examines the role of the Soviet music ensemble in creating national identity as well as in sharing it.

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CHAPTER 2

MUSIC AS METHOD AND METAPHOR

In the catalog for the World Literature publishing house, Gorky had written, “There is no universal Literature because – as yet – there has never been any universal language common to all mankind.” His contention that “all Literature … is saturated with sentiments, thoughts, ideas, which belong to the whole human race” suggests, however, that through linguistic translation, literature could be that universal language, uniting humanity – at least, Soviet humanity – in a common culture.\textsuperscript{258} With the freedom to use native languages as a cornerstone of Soviet nationalities policy, linguistic divisions remained a fact of Soviet life, and translation the only means of overcoming this obstacle to universal culture. Accordingly, Gorky campaigned for more translation – from Russian into minority languages, from minority languages into Russian, and from minority languages into other minority languages (typically via Russian). The Soviet Union’s literature translation project was enormous and unprecedented, including all the country’s languages as well as those of Europe and other parts of the world, which made it “nothing short of an endeavor to reinvent world literature on socialist terms, in keeping with Gorky’s injunction to ‘share our knowledge of the past.’”\textsuperscript{259}

Publicly espousing the disingenuous view that language is the only respect in which the brother Soviet nations differ, Gorky called for more translation to clear the path to a common world culture.\textsuperscript{260} Linguistic translation, however, consumed vast resources (time, money, expertise, administration) that were in short supply. In addition, there were many obstacles to the dissemination of the printed word in the early Soviet Union. In contrast, music was a universal

\textsuperscript{260} “Rech’ Gor’kogo,” \textit{Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s’ezd sovetskih pisatelei}, 15.
language that could be shared immediately to bring different nations closer; moreover, its emotional appeal made it a force for unity that was waiting to be unleashed. The new technology of radio provided a delivery system free of the difficulties that attended the printed word. Beginning with a discussion of radio as a means of bridging both cultural and spatial distance, this chapter explores the role of music in Bolshevik plans for cultural fusion. Through the example of music, I consider the interconnected processes of “cultural development” of minority nations and merger of nations during the first two decades of Soviet rule. Continuing the themes of “red triangulation” and continuity over time, I trace Bolshevik ideas about music’s unifying power and Soviet methods devised to foster cross-cultural interaction to pre-revolutionary roots. Drawing on examples from Azerbaijan, where musical art, including the accomplishments of the Soviet period, is central to national identity, I pay particular attention to folk ensembles (both choral and orchestral) as metaphors for and means of effecting cultural synthesis and social unity.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION: RADIO AND THE NATION

Lenin had praised radio as a “newspaper without paper and without distances.”\(^{261}\) The role ascribed to print capitalism in the development of national identity is well-known, and the Bolsheviks understood the value of newspapers for their political agenda.\(^{262}\) However, the early Soviet Union presented many challenges to the production and circulation of print media. In addition to physical distance and illiteracy, paper shortages were a constant problem, along with poor roads and transportation, lack of typesetting and other printing equipment, and a dearth of


\(^{262}\) The point is argued most famously by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
skilled print workers in many areas. Radio was the unique medium that could overcome these obstacles to reach the masses in even the remotest areas in real time. In a sense, radio could even speed up time, or at least the development of national identity, which, in the past, had to wait for the spread of literacy. Now, radio could take on print media’s community-building role without delay, telescoping stages of national development. Moreover, radio could facilitate nation-building on multiple levels simultaneously: on the one hand it could develop national identity within an individual ethnic group; on the other, it could connect “the far-flung parts of the union” to the center, binding them together into a unified supraethnic whole. A push for the expansion of radio in the mid-1920s coincided with other efforts to instill a unified Soviet identity in the mind of the Soviet public. As broadcasting spread to the periphery, Moscow sought to coordinate radio schedules across the entire country and to expand nation-wide broadcasting, requiring regional radio centers to rebroadcast a set amount of Moscow programming. Scholars of early Soviet culture emphasize radio’s ability to unite the Soviet Union, asserting that “one of radio’s key roles was the creation of the great Soviet community of feeling.”

During the festivities that marked the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1927, more than 20 stations around the country broadcast programming from Moscow. By 1 May 1928, the USSR had 59 radio stations, including in spots on the non-Slavic periphery such as Ufa, Kazan, Makhachkala, Nal’chik, Tashkent, Samarkand, Ashkhabad, Baku, Tiflis (Tbilisi),

263 Schlögel, Moscow, 1937, 215-6; Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 54.
264 For example, while visiting Moscow in late December 1926, Walter Benjamin wrote in his diary: “Russia is beginning to take shape for the man on the street. A major propaganda film, A Sixth Part of the World, has been announced. On the street in the snow lie maps of the USSR, piled up there by street vendors who offer them for sale.” Walter Benjamin, Moscow Diary, ed. Gary Smith, trans. Richard Sieburth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 50-1. Cited in Holt, The Rise of Insider Iconography, 44.
265 For example, Moscow programming accounted for about 20 percent of Turkmenistan’s radio schedule in 1934. Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 79.
266 Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 43. On the significance of radio in the Soviet 1930s, see Schlögel, Moscow, 1937, 215-28, here 228. Schlögel adds, “Radio is not just a means of communication over an infinite space; it is not just a medium for information, further education and enlightenment. It is a medium, indeed an instrument, for synchronizing experiences, for bringing people together, for the creation of communities of feelings and hatreds.” (215-6)
and Erevan. In both urban and rural areas, wired systems such as loudspeakers were used to project radio programming into streets, workplaces, residence halls (barracks, worker dormitories), and leisure spots such as clubs and “red corners,” making radio-listening a “collective activity.” Language, however, remained a source of division. For example, “In Kazan region, radio was of limited interest while it broadcast only in Russian. But when Tatar broadcasts started, the number of radio sets in the village increased sharply.” At a 1938 meeting, local radio authorities in Baku complained that although 70 percent of the republic’s radio programming was supposed to be in Azerbaijani, in actuality it accounted for only 15-20 percent. One official related an instance when an announcer giving news in Azerbaijani was cut off and replaced by news in Russian, eliciting great dissatisfaction from listeners.

Even without a language barrier, words, both written and spoken, could cause difficulties. The practice of live broadcasting placed substantial burden on censors, who had to review scripts for upcoming programs and then monitor adherence to approved texts during live broadcasts. As increasing levels of censorship and political restriction made ad-libbing on the air impossible, invited guests were given pre-approved scripts to read at the microphone. This, as a member of Azerbaijan’s Radio Committee explained in March 1938, presented its own problems. When Azerbaijani Stakhanovite cotton worker Basti Bagirova (Bəsti Bağırova) arrived at the radio studio in Baku, it became clear that she was illiterate; unable to read the provided script, she could not go on the air. Musical content was preferable when it came to radio programming

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268 Ibid., 25, 51-2, 58.
269 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 898, səh. 4.
270 In 1940, for example, nearly 75 percent of all programming was live. Lovell attributes this to the expense of high-quality recording. (*Russia in the Microphone Age*, 36-7)
271 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 898, səh. 6. In 1937, Basti Bağırova was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as a deputy from Azerbaijan.
and quickly became a cornerstone of Soviet radio schedules.\textsuperscript{272} By the late 1930s, musical programs accounted for about 60 percent of radio broadcast output nationwide. In Azerbaijan, the Central Committee of the republic’s Communist Party resolved in November 1938 that music should account for 45 percent of republican radio programming and called for the expansion of the repertoire available for broadcast.\textsuperscript{273}

In addition to their popularity with the public, music programs were a way to acquaint listeners with the cultures of brother Soviet peoples. A Moscow radio schedule from March 1925 lists a broadcast devoted entirely to Ukrainian music.\textsuperscript{274} In May of the same year, Moscow radio Novosti broadcast a discussion of Kazakh music in connection with the publication of a new collection of Kazakh folk song, and the capital’s “Komintern” radio station aired a special concert devoted to the music of the Kazan and Ural Tatars in honor of the fifth anniversary of the Tatar SSR.\textsuperscript{275} By late 1925, one of the main rubrics of Soviet musical radio programming was “Musical ethnography – songs and music of the peoples of the USSR,” with entire broadcasts devoted to the music (or a representative musician) of one ethnicity or nationality.\textsuperscript{276} At the same time, the universal language of music provided a handy metaphor for the Soviet project of concentric identities that brought individual nations together in harmony.

Platon Kerzhentsev exploited the unifying aspect of music with the first All-Union Radio Festival of Soviet Radio Broadcasting in March 1936. Formally organized by the Radio

\textsuperscript{272} Of course, avoiding text did not eliminate political risk. For example, the well-known case of Shostakovich and his opera \textit{Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk}, in which Platon Kerzhentsev is believed to have played a role, is evidence that music could be the basis for political accusation in the paranoid and predatory environment of the Soviet 1930s. Another example is the famous incident of a Moscow radio station playing Chopin’s \textit{Marche Funèbre} immediately after the announcement of the guilty verdict condemning Trotskyites, prompting accusations of disloyalty against those responsible for the choice of music. The incident is described in Schlögel, \textit{Moscow, 1937}, 228.

\textsuperscript{273} ARDSPiHA f. 1, siy. 235, i§ 929, sah. 10-4.

\textsuperscript{274} Novosti Radio No. 6, 15 March 1925, 9.


Committee, the festival was one of the first country-wide events Kerzhentsev oversaw as chair of the new All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs.\textsuperscript{277} The festival’s opening on March 23 demonstrated radio’s ability to overcome physical distance with singers in four different cities performing a collective, harmonized rendition of the \textit{Internationale}. In a simultaneous celebration of unity and diversity, eleven more renditions of the anthem followed, each from a different city and in a different language with local national accompaniment – in Minsk by a cymbal orchestra, in Kiev by \textit{kobzars} (traditional Ukrainian bards who played the \textit{kobza}, a stringed instrument), and in Baku by an Eastern orchestra.\textsuperscript{278} “As city after city took up the proletarian hymn,” \textit{Pravda} reported, “space ceased to exist.”\textsuperscript{279} During the first six days of the festival, concerts in 13 cities (Petrozavodsk, Leningrad, Tiflis [Tbilisi], Arkhangel’sk, Saratov, Engel’s, Minsk, Rostov, Sverdlovsk, Tashkent, Alma-Ata, Cheboksary, and Gor’kii) featuring national art were broadcast across the entire country. The preponderance of groups focused on folk art, with one critic pointing out that the Minsk concert showed Belorussian folk song in a great variety of performances, “from a primitive kolkhoz [collective farm] choir to a complex symphony orchestra.”\textsuperscript{280}

The first All-Union Radio Festival may have been inspired by the International Broadcasting Union’s (IBU) “Youth Sings” program, which began on 27 October 1935 and featured youth choirs from 31 countries singing their favorite songs.\textsuperscript{281} An article written at the conclusion of the Soviet festival remarked that the IBU’s effort was not “unmediated” because

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{277} As noted in Chapter 1, Kerzhentsev had served as chair of the All-Union Radio Committee since its creation in 1933 and was appointed chair of the new Arts Committee in January 1936. He retained both posts for much of 1936. An article announcing the festival appeared in \textit{Pravda} on 13 February 1936, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Moscow sang soprano, Leningrad alto, Kiev tenor, and Minsk bass. “Vsesoiuznyi radiofestival’,” \textit{Pravda}, 23 March 1936, 4. The “Eastern orchestra” is discussed below.
\item \textsuperscript{279} “Otkrytie pervogo sovetskogo radiofestivalia,” \textit{Pravda}, 24 March 1936, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{280} S. Korev, “Shest’ dnei,” \textit{Izvestiia}, 4 March 1936, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Suzanne Lommer, \textit{Europe - On Air: Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting} (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 263.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
some countries’ performances were not live, but recorded in advance. In contrast, no one in the All-Union Radio Festival had to resort to this practice, a testament to Soviet technical achievement, which had created a “genuine all-Union audience.”

Between 8:30 and 11 pm (Moscow time) on each night of the festival, which ran from March 3 to April 5, live performances from a total of 28 Soviet cities were transmitted to Moscow, where they were broadcast to the entire Soviet Union in a show of unity brought about by modern Soviet distance-conquering technology. In addition, this vast and diverse yet intimate and united country knew how to reward its citizens. The festival was a juried competition, with the best groups receiving awards of cash, radios, phonographs, and a physical trip to Moscow (rather than via radio wave), where they gave open concerts and radio performances. The First Eastern Orchestra of Azerbaijan’s Radio Committee was recognized in this manner, with its 32 members traveling to Moscow in February 1937.

UNITY IN MULTICUITY: PREACHING (TO) THE CHOIR

While Kerzhentsev’s 1936 All-Union Radio Festival had innovated the use of technology to unite singers in harmony across space, the group singing exercise itself had long been a fixture of Soviet festival culture. Sixteen years earlier, describing the 1920 May Day celebration in Petrograd, Kerzhentsev had written, “The most gripping moment was when … a tremendous chorus of workers of all nationalities sang the Internationale.”

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282 This boast takes on a different cast, however, in light of Stephen Lovell’s observation that live broadcasts were the norm for Soviet radio in the 1930s because Soviet recording technology was primitive and high-quality recording on sound film was expensive. (Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 37)

283 “Vsesoiuznyi radiofestival’”; V. Shostakovich, “60.000.000 slushatelei,” Izvestiya, 8 April 1936, 4.

284 “Vsesoiuznyi radiofestival’.”

285 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, iş 455, sah. 292; Ramil Qasımov, Azərbaycan Televiziya va Radiosunun Səid Rüstəmov adına Əməkdar xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri – 80 (Baku: Yazıçı nəşriyyatı, 2012), 58.

Olimpiada of Leningrad Trade Unions, held in July 1929, the concert program featured a performance of the *Internationale* in which the event’s thousands of participants and entire audience, including groups of visitors from Ukraine and Transcaucasia, collaborated as one.\(^{287}\)

Although in January 1934 Bukharin had told the Seventeenth Party Congress, “Unity does not mean we should all sing the same song at the same time,” the symbolic meaning of doing just that kept the practice of group singing a cultural constant through decades of upheaval.\(^{288}\)

Examining a pre-revolutionary moment when imperial Russia’s cultural elites felt adrift in a sea of change, Rebecca Mitchell observes their turn to music as “the ultimate transformative and unifying force, capable of overcoming the divisions of modern life and ushering in a new stage in human history,” a view that she calls *musical metaphysics*.\(^{289}\) Many intellectuals, she argues, came to see music as the “ultimate expression” of unity, which was “the final goal in art and life.” Moreover, Mitchell sees this philosophical equation as rooted in an admixture of Continental and indigenous Russian philosophy, a formula of synthesis familiar from Russia’s narratives of its cultural and national development.\(^{290}\) The rise of the notion of music as (1) an “instrument of social unity” that “creates an inclusive spiritual space for gathering of the nation,” and (2) an instructive medium for social transformation among pre-revolutionary Russian elites has unmistakable resonances with the Soviet project in general, and with the ideas underpinning

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\(^{290}\) Ibid., 25, 31. Nietzsche and Wagner influenced such leaders of early Soviet culture as Anatoly Lunacharsky and Platon Kerzhentsev. Generally, “the German thinkers were fundamental to determining the agenda of cultural debate.” (von Geldern, “Nietzschean leaders and followers in Soviet mass theatre,” 134)
Soviet nationalities policy in particular. Although Mitchell suggests that this faith in music petered out as the Soviet cultural experiment gained momentum, this section shows that many of the ideas about music that characterized the Zeitgeist at the center of Mitchell’s study were fundamental to Soviet leaders’ approaches to their new multinational state and therefore endured beyond the 1920s. Of all the arts, music best embodied the ideas and goals of Soviet nationalities policy, including the “paradoxes” at its core.

Music’s potential for forging unity from diversity held particular appeal for the Russian state and the multiethnic community of Russia’s intellectual elites. Just as one of “Nietzsche’s orphans” in 1908-9 referred to music as “vsenarodnyi” [all-national, universal], “kollektivnyi” [collective], and “an instrument of social unity and agreement,” so 35 years later, Soviet musicologist S.A. Ginzburg suggested that the aim of Soviet music is “the creation of an all-national [vsenarodnyi] musical language.” After 1917, while some proponents of “musical metaphysics” (Sergei Rachmaninoff, for example) fled Russia, others (such as Marietta Shaginian, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Viacheslav Ivanov, and Nadezhda Briusova) transitioned to the new cultural life, bringing many of their ideas about music (minus the metaphysics) with them. In the cases of Lunacharsky, who became the first Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment (initially of the RSFSR and then the USSR), and Briusova, who continued the folk music-based curriculum she had developed at her People’s Conservatory, aspects of the philosophies they

291 Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans, 31-5, 54. See especially the section “Music as Unity” (31-4).
292 Mitchell does note that some figures, as well as their ideas about the centrality of music to cultural identity, continued to exert significant influence in the Soviet (and post-Soviet) period. (Nietzsche’s Orphans, 208) Katerina Clark describes the cultural climate of the Soviet 1920s as one in which “materiality of the word was downplayed in favor of such values as music … theatricality, spectacle, and monumentalism.” She adds, “in the culture of 1927-31 one finds an impulse toward homogenizing all elements in a society in a Gesamtkunstwerk in which, as in the Wagnerian scheme, “music” predominated.” [Clark, Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 225, 255]
293 Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans, 7, 25; 35-6; S. Ginzburg, “Muzikal’no-istoricheskoe nasledstvo Sovetskogo Uzbekistana,” in S. Ginzburg, Iz istorii muzikal’nykh sviazei narodov SSSR. Izbrannye stat’i i vystupleniia (L.: Sovetski kompozitor, 1972), 17-31, here 23. Ginzburg also writes that the goal is for each Soviet nation “to have its Glinka.”
carried across the revolutionary divide strongly influenced early Soviet culture and outlived their carriers’ presence on the Soviet cultural scene. Emerging from the revolution and civil war, Russian musical life was hardly a picture of unity, with a profusion of views about how music could best contribute to socialist cultural transformation.²⁹⁴

In 1913, a provincial Russian voice teacher sought to make choral singing a required part of elementary school curriculum, seeing music as a source of “sobornost’: unity in multiplicity.” Similarly, the practice of Orthodoxy in late imperial Russia placed a new emphasis on the importance of communal singing, a sentiment reflected in the biography of erstwhile seminarian Stalin.²⁹⁵ This same view of choral singing as a binding and grounding activity in an era of dislocation persisted in the Soviet culture of the 1920s and 1930s, on both the amateur and professional levels. As a “bridging genre,” choral music had a lot to offer: The need for music as an enlightening and unifying force had never been greater, and choral music, which encompassed popular and folk songs as well as opera (the choir’s origins lie in Greek drama), bridged the spheres of low and high art. Speaking in 1936 to a group of choirs participating in a choral Olimpiada in Moscow, Arts Committee chair Kerzhentsev referred to Stalin’s affection for choral singing:

… our beloved Comrade Stalin has often pointed out the importance of the propaganda of choral folk song. Stalin himself sang in a choir, loves singing, and considers …[it]… an extremely important element of all our work in the area of art [and] culture … through choral singing we are educating the masses …²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans, 25. Mitchell writes, “Between 1905 and 1917, it was regularly argued … that communal singing should be employed in the Orthodox liturgy to reawaken spiritual devotion among the peasantry and to protect the confused souls of Orthodox peasants from the seductiveness of both revolution and sectarian worship.” (36) As a student at a Tbilisi seminary, the young Stalin sang in the school choir.
²⁹⁶ RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 92, l. 5.
From a nation-building perspective, the activity of singing engages the individual’s emotional sense of belonging to a group; this accounts for the role of national anthems in nationalist movements and the lives of nations. At a February 1925 meeting, the Central Committee of Azerbaijan’s Communist Party turned to choral circles “as a means of developing national musical culture” among the Azeri proletariat and recommended their wide use in schools, workers’ clubs, the Red Army, and the Komsomol and Pioneer youth organizations. The repertoire was tailored to the population: revolutionary songs for singing groups in Baku, folk songs for groups outside the city. At the same meeting, the Central Committee (TsK) resolved that the republic’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros) must expand the collection and recording of Azerbaijan’s folk music in Western musical notation. These efforts were a departure from local musical tradition, which did not use musical notation (Western or otherwise), relying instead on oral transmission and improvisation.

In Azerbaijan, as elsewhere in the “East,” traditional singing was neither a large collective nor a polyphonic endeavor, consisting, rather, of solo performance, often with accompaniment by a trio of instruments or self-accompaniment by the singer. Settings were intimate; large-scale concerts delivered in formal public halls were not customary. Voices were either tenor or soprano, as the bass and baritone registers were not used. During the cultural flowering of the late imperial period known as the Azerbaijani Enlightenment, some Azeri creative intellectuals experimented with elements of Western musical theater, combining them with local traditions to produce Azerbaijan’s first musical-dramatic works. In these operas and

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298 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, iş 140, səh. 112. In addition, the Central Committee ordered the replacement of all “nationalist, Pan-Turkist, Pan-Islamist choral songs” with strictly revolutionary ones, though no definition of these categories was given.
operettas, written in the decades before the advent of Soviet power in the South Caucasus, low vocal registers were used for negative or comical characters, and choruses, a Western import, were monophonic. Thus the promotion of choral culture in many parts of the Soviet ethnic periphery, especially among Muslim populations such as the Azerbaijani Turks, served not only to develop group identity and political awareness but to exert a culturally Westernizing influence.

Along with the spread of choral culture on the amateur level, there were efforts to form professional institutions. In 1920, composers Uzeyir Hajibeyov (Üzeyir Hacıbəyov) and Muslim Magomayev ( Müslüm Maqomayev) had lobbied Azerbaijan’s Commissariat of Enlightenment to open a music academy and national conservatory, including a department of Eastern music.\(^{299}\) Both men were proponents of cross-cultural contact as an avenue to growth and saw experiments with cross-cultural borrowing as a means of progress. Hajibeyov first attempted to form a monophone choir in 1926 at the music academy in Baku. The collective soon disbanded (according to one source, under pressure from “bourgeois nationalists”), and it was not until a decade later that, on assignment from republican authorities, Hajibeyov successfully organized a national state choir.\(^{300}\) There were also efforts to form a choir of *ashugs* (traditional Caucasian bards; Azerbaijani: *aşıq*), even though the ashug style was solo and improvisational and therefore ill suited to the organizing principles of ensemble.\(^{301}\) In some sense, however, this effort to combine the seemingly irreconcilable was designed to make a point. Exercises in cultural synthesis had symbolic, ideological, and practical import for the Soviet project. Music – and choral singing in particular – was a powerful metaphor for and agent of social unity.

\(^{300}\) *Azerbaijanskaya gosudarstvennaya filharmoniya imeni M. Magomayeva* (Baku: Izdanie upravleniia po delam iskusstv pri SNK AzSSR, 1938), 12.
\(^{301}\) Uzeir Gadzhibekov, “V starom i novom Azerbaidzhane,” *Sovetskaia muzyka* No. 2 (Feb.), 1938: 59-61, 61; RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 537, l. 9.
Choral music was a European format and had developed standards and a performance culture that were at odds with the musical traditions of Azerbaijan and Central Asia. For example, the large-scale format of the choir was not tolerant of practices such as improvisation and singing by ear (as opposed to reading notes). Furthermore, the leaders of Soviet culture in Moscow, oriented toward European culture, valued polyphony both as a sign of cultural development and a symbol of harmonized social diversity. The goal that each recognized Soviet ethnic group have a large, professional, mixed-voice choir (that is, including male and female voices) that performed polyphonic arrangements necessitated significant modifications to local musical cultures.

Figure 2.1. Azerbaijani aşq ensemble, circa 1937. Sovetskaia muzyka No. 2, 1938, 59.

Taking Notes: Cultural Synthesis and the Folk Ensemble

The adoption of musical notation was the subject of heated debate among Azerbaijan’s cultural elites in the 1920s. The crux of the issue was whether the European system of musical notation, which was designed to denote the 12-tone scale used in European music, could be applied to Eastern music, which used a different scale with intervals (half and quarter tones) that did not coincide with the standardized European scale. The notation question was a proxy for the issue of fundamental compatibility between Eastern and Western musical traditions and, by
extension, between Eastern and Western cultures. The Eurocentric orientation of Bolshevism as an ideology, along with the Russocentric frame of reference and Orientalist tendencies of individual Bolsheviks, had made the modern synonymous with the Western. On questions of technological and economic advancement, many reform-minded Muslims of the Russian Empire agreed that cues could be taken from the West. On cultural matters, however, especially about artistic production, the path was less clear. Experimenters and reformers like Hajibeyov and Magomayev were open to Western influence. Hajibeyov championed formal musical education that included Eastern and Western traditions, while Magomayev stressed the need to “spread among the people examples of the music of East and West.”

He argued,

We must master conquests of cultured countries not only in the area of music, but in all areas. The Turkic people must taste the delight of the work of great European geniuses such as Wagner, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky. Our work in the area of musical enlightenment must go in that direction, so as to finally reach an understanding by Turks of the beauty of these works. But you cannot do this at the expense of destroying national music.

Soviet nationalities policy called for the cultural flowering of minority nations now liberated from tsarist oppression, but for many, forcing Turkic song into the Procrustean bed of European foundations meant “breaking its ribs.”

At the same time, admitting cultural incompatibility and insurmountable cultural difference had serious implications, dealing a blow to the ideal of the International. In Bolshevik thought and Soviet policy, culture was the sphere where national identity was expressed but also where the process of cultural merger was to unfold. How could cross-cultural encounter occur and lead to the creation of a common culture, if national cultures remained isolated behind unscalable walls? And how could international cultural synthesis take place when national

304 Ibid., 28.
elements remained inaccessible to others? Especially troubling to those who had imbibed a belief in music’s power to unite was the idea that cultural irreconcilability should reside in music. Leninist policy had conceded the importance of language to national identity, supporting the use and development of national languages. Even if, as Gorky sermonized in 1934, language was the only point of difference between Russians and other Soviet peoples, this was an admission that verbal interaction had to be mediated. Music, however, was regarded as a universal language, and as such held the promise of unmediated sharing across cultures. Admitting the fundamental incompatibility of musical cultures threatened the premise and future goal of merger. The Soviet-sponsored development of national cultures required eventual convergence at a common destination. The developmental paths of individual nations, then, proceeded at an incline toward each other. By requiring national cultural production that was accessible to a multinational audience and forcing the multinational audience’s consumption of it, state-sponsored cultural interaction steepened the gradient of progress toward intersection. Furthermore, the initial stages of expedited cultural development for “backward” groups were defined by the trail Russia had blazed, which had served that nation so well in its own expedited artistic development.

In the public debate over musical notation in Baku in 1924, those who held that “Turkic song cannot really be written with the European note system” were met with accusations of “scholasticism” and “denying European civilization” from Mustafa Quliyev, Azerbaijan’s Commissar of Enlightenment.305 Later on, this position was damningly branded as “bourgeois nationalist” in its isolationism and resistance to progress.306 In late 1930s Kirgizia, for example, “bourgeois nationalists” allegedly “denied musicians the opportunity to study the European and

Russian classical legacy” and argued “that Kirgiz folk melodies would be distorted and lose their beauty if they were played on European instruments.” Likewise, the Ukrainian Composers’ Union was accused of discouraging “adaptations or elaborations of folk songs, arguing that this technique would only spoil the original work,” and therefore “attempting to keep their national music in a primitive state.” Such accusations reduced the cultural debates in the periphery to extremist views that did not logically equate. In Azerbaijan, for example, reform-minded and nationalist intellectuals of various political stripes had long encouraged cross-cultural exposure.

It is tempting to see this insistence by Moscow (and its allies in the periphery) on the adoption of European musical notation as discrimination against non-Russian national cultures and repression of non-Russian national identity. Yet the adaptation of folk forms to the professional standards of European music is a process that was pioneered in Russia before the revolution. For example, the group that eventually became the Piatnitskii Folk Choir, an ensemble that enjoyed enormous popularity throughout the Soviet era, had its roots in ethnographic fieldwork done in the villages of Central Russia during the first decade of the 20th century by singer and ethnographer Mitrofan Efimovich Piatnitskii, who sought “to collect for posterity what remained of the traditions of village life that were quickly disappearing in the face of modernization.” When he brought several groups of peasant singers to Moscow to perform,

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308 Frolova-Walker maintains that in the 1920s cultural development in the ethnic periphery was not strictly dictated by Moscow but left to republican authorities, and therefore the responsibility for radical changes such as adopting musical notation lay with local ethnic Bolsheviks who were radical Westernizers such as Azerbaijan’s Mustafa Quliyev. Thus Frolova-Walker writes that Quliyev, who in 1923 commissioned a Russian composer to write an Azerbaijani national opera, simply “anticipated” Stalin’s insistence in the 1930s on the development of national operas and the dispatching of Russian composers to various republics to write them. (Frolova-Walker. Russian Music and Nationalism, 321-2) Amy Nelson, who focuses on Russia, maintains that musical culture there remained relatively untouched in the 1920s. (Nelson, Music for the Revolution) I argue that while it is true that in the 1920s the centralized structures were not yet in place to execute uniform cultural policy, musical Westernization was an important element in Soviet merger goals, which were part of nationalities policy, and was pursued from the start, if more gradually than later on. In general, AzKP/b/ directives about adapting Azerbaijani music to European techniques from early 1925 indicate that this was a priority. Likewise, persecution of Abdurauf Fitrat in Uzbekistan at around the same time (discussed below) indicates that the center was resolute in its position about the acceptable direction for ethnic national development, and that direction meant developing national culture that was “shareable.”
the concerts “met with both critical praise and enthusiasm from the audience,” a response that set off a process of professionalizing the choir that began before the revolution and continued after it. Among the changes were singing from sheet music and eschewing oral transmission and improvisation, which were features of folk music. Singers objected to these developments, and claimed that writing down a song warped it, destroying its authenticity.\textsuperscript{309} Some of the proposed changes to musical culture in Azerbaijan (and elsewhere) thus followed precedents in pre-revolutionary Russia, where they had elicited the same disapproval. The story of the folk orchestra shares many features with that of its cousin ensemble, the folk choir, but presents what may be a more pronounced example of red triangulation in Soviet efforts at cross-cultural encounter and cultural synthesis.

Like the vocal collective of the choir, the instrumental collective of the orchestra enacted a process of harmonizing diversity in pursuit of a common goal. Accordingly, it was a potent metaphor for Soviet culture. Azerbaijani poet Samad Vurgun (Səməd Vurğun) is credited with comparing Soviet literature to “a many-instrument orchestra, in which each instrument reflects the voice of a specific people, and all these sounds together create the melody of socialist poetry.”\textsuperscript{310} In the Soviet ethnic periphery, the Western symphony orchestra, triangulated through the orchestra of Russian folk instruments, was the model for the evolving national instrument orchestras, which were regarded as evidence and expression of the cultural compatibility between Eastern and Western cultures. In a Russian-language program printed for the Dekada of Azerbaijani National Art held in Moscow in April 1938, the conductor of an Azerbaijani folk instrument orchestra wrote, “The socialist revolution … created and developed new forms of genuinely national art, the appearance of which was not possible in the pre-revolutionary time.”

\textsuperscript{309} Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals,” 394, 413.
Identifying the orchestra of folk instruments as one such new form, he described its emergence as “inextricably tied to the development of socialist construction in Azerbaijan, to the appearance of new artistic demands from our mass listener.” Soviet Azerbaijan’s first orchestra of national instruments was, indeed, created shortly after the installation of Soviet power, and since then, numerous ensembles of so-called folk or national instruments (sometimes called “Eastern instruments”) in various iterations and sizes had been organized in Azerbaijan. By the late 1930s, most Soviet national republics – both Union-level and autonomous – had their own folk instrument orchestras.

Like the folk choir, the orchestra of national instruments has pre-revolutionary roots. The first orchestra of Russian folk instruments was an all-balalaika affair that debuted in St. Petersburg in March 1883, led by Vasilii V. Andreev. As with the peasant choir, the formation of a concertizing folk orchestra brought changes to traditional repertory, playing habits, musical styles, and even the instruments themselves. Because the traditional balalaika did not have tempered tuning, a chromatic scale, or fixed frets – all obstacles to the orchestral format – Andreev modified the instrument, introducing these features. In addition, he innovated different sizes of balalaikas to match the range of pitches used by the instruments of the European orchestra. Andreev’s group played “lushly harmonized” arrangements of Russian folk music as well as works of Russian and Western European classical composers “in lavish settings.”

According to a Soviet source from the 1960s, Tolstoy, along with composers Tchaikovsky and Rubinshtein (all Soviet cultural icons at the time of writing) appreciated the

311 Azerbaidzhanskaia gosudarstvennaia filharmoniiia imeni M. Magomaeva, 45.
313 For example, on Buryat-Mongolia’s orchestra of folk instruments, see Pravda, 19 October 1940; on Kazakhstan’s folk instrument orchestra see Michael Rouland, Music and the Making of the Kazak Nation, 1920-1936, Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 2005, 349-50.
balalaika orchestra, but “conservatives” did not, charging that Andreev’s reconstructions of the instrument had robbed it of its “primordially Russian” (iskonno russkii) character. Some objected to the instrumental ensemble performance as not native to Russian folk music (in village musical culture, “the three-stringed balalaika was known, if at all, in one size and usually played only to accompany dancing”), while others disapproved of the exalted Western classical canon rendered by primitive peasant instruments. One critic considered Andreev’s orchestra to be lacking in artistic value but “appropriate for the lower strata of society, in particular for the factory worker …” Nevertheless, the orchestra of Russian folk instruments endured, expanding to incorporate other instruments (such as the domra, gusli, svirel’, and zhaleika) and, like the Piatnitskii choir, crossed the revolutionary divide to become a Soviet institution. In the Soviet era, Andreev was commonly credited with saving Russian folk music at a moment when rapid change endangered its survival; his innovations were seen as acts of preservation rather than disfigurement or loss.315

This narrative of cultural preservation is repeated later in the context of national cultural development in the Soviet Union’s non-Russian periphery.

The folk orchestra’s cultural synthesis of urban and rural elements was hardly new. Nationalist composers throughout Europe had looked to the countryside and folk culture for inspiration for more than a century, and the mix of “high” and “low” culture fit the 1920s Soviet ideological agenda of working toward “a unified culture … an inclusive art that would breach the divide between elite and popular forms.”316 If music itself were a means of cultivating human sensibility, then folk music was a means to reach and uplift the masses, who would begin with

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315 T. Vyzgo, A. Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov (Tashkent: Gos. izd. khudozhestvennoi literatury UzSSR, 1962), 9-12; Stites, Russian Popular Culture, 20, 50, 78, 120.
316 Nelson, Music for the Revolution, 25-6. Likewise, Romantic composers were known to take grand tours, during which they exposed themselves to different types of music in different parts of Europe and elsewhere, which then served as material for new compositions that sometimes sought to imitate one or another national “style.”
folk song and then proceed to “more complex” examples of Russian and Western “cultured” music. Grigorii Liubimov, head of the folk music section of Proletkul’t in Moscow, had developed a four-stringed domra that was tuned like the violin, viola, or cello of the classical European orchestra, but was easier to play and thus a step toward learning “more serious” instruments like the violin.\(^{317}\)

As a tool for spreading cultural enlightenment, the folk instrument orchestra borrowed from Il’minskii system logic: It introduced the new (in this case, musical literacy and notated repertoire, the range and harmonies of classical music) using an idiom more familiar to the target population.\(^{318}\) In this sense, the folk instrument orchestra was a transitional step, not an endpoint, in a great cultural transformation. Presumably, as the population attained a higher cultural level, it would demand more sophisticated art. In the meantime, however, the folk orchestra enterprise was aided by the practical needs of radio broadcasting. To maximize the medium’s reach, radio had to appeal to all segments of the Soviet audience. Enlightenment could be delivered only to those who tuned in, and engaging peasant listeners was an ongoing concern. To reach this part of the audience, a commission on village broadcasting recommended scoring music “for existing village ensembles (accordions, balalaikas, domras, and so on).” At the same time, “other cultural agencies were pondering how to accommodate the balalaika in the overall project of the ‘musical education of the masses.’”\(^{319}\) Given the popularity of folk music, a “Soviet broadcasting repertoire – one that found an acceptable balance between listener tastes and ideological imperatives – seemed to be taking shape,” with groups such as the Piatnitskii choir at its center.\(^{320}\)

\(^{318}\) The Il’minskii system as a model for Soviet nationalities policy is noted in the Introduction.
\(^{319}\) Lovell, *Russia in the Microphone Age*, 66.
\(^{320}\) Ibid., 67-8.
THE ORCHESTRA OF EASTERN INSTRUMENTS: WIDENING THE RANGE, CLOSING THE GAP

As noted, the orchestra of folk instruments was a standard feature of Soviet national cultures, including Russian. Its appearance in the ethnic periphery is often linked with the spread of radio in the mid-to-late 1920s, while adaptation of instruments and development of notated repertoire is generally associated with the 1930s and ‘40s. From the start, Russia’s folk orchestras provided the model for orchestras of Eastern instruments. In 1924, commenting on the shortcomings of Azerbaijan’s orchestra of Eastern instruments (specifically, the absence of bass and lack of range made the orchestra sound hollow), composer and Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros) official Muslim Magomayev advised the group’s directors to consider its make-up and suggested that “the example of ... the Russian orchestra of folk instruments can be instructive.” Several years earlier, Magomayev told a congress of Azerbaijan’s arts workers union (Rabis) that the republic’s Eastern orchestra needed particular attention from the music sub-department of Narkompros, explaining, “Our musician comrades know very well that if you gather 20 and 60 tars together and play on them, that doesn’t mean that this is an orchestra.” The orchestra of Kazakh folk instruments, founded in 1934, is described in a 1955 book as created on the model of Andreev’s Russian folk orchestra. At the

321 They were the model, that is, for Eastern “orchestras” that paralleled the scope of the European symphony orchestra. Azerbaijani conductors A.A. Ioanesian and Said Rustamov (Səid Rüstəmov), explaining the pre-Soviet history of Azerbaijani music, wrote that “typically (at least in Azerbaijan), ensembles [consisted] of three or five instrumentalists” and referred to these groups “‘miniature orchestras’” and “the first ‘orchestras’ of Azerbaijani instruments.” (Azerbaidzhanskaia gosudarstvennaia filarmonii imeni M. Magomaeva, 45, 53)

322 At this point, the Eastern orchestra was a group of musicians playing together on unreconstructed instruments, without sheet music, under the direction of a conductor. [Fərəh Əliyeva, XX əsr Azərbaycan musiqisi: Tarix və zamanla üz-üzə (Baku: Elm, 2007), 156]; Magomaev, “Tiurkskii teatr: Vostochnyi kontsert.” Apparently, Russian folk orchestras had by this time sprung up in ethnic areas where there was a large Russian population, such as Baku, making them a model close at hand.

323 M. Magomaev, “Doklad na III vseazerbaidzhanskom s”ezde soiuza Rabis,” 14 September 1921. Reproduced in Magomaev, O muzikal’nom iskusstve Azerbaidzhana, 7-18, here 16. Magomayev seems to have anticipated that some changes to tradition would be necessary to create Azerbaijan’s orchestra of folk instruments, just as they had been in Andreev’s Russian project. The tar is a string instrument widely played in Azerbaijan.

same time, a 1962 book about Uzbekistan’s folk instrument orchestra stresses that constant “experimentation” keeps the group’s composition in flux.\textsuperscript{325}

If the process of creating Soviet orchestras of national instruments was guided by Andreev’s example, then Andreev’s creation was the adaptation of Russian musical folk culture to the standards of formal European musical culture, represented by the canonical European symphony orchestra. Like the balalaika orchestra and orchestra of Russian folk instruments before them, the new national instrument orchestras of the Soviet Union approximated the organization and canonical instruments of the European symphony orchestra. Folk instruments were designated as equivalents to the various members of the European orchestra’s wind, string, and percussion sections and then modified to conform more closely to the needs at hand; traditional music was arranged and orchestral roles assigned accordingly. Thus the national instrument ensemble took its cues from Western high musical culture, but with national instruments substituted for European ones.\textsuperscript{326} In another example of red triangulation, the forms of Western cultural development were filtered through the Russian experience and presented as models to the other peoples of the Soviet Union, who were expected to follow Russia’s example.

As already mentioned, Azerbaijan’s urban creative elites had begun combining cultural influences in artistic experiments during the decades before the revolution. For example, in 1902, a group of ashugs (Azerbaijani: \textit{aşıq} [sing.], Caucasian bard) came to Baku to give an “Eastern concert” (\textit{Şərq konserti}), a development that prefigures the concerts by village peasant singers

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\textsuperscript{325} Vyżgo and Petrosiants, \textit{Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov}, 74. The authors add, however, that one constant is the orchestra’s ever-expanding repertory, a mix that includes arrangements of traditional Uzbek songs and works of contemporary Uzbek composers along with classical and contemporary works of composers of other nations, Soviet and non-Soviet, Eastern and Western.

\textsuperscript{326} Andy Nercessian describes this process in the context of the formation of the Armenian folk orchestra in the mid-1920s. He explains that “for the genre of folk music,” the Marxist-Leninist agenda of modernization meant “using classical techniques, employed by the most ‘advanced’ states of Europe and raising folk music to the level of classical music.” [Andy Nercessian, “A Look at the Emergence of the Concept of National Culture in Armenia: The Former Soviet Folk Ensemble,” \textit{International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music} 31/1 (June 2000): 79-94, here 83]
\end{flushright}
that Piatnitskii organized in Moscow a few years later.\textsuperscript{327} If these Eastern concerts (vocal and instrumental), which became increasingly frequent in Baku cultural life, remained traditional in content, they reflected change in the social context. In a departure from the private, intimate setting traditional for music performance in Azerbaijan, now musicians gave public performances before large urban audiences. The operas and operettas of this period, likewise, transferred music performance to the theater stage, and experimented with new forms and combinations. A 1908 advertisement for the premiere of the Hajibeyov opera \textit{Leili and Mejnun} (\textit{Leyli və Məcnun}) refers to an “Eastern orchestra under the direction” of a conductor; the opera’s score called for both Eastern and European instruments (though they played separately).\textsuperscript{328}

After the revolution, figures such as Magomayev and Hajibeyov continued to advocate for increasing cross-cultural interaction and exposure through the arts. Magomayev, for example, advocated concerts of Eastern music played by a European symphony orchestra: “Turkic folk song performed by symphony orchestra can present not only aesthetic but scientific interest as well.”\textsuperscript{329} He likewise argued for the “internationalization of theater,” saying that by attracting the broad Turkic masses to Baku’s Bolshoi Theater, Turkic audiences would be exposed to the “musical thought” of the greatest European composers and drawn in as regular theater-goers, consequently strengthening the theater’s material base. To achieve this, he explained, the theater

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{327} Oliyeva, \textit{XX asr Aşərbaycan musiqisi}, 160. Piatnitskii’s peasant singers first performed in Moscow in February 1911. (Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals,” 394)}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{328} Kaspii, 10 January 1908, 1. The advertisement’s announcement of a separate seating area for women reflects adaptation of European theater-going practices to accommodate local custom. I am grateful to Viladi Maniyev for providing this document. Since Muslim women did not participate in these productions, female roles were played by non-Muslim women (chiefly local Turkic-speaking Armenians or Russians) or by men. The practice of men playing women’s roles in Azerbaijani theater was ended by decree of the local Soviet government in 1925.}
\end{footnotes}
must present a program of both original Turkic operas and European repertory translated into Turkic, with all productions funded at the same level.330

With Sovietization, the Eastern orchestra was put to work serving the cultural goals of the new regime. An Eastern orchestra reportedly performed at the Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in Baku in September 1920. Reflecting the agenda of drawing women into the public sphere, an all-female Eastern string orchestra was organized in the early 1920s under the auspices of a Baku women’s club run by the Women’s Department (Zhenotdel) of Azerbaijan’s Central Committee.331 An Eastern orchestra led by conductor A.A. Ioannesian, which had formed in 1922 but subsequently fell dormant, was resurrected with the opening of Azerbaijan’s new radio center.332 Baku’s radio station went on the air in 1926, broadcasting four hours of programming per day in Russian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani, as well as concerts of music played on European and Eastern instruments.333 Similarly, the establishment of an Armenian national instruments orchestra coincided with the opening of Erevan’s first radio station in 1926, while Uzbekistan’s radio center created a unison national radio ensemble in 1927.334

When Magomayev went to work at Baku’s radio center in September 1929, he was keen to improve radio programming in the republic, particularly for the rural Turkic audience, and suggested increasing the size of the Eastern orchestra to 24 members and hiring permanent folk singers (ashugs) “for the popularization of genuine Azerbaijani peasant song.”335 In 1931,

330 M. Magomaev, “Teatr i muzyka.”
331 The all-female orchestra survived the club’s closure on 15 September 1937, when the 75-member ensemble was transferred to the oversight of Azerbaijan’s State Philharmonic. (ARDOIA f. 345, stv. 1, š 2, səh. 33-5) The group performed at the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in Moscow in April 1938.
332 ARDSPIHA f. 1, stv. 74, š 409, səh. 281; also Magomaev, “Tiurkskii teatr: Vostochnyi kontsert.”
335 Magomaev, Dokladnaia zapiska nachal’niku Azerbaidzhanского republikanskого radio-tsentrа (undated), reproduced in O muzykal’nom iskusstve Azerbaidzhana 58-9; Dokladnaia zapiska Predsedateliu Azkomiteta

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Hajibeyov approached him with the idea of creating an Eastern orchestra that used a note system – i.e., that played from sheet music – and by the start of 1932, they had assembled a group of 22 instrumentalists.\textsuperscript{336} Thus from 1932, Soviet Azerbaijan had two state folk instrument orchestras: one, conducted by Hajibeyov and formed under Radio Committee auspices, that used sheet music, and another, under Ioannesian, that did not. In April 1936, Azerbaijan’s note orchestra of national instruments participated in the First All-Union Radio Festival (discussed earlier), winning an award from the festival jury. In February 1937, the orchestra performed in Moscow and Leningrad with concert programs that included folk music, original works by Azerbaijani composers, and works by Russian and European composers (such as Verdi, Strauss, and Wagner).\textsuperscript{337}

In a 1932 report on his activities at Azerbaijan’s radio center, Magomayev cited the establishment of an Eastern note orchestra (purportedly, the world’s first) as an accomplishment of “political significance.”\textsuperscript{338} This political significance derives from a number of sources. The adoption of European musical notation for Eastern music wrought enormous changes in local musical culture in the Soviet ethnic periphery, just as it had on musical traditions in the Russian village.\textsuperscript{339} The switch provided the prerequisite for bringing both into conformity with modern European norms of musical performance and composition. The Soviets valued standardization and fixity in culture because they saw these characteristics as features of scientific modernity and progress that increased efficiency and scalability in the production and consumption of culture (including censorship). Formally, Soviet Eurocentrism meant that cultural progress in music amounted to the assimilation of musical features deemed more evolved, such as polyphony and

\textsuperscript{336} Inna Naroditskaya, \textit{Song from the Land of Fire: Continuity and Change in Azerbaijani Mugham} (NY: Routledge, 2003), 97.
\textsuperscript{337} Qasimov, \textit{Azerbaijan xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri}, 58.
\textsuperscript{338} Magomayev, Dokladaia zapiska Predsedateliu Azkomiteta radioveshchaniia, 65. In his report, Magomayev noted that Ioannesian’s orchestra had existed for years and still had not switched to using notes.
\textsuperscript{339} See Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals.”
the symphony orchestra, which were facilitated by musical notation. For Soviet nationalities policy, these orchestras were necessary as proof of cultural compatibility and exchange, the process on which Soviet unity depended. A 1962 book about Uzbekistan’s orchestra of national instruments provides insight into the value of this institution to the Soviet project: In developing its national instrument orchestra, each republic realized the “goal of creating a many-voiced orchestra, capable of playing the music of different nations” through a process “both common to all and unique to each.”340 In other words, these orchestras, once they became note-based, were simultaneously an expression of national identity and a medium of cross-cultural interaction and exchange. They were, as the regime evidently recognized early on, an ideal vehicle for implementing Soviet nationalities policy.

Figure 2.2. An “Eastern orchestra,” Baku. The group is reportedly performing at the 1920 Congress of the Peoples of the East. Baki.info via Wikipedia

340 Vyzgo and Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov, 16.
Narrating the Orchestra, Conducting the Nation

Narrative histories of the respective folk orchestras presented in Soviet and post-Soviet publications offer a glimpse into their uses and “political significance” for various actors and agendas. In the Soviet “East,” the emergence of the folk orchestra followed the precedent set by the Russian tradition, but the changes this implied for local musical tradition were perhaps even more extreme than in the Russian village. Just as with Andreev’s project, there were those who objected to these changes, perhaps even more strenuously than in the Russian case. In Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, local musical traditions belonged not only to peasant culture but also to the realm of high art. While entrepreneurs of cultural nationalism in Azerbaijan such as Hajibeyov and Magomayev were more amenable to experimentation with cultural synthesis, in Uzbekistan, Abdurauf Fitrat, a Jadid and framer of Uzbek nationalism, sought to canonize part of local musical tradition as classical Uzbek music and thus “establish the status of Uzbek musical tradition as separate but equal to the Western classical tradition.” Seeing a lack of

341 Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals,” esp. 413; Gadzhieva, Uzeir Gadzhibekov, 98.
342 Shashmaqom was the musical tradition Fitrat sought to canonize as classical Uzbek music. “The term maqom
standardization as threatening “the value and the future of Uzbek classical tradition,” Fitrat set about codifying it, inviting Russian musicologist Viktor Uspenskii to write down the music using European musical notation, and publishing the results. While Fitrat’s embrace of notation and fixity seems to overlap with Soviet plans for cultural development, observers see the 1927 formation of Uzbek radio’s national folk ensemble as “moving away from Fitrat’s agenda of building equitable relations between the music of the East and the West,” perhaps because of the integrationist aims of such groups. Fitrat was executed in 1937, the same year that Uzbekistan’s unison orchestra of folk instruments gave its first performance outside the republic – in Moscow, at the Dekada of Uzbek Art in May – and subsequently began a transition to notes. Perhaps the authorities viewed Fitrat’s desire to maintain the separateness of Uzbek musical tradition as a manifestation of cultural isolation, an impermissible direction for the cultural nationalism the Bolsheviks sought to harness for their own ends. (See Introduction)

In the Soviet era, adaptations that allowed progress toward the future were also presented as conserving the past as a contribution to building national identity. For example, one Azerbaijani conductor wrote in 1938, “It is quite possible that, as a result of the absence of note literacy, many original works of our ashugs, tarists, kemanchists and other musicians have not survived to reach us.” The work being done to convert Azerbaijani music to musical notation was thus presented as an act of preservation, just as Andreev’s had been. In a comment tinged with Orientalist clichés about Eastern chaos, the conductor added, “[Before,] it was difficult to find two Azerbaijani musicians who played the same melody in the same way – so we couldn’t...”

refers to a suite comprising songs and instrumental pieces performed in a certain order. Sometimes, it also refers to a melody type.” One of the best-known maqom repertoires in Uzbekistan is shashmaqom. (Kale-Lostuvali, “Varieties of musical nationalism,” 555, fn 18) See also Theodore C. Levin, The Hundred Thousand Fools of God: Musical Travels in Central Asia (and Queens, New York) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

342 Ibid., 546.
343 Vyzgo and Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov, 48. On Fitrat, see Khalid, Making Uzbekistan.
344 Azerbaidzhanskaya gosudarstvennaia filharmoniia imeni M. Magomaeva, 53.
even talk about required tonality defined for everyone.”

National art, he implied, had been hobbled by the old techniques, which, “despite the virtuosity of the musicians, despite quite solid repertoire, could not reflect all the melodic and rhythmic riches of Azerbaijani music.”

According to this view, the reconstruction of national instruments and the overhaul of tonal structure in alignment with the European scale brought order, and the self-study that guided these developments was a process of national self-definition by which the nation’s svoebrazie (distinctiveness, uniqueness) was identified. Rather than distortion and loss, the argument implied, the changes brought advancement, freeing Azerbaijani art to reach its full potential.

In 1960s Uzbekistan, a history of the republic’s folk orchestra likewise portrayed the ensemble’s development as a process of national modernization and self-definition. While insisting on the rightness of the path of change, a book from this period takes pains to reassure that the past is not lost: “it is natural that the old, untempered instruments continue to exist alongside the reconstructed ones.”

Such concessions to nostalgia notwithstanding, the story of Soviet-era changes to indigenous musical traditions was told as a natural evolution: the limited instruments of yore had to be updated (or “perfected”) to meet the needs of modern life. By this logic, Soviet musical culture is mass in scale and inclusive in nature, broad-ranging and diverse from every angle. It is the “music of many different peoples” played for and by many different peoples, in large venues, using the creative energy released by the revolution. For instruments,

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347 Azerbaidzhanskiaia gosudarstvennaia filarmoniia imeni M. Magomaeva, 53.
348 Ibid., 45.
349 Vyzgo and Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov, 44. Part of the Zeitgeist in Soviet Central Asia by the early 1960s, anxiety over losing the past is expressed in works of art such as the novels of Chingiz Aitmatov. See Ali İğmen, Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 134-7. İğmen focuses on female characters as repositories and preservers of tradition, but eradication of memory and loss of knowledge of the past is a theme in much of Aitmatov’s work.
sound had to be strengthened, range broadened, and polyphony assimilated in order to express the new, richer life.\textsuperscript{350}

The same could be said of people. In her study of the Piatnitskii group, Smith notes the folk choir’s capacity for “attracting and holding a mass audience – while simultaneously shaping the character of that audience.”\textsuperscript{351} Similarly, in its early repertoire, Uzbekistan’s orchestra of national instruments carefully introduced elements of polyphony, creating arrangements that did not distance the listener too much from the familiar. Still, the harmonized folk melodies immediately distinguished the orchestra of reconstructed folk instruments from other ensembles in the republic.\textsuperscript{352} Along similar lines, a 1959 book about Azerbaijan’s orchestra of national instruments notes that the research into and modification of instruments permitted an alignment of musical cultures that afforded “the possibility to propagandize the wonderful compositions of the musical creativity of all times and peoples in a form that is much closer and understandable to the general Azerbaijani listener.”\textsuperscript{353} With its tempering of the unfamiliar with the familiar, the folk instrument orchestra was an apt vehicle for introducing the new and different.

The exploitation of this capacity is reflected in the mixed repertoires of national music and Russian/Western classics that national folk orchestras of “Eastern” republics invariably maintained. The uniform emphasis on this feature of national folk orchestra activity attests to its importance in the Soviet context. Through the orchestra’s work, an introduction to European harmony and polyphony was delivered to an Eastern audience through familiar melodies, while an introduction to Western classics was conveyed through the sounds of familiar instruments. At the same time, the orchestra made non-Western music more accessible to Russians (and other

\textsuperscript{350} Vyzgo and Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov, 17-8, 44.
\textsuperscript{351} Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals,” 405.
\textsuperscript{352} Vyzgo and Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov, 56-7, 59-61, 74.
\textsuperscript{353} Kerim Kerimov, Orkestr azerbaidzhanskikh narodnykh instrumentov (Baku: Krasnyi Vostok, 1959), cited in Qasimov, Azərbaycan xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri, 46.
European ethnicities of the Soviet Union), who could hear familiar classics rendered in the novel
tones of unfamiliar instruments. Equally important, this crossing of the boundaries of national
musical culture to combine different elements into an artistic whole provided evidence of the
deepest cultural compatibility among nations and between East and West. There is no
“unbridgeable gulf between Uzbek music and music of the Russian or other peoples,” declared
the 1962 history of Uzbekistan’s orchestra of national instruments.354

The Soviet folk instrument ensemble project was fundamentally a means of increasing
cross-cultural exposure, exchange, and influence among Soviet nations. By the 1960s,
Uzbekistan’s orchestra of folk instruments had an expansive repertoire that included works by
composers of brother Soviet nations, European and Russian classics, arrangements of traditional
Uzbek music, and works by Soviet Uzbek composers created expressly for national instrument
orchestra. These “Soviet classics” populated the canon of multinational Soviet culture that was
“a means of strengthening the friendship and mutual understanding of Soviet peoples” and of
effecting the “closest rapprochement of the brother peoples of the Soviet country.”355 Yet, while
the folk ensembles of the Soviet ethnic periphery might seem like creations designed to serve a
particular Soviet cultural agenda, their roots in pre-revolutionary Russian precedent point to their
uses beyond the Soviet context. Today, the Piatnitskii choir, along with a number of folk vocal,
instrumental, and dance groups established during the Soviet period, remain active
representatives of Russian culture on both domestic and international stages.

Likewise, in today’s Republic of Azerbaijan, the note orchestra of folk instruments
founded by Uzeyir Hajibeyov endures, now known as the Said Rustamov Folk Instrument
Orchestra of Azerbaijani State Television and Radio (Azərbaycan Televiziya və Radiosunun Səid

354 Vyzgo and Petrosiants, Uzbekskii orkestr narodnykh instrumentov, 42.
355 Ibid., 71, 53.
Rüstəmov adına Əməkdar xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri). A 2012 book published in Azerbaijan to commemorate the ensemble’s 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary describes the orchestra as “serving national music … [and] the national ideology, bringing our music to future generations.” The book quotes Hajibeyov himself identifying the orchestra’s goal of putting national musical instruments “on the map for the entire world … presenting to the peoples of the world our national heritage.” Among the pronouncements of notables from Azerbaijan and beyond that are included in the book is Azerbaijani conductor Niyazi’s assertion that the orchestra raised “the profile of Azerbaijani music, placing it in the same category as Western [music].”

The orchestra is regarded as the creation of Hajibeyov, who was a key figure in the project of aligning Western and Azerbaijani music, including conversion to the note system. While there are those who charge the composer with denuding Azerbaijani music of its indigenous nature in the process, Hajibeyov is widely seen in Azerbaijan as having rescued national music from destruction and assured its endurance in the modern era. As Niyazi’s comment indicates, Hajibeyov is credited with giving Azerbaijani music exposure beyond the nation, thereby burnishing its reputation, which, as a source of national pride, served to strengthen national identity. Notably, the 2012 book invokes the same musical metaphor for unity employed by Samad Vurgun in the Soviet era and by Nietzsche’s orphans at the turn of the century, under the influence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European (especially German) thought. In Hajibeyov’s “Azerbaijani Capriccio,” a work the composer wrote expressly for the

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356 Qəsimov, Azərbaycan xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri, 17, 19, 24.
357 Ibid., 68.
358 Gadzhibekov, “V starom i novom Azerbaidzhane,” 58.
359 See, for example, Stanley Dale Krebs, Soviet Composers and the Development of Soviet Music (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 132-7; Marina Frolova-Walker, “‘National in Form, Socialist in Content’: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics,” Journal of the American Musicological Society, 51/2 (Summer 1998): 331-71, and Russian Music and Nationalism, 320-38. Frolova-Walker suggests that ethnic composers such as Hajibeyov were coerced into adopting Russian musical styles and calling them Azerbaijani.
 orchestra of national instruments, “each instrument in the orchestra sounds individually, together it makes one big ensemble.”

CONCLUSION

The folk choirs and orchestras of folk instruments established in non-Russian Soviet republics are sometimes dismissed (especially by foreigners) as examples of the ethnic kitsch to which Moscow’s nationalities policy reduced minority nations. Others may see in them a patronizing, exploitative colonial perspective, alternately exoticizing and Russifying. As discussed above, these national ensembles were Russifying in their Westernizing trajectory that was triangulated through Russian experience. The reliance on folk culture as a core of national identity is standard nation-building practice, providing a rootedness in the land and the past that was particularly important in times of change.\textsuperscript{361} The story of the Soviet orchestra of national instruments, however, highlights particularly Russian assumptions about the relationship between art and national identity that, in turn, influenced the logic and implementation of Soviet cultural policy.

Cultural innovations that harness the unique power of music as a mobilizing and unifying force attest to the universality of this feature.\textsuperscript{362} National anthems, for example, channel this power into nation-building in a dynamic Benedict Anderson calls “unisonance,” the feeling of connection with a larger unseen (or imagined) community of strangers brought on by singing the same song at the same time.\textsuperscript{363} Late imperial Russian intellectuals and Bolsheviks alike were aware of music’s power to bind diverse people together. Kerzhentsev’s All-Union Radio Festival

\textsuperscript{360} Qasimov, \textit{Azerbaijan xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri}, 70.
\textsuperscript{362} The Ottoman Janissary band is one example.
\textsuperscript{363} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 145.
in early 1936 propagandized the combined use of music and radiophony to bring about the harmonious union of diversity on a mass scale in pursuit of a common goal. The adoption of a new Soviet Constitution on December 5 of the same year prompted the declaration of a Constitution Day holiday, throughout which the airwaves delivered ecstatic – and largely musical – celebrations of Soviet patriotism. For one diarist, who spent the day at his radio, this was the moment “for the country to become aware of its identity as a whole.”

Likewise, Russian intellectuals, both Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik, saw the potential of music for spreading enlightenment and introducing the new. Smith’s observation about the change in audience for Piatnitskii’s choir before and after 1917 underlines the national ensemble’s staying power. Whereas before the October Revolution Piatnitskii’s choir typically performed for a bourgeois audience (“ladies’ charities or groups such as the Moscow Literary-Artistic Circle”) in Moscow concert halls far removed from the village, the audience after 1917 expanded through free performances for the proletariat, military, and others to whom village songs were familiar. Over the next decade, radio increased the audience even more. When so much else was changing, the choir drew upon the familiar. This versatility and reach – the capacity to resonate differently with different audiences – was invaluable to a regime with a complex cultural agenda that included building individual national identities and a single, common Soviet community at the same time.

The pursuit of this seemingly paradoxical agenda called for the sharing of art across cultures, an assignment to which the orchestra of folk instruments was well adapted. A common

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364 The Extraordinary Eighth Congress of Soviets convened in Moscow in late November 1936 to discuss and adopt the new Soviet Constitution. Stalin’s November 25 speech explicating the new Constitution was broadcast nationwide. (Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 61; Karen Petrone, Life Has Become More Joyous, 181) On the Stalin Constitution and public rituals surrounding it, see Petrone, Life Has Become More Joyous, Chapter 7. Quotation is from Schlögel, Moscow, 1937, 227.

365 Smith, “From Peasants to Professionals,” 395.
strategy of making the nation’s cultural production accessible to the world outside could support the nationalist’s goal of perpetuating the nation by claiming a spot for it on the international cultural stage as well as the Marxist-Leninist’s goal of dissolving the nation by universalizing its cultural property. In this way, a remnant of late imperial Russian culture was modified to be a response to Gorky’s importuning call to learn from one another, to partake of the cultures of other nations and make them one’s own. The Soviet folk instrument orchestra project was most fundamentally a means of increasing cross-cultural exposure, exchange, and influence among the Soviet brother nations and therefore a vehicle for the Soviet cultural agenda. Each performance was at once an expression of national identity and a universal invitation for all to participate in creating a unified all-Soviet community with a common culture. As a nation-building mechanism, the orchestra of national instruments had something to offer both center and periphery.

The folk orchestra project in each republic called for study of local musical traditions and instruments. This accumulation of national self-knowledge across a broad range of fields is a particularly important activity in the context of the scientific materialism of Soviet society, which put a high premium on academic expertise and the production of scientific knowledge. In addition, national cultural institutions such as the folk instrument orchestra contributed to the development and presentation of a unified national identity. The dynamics of this self-presentation could vary, depending on the receiving audience. Here, too, there is a Russian precedent in Andreev’s orchestra, which, in addition to performing throughout the Russian

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366 Magomayev, for example, noted the need to consider Azerbaijan radio’s Eastern orchestra from a radiophonic perspective (its “radiofonichnost”). Magomaev, O muzikal’nom iskusstve Azerbaidzhana, 71.
367 This aspect of nation-building is particularly relevant in the Azerbaijani context, where there were struggles between native and outside talent over authority in matters of cultural production and cultural knowledge (addressed in chapters 3-5). The scholarly production of local knowledge by locals was an important development, especially in the context of the “East,” where legacies of Orientalism endured.
Empire, also toured Europe, putting Russian folk culture on the European map.\textsuperscript{368} In the Soviet context, the cross-cultural encounter was an activity required for the building of internationalism and Soviet unity, but modifications were necessary to create a universal language of music in which the encounter could take place. The standard for this language was based in Western culture and refracted through a prism of Russian experience, which, in turn, was coded as progress and modernization. The Europeanizing transformation of local traditions was framed, in an echo of Dostoevsky’s famous speech about Pushkin’s Russianness, as a creative act of cultural translation that demonstrated national ingenuity. Thus, change could be interpreted as a deepening and strengthening of national tradition.

Soviet nationalities policy placed cross-cultural interactions at the center of both minority nation-building and internationalism, creating a close link between them. The versatility of music in serving both looms large in another Soviet institution of cross-cultural sharing, the dekada of national art, which is the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{368} Stites, \textit{Russian Popular Culture}, 20. The nation-building significance of self-presentation in the cross-cultural encounter is considered in chapters 3-5.
On 7 April 1938, Mir Jafar Bagirov (Mir Cəfər Bağırov), the first secretary of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, left Baku for Moscow. It was not Mir Jafar’s first trip to Moscow since the new year 1938: In January he had attended the first session of the newly elected Supreme Soviet, where he echoed Zhdanov’s criticism of Platon Kerzhentsev, the now-ousted head of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs (Vsesoiuznyi Komitet po delam iskusstv, abbreviated VKI).\(^{369}\) On another trip in early March, Bagirov had met with Stalin and Molotov.\(^{370}\) This time, however, Azerbaijan’s first secretary brought with him a series of documents, including a number of items connected with the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art, a ten-day festival showcasing his republic’s cultural accomplishments that was already underway in the Soviet capital. Azerbaijan had been preparing for the event for over a year, and progress had been widely covered in both the central and the Azerbaijani republican press. The day before his departure, Bagirov had received a telegram from the dekada delegation leaders in Moscow reporting the brilliant success of the premiere of Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s opera Koroglu (Koroğlu) on the evening of April 5, which had been attended by Stalin along with Molotov, Kaganovich, and Zhdanov.\(^{371}\) To the great joy and relief of Azerbaijani officials and festival participants, the dekada performances thus far were publicly heralded as a resounding triumph, a testament to the sagacity of Lenin-Stalin nationalities policy, and its successful implementation under Stalin’s

\(^{369}\) Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 18 January 1938, 2; Literaturnaia gazeta, 15 January 1938.

\(^{370}\) In addition to these frequent trips, archival documents show that Bagirov was in frequent contact with Stalin by telegram in 1937-8.

\(^{371}\) ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 379, səh. 34.
stewardship, as well as evidence of the talent and hard work of the Azerbaijani republic. The event, then, celebrated many heroes whose accomplishments were symbiotic.

At the same time, the materials Secretary Bagirov carried with him to Moscow point to the circumstances surrounding the dekada, both as an institution generally and as a test for Azerbaijan more specifically. They hint at the nature and purposes of the event, the challenges and risks it posed, and the expectations placed on it both by the Russian center and the Azerbaijani periphery. Along with financial documents outlining festival expenditures, Bagirov brought Russian-language brochures that had been specially prepared for each of the four operas to be presented at the dekada, detailing their plots, composition, and the creative teams behind them. According to an article that appeared in the Azerbaijani-language press shortly before the dekada began, these books were printed on quality paper, beautifully bound, artistically prepared and filled with content that “completely reflects the progress of Azerbaijan’s musical art.”³⁷² He also brought playbills published by Georgia and Uzbekistan for their festivals of national art, both held in Moscow the previous year; a volume of Marx and Engels’ writing on art; and a newly published Russian-language Anthology of Azerbaijani Poetry, issued by the republic’s publishing house Azerneshr (Azərnəşr) in a small print run of 500 in time for the Azerbaijani festival.³⁷³ There were also transcripts of pep talks given to the delegation on the eve of their departure for Moscow, as well as lists of all 688 festival participants, with statistical analyses of the group by gender, ethnicity, and class origins.³⁷⁴ These lists were complemented by a book of meticulously assembled kompromat (compromising material), i.e., doubt-casting information about each member of the delegation that could be used as leverage, inducement, and, if

³⁷² “Mosqvada Azərbaycan inçəsənəti deqadası mynasibətilə,” Kommunist, 22 March 1938, 4; Ü. Hacıbəyov, “Lenin-Stalin milli səjasətinin təntənəsi,” Kommunist, 28 January 1938, 2. Kommunist was the Azerbaijani-language organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (b) of Azerbaijan.
³⁷³ ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, səh. 11. On the Anthology of Azerbaijani Poetry, see Chapter 4.
³⁷⁴ ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 379, səh. 141-8.
necessary, grounds for arrest.\textsuperscript{375} The materials Bagirov carried with him provide hints as to the nature and purposes of the event, the extreme care with which Baku prepared for it, and the Azerbaijani leader’s concerns about what might await him in Moscow.

The dekada of national art was a ten-day festival showcasing the culture of a given Soviet ethnic group.\textsuperscript{376} Between 1936 and 1941, ten of these festivals were held in Moscow, each celebrating the artistic accomplishments of a different non-Russian ethnic group of the Soviet Union. The dekada of national art was in many ways the culmination of the Soviet nationalities policy of the preceding twenty years and the apotheosis of Stalinist culture, weaving together various campaigns of the era – production of all kinds, nation-building, construction of a pan-Soviet identity, Friendship of Peoples, pageantry and public celebration. In a January 1938 article entitled “Celebration of Lenin-Stalin nationality policy,” the prominent Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov linked his republic’s upcoming arts dekada with the recently concluded session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, to which he, along with numerous other ethnic artists, has been elected in December 1937. Both, in his description, were examples of the triumphs of Soviet policy toward national minorities.\textsuperscript{377}

Some observers associate the national art dekada with “performances of folkloric customs of the non-Russian indigenous peoples of the Soviet Union” and thus a display of the same ethnic kitsch represented by the orchestras of national instruments (which typically participated in a republic’s art dekada) discussed in Chapter 2. Others, pointing to the national operas that were often dekada centerpieces, acknowledge an emphasis on the high art of ethnic

\textsuperscript{375} ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 389, səh. 139.
\textsuperscript{376} These ethnic groups were usually represented by a Union-level republic but sometimes by a smaller ethnically defined political unit such as an ethnic autonomous republic (for example, the Buryat-Mongol ASSR).
\textsuperscript{377} Hacıbəyov, “Lenin-Stalin milli səjasətinin təntənə si.” The election of prominent artists, including ethnic ones, to this highest body of the Soviet government was a common practice and presented as a source of pride: In 1938 the central arts publishing house issued a book profiling artists elected to represent their republics in the Supreme Soviet. [\textit{Mastery iskusstv deputaty Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR} (M.: Iskusstvo, 1938)]

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minorities, but see such works as inauthentic products of colonialist Russification. Some view the national art dekada as an instrument devised by Soviet Russia to control ethnic minorities and “compartmentalize” Soviet Central Asian culture, or, noting the dynamic of exchange present in dekada ritual, see in it the self-aggrandizing wolf of Russian domination disguised in the sheep’s clothing of cultural reciprocity. In another reading, the dekada is an arrow in the Friendship of Peoples quiver, aimed at providing a sense of unity and equality among brother Soviet nations just as Russian culture and nationalism were being rehabilitated as an official unifying force.378 Viewing the institution of the dekada from the perspective of the periphery, some identify it as the culmination of Soviet-sponsored cultural nation-building efforts.379 Indeed, Kazakhstan and the republics of the South Caucasus, all promoted to Union-level status by the 1936 Soviet Constitution, were among the early dekada presenters, as if debutante nations, just come of age, coming out to Soviet cultural society.

With the above views in mind, this chapter seeks to expand our understanding of the dynamics underlying the dekada of national art, the complexity of which can be drowned out by the loud and monotonous hum of the ubiquitous official rhetoric that tends to surround it. A focus on one dekada experience, that of Azerbaijan in 1938, serves to place this institution in a broader context by taking a longer view that includes the festival’s immediate planning and aftermath as well as its links with cultural development efforts and policies in preceding years. The chapter begins with a discussion of the evolution of the dekada as a cultural institution, considering it in the context of Soviet 1930s culture more generally. In addition, the dekada is

viewed in the context of Soviet nationalities policy and arts bureaucracy, with particular reference to the themes identified in previous chapters, such as cross-cultural exchange as a medium of both individual nation-building and multinational integration. The second half of the chapter is devoted to the particulars of the Azerbaijani case, bringing into sharper focus specificities of time and place as well as the dynamics of interaction across cultures.

THE CULTURE OF PRODUCTION AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

The term “dekada” is traceable to the French Revolutionary calendar, which, seeking to break the church’s domination of life through its cycles of holy days that organized time, divided the year into twelve 30-day months, with each, in turn, divided into three ten-day “weeks,” or decades. Likewise, the Bolsheviks, sought to “remake” time in various ways. Among those active in the propagation of new time management theories during the immediate post-revolutionary period was Platon Kerzhentsev, who in 1936 was named chair of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, the new bureaucratic entity charged with overseeing much of Soviet cultural life, including the dekady of national art in Moscow. The Soviet nationalities policy developed in 1922-3 – particularly, the “state-sponsored evolution” that sought to use state resources and intervention to provide “backward” ethnic groups with the same cultural trappings as those enjoyed by “more advanced” nations as a means of speeding progress through the prescribed stages of Marxist historical evolution – was arguably a manifestation of the Bolshevik conceit of mastering time. But it was not until the advent of the First Five-Year Plan in the late 1920s that the goals of “beating back the power of time over everyday life” were framed in the

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context of economic development at a breakneck pace: “the entire planning system constructed by Stalin was geared toward the compression of time in economic production.” With the constant drive to overcome time underlined by the slogan “Fulfill the Five-Year Plan in four years!” even the state-dictated timeframe was to be overturned by the enthusiasm of the builders of socialism.\(^{382}\)

During the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32), shock workers were the models of productivity and received material privileges for their efforts, but with the Second Five-Year Plan (1933-37), a new kind of model worker was introduced for emulation by the masses: Alexei Stakhanov. As Stalin’s Five-Year Plans shifted the USSR into high gear, the production cycle – setting, (over)fulfilling, and celebrating output goals of all kinds – structured the rhythm of life. The Stakhanovite movement spread from the single exemplary worker to entire factories, as enterprises planned Stakhanovite shifts, Stakhanovite days, and Stakhanovite ten-day periods, referred to as \textit{dekady} (sing. \textit{dekada}), during which a given factory or industry was challenged to maintain a Stakhanovite pace of production for the designated period.\(^{383}\) Throughout the 1930s, the pages of \textit{Pravda} were filled with the plans for and output results of Stakhanovite dekady in various industries and regions throughout the Soviet Union. On a more personal note, \textit{Pravda} covered the outstanding performances of Stakhanovite individuals and worker brigades, following them from the factory floor to Moscow, where they were received by high-ranking Party officials and treated to shopping sprees of consumer goods in the capital. Such celebrations often lasted for ten days and were also called dekady.\(^{384}\) Thus the dekada also become a period of time associated not only with Stakhanovite achievement in labor, but with the leisure time and

\(^{382}\) Hanson, \textit{Time & Revolution}, 151, 153.
gifts used to celebrate and reward these exemplary feats. With extensive coverage in the press, these “reward” dekady also became a site of production, here the production of images and myths. In short, ‘dekada’ migrated from the economic sphere into general usage, where it came to denote a remarkable ten-day period during which a group pulled out all the stops in the name of some goal, be it work, propaganda, cultural programming, reward, celebration, or any combination of these.

The term’s migration from an economic meaning – a temporal unit for measuring output – to a celebratory meaning creates a linkage; celebrating the results of building socialism and individual feats of production was as much of an industry as mining or iron smelting, and the production of these celebratory events was a key part of Stalinist culture. ‘Dekada’ was a multi-purpose term that could refer to a production period on the factory floor or in the mineshaft or cotton harvest as well as the celebration of the successful completion of the production period, a term that could refer both to the feat as well as the reward for it, for production as well as consumption. This link between the production of goods and their consumption is a noted feature of Stakhanovite culture.385 Likewise, this dual use of the term ‘dekada’ to denote periods of intense production as well as of intense consumption points to the linkage of these concepts in Stalinist culture. Although throughout the Soviet era the national art dekada remained a vehicle for propagandizing the culture of a given group – a mainstay of the domestic cultural diplomacy that took place among the socialist brother nations – its origins are closely linked with the projects of the 1930s.

The Stakhanovite production ethos quickly metastasized, spreading to other spheres of activity – the arts, censorship, even celebration itself – and Stakhanovite producers, no matter the field, received similar treatment: they were enshrined as heroes of labor and rewarded with

385 Siegelbaum, Stakhanovism, Chapter 6.
“valuable gifts.” The creative community was expected to participate in the push for production. For example, during a republic-wide “Stakhanovite dvukhdekadnik” (20-day period of Stakhanovite production activity) in 1936, Azerbaijan’s Radio Committee organized broadcasts featuring Baku’s most popular and revered performing artists. Likewise, creative communities were expected to play a key role in the celebrations of the 1930s, producing new works of art expressly for such events. For example, in 1934 the Union of Composers of Azerbaijan (AzSSK) agreed to write songs (the short timeline made the composition of longer works impossible) for the 1000th anniversary of Persian poet Firdousi and to supply original music for the 17th anniversary of the October Revolution, both celebrated that year. In May 1937, delegates from republican composers’ unions met in Moscow to discuss production plans for the 20th anniversary of Soviet power. Competitions were often held to generate new works of art for a particular celebration. In 1934, Azerbaijan’s Composers’ Union took part in the contest to write military songs for the KKA (Kavkazskaia Krasnaia Armiia [Caucasian Red Army]). The aim of this particular contest was to celebrate the anniversary of the KKA as well as to generate military songs that had regional appeal and were inflected by local musical traditions. In these ways, the Soviet calendar of celebration became a boon to cultural production. Soviet festivity was both forward- and backward-looking, serving to celebrate deeds completed and stimulate future ones.

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386 Sheila Fitzpatrick writes, “[T]he First Five-Year Plan inaugurated the heroic age” and “the word ‘hero’ was ubiquitous in the 1930s.” [Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 71] Outstanding members of dekada of national art delegations were typically given gifts and honorary titles. On Kerzhentsev’s efforts to bring Soviet production practices to the creative fields, see Chapter 1. According to Jan Plamper, Stakhanovite censors “overfulfilled their plan of eliminating heresies,” even if that meant overreading material to see heresy that did not exist. [Jan Plamper, “Abolishing Ambiguity: Soviet Censorship Practices in the 1930s,” The Russian Review 60 (October 2001): 526–44, here 543]

387 ARDSPIHA f. 1, siy. 77, iş 1082, sah. 22.
388 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, sah. 24; f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, sah. 25.
389 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 75, sah. 16.
390 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, sah. 24.
Just as in French revolutionary culture, public festival was a central part of Soviet culture from the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in the late 1910s to the collapse of the Soviet Union some 70 years later. Mass events were valuable for their legitimizing and transformative power and for their capacity to mobilize and bind people together through shared experience.\footnote{Mona Ozouf, \textit{Festivals and the French Revolution}, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); James von Geldern, \textit{Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Malte Rolf, \textit{Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991}, trans. Cynthia Klohr (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013); Julie Buckler & Emily D. Johnson (eds.), \textit{Rites of Place: Public Commemoration in Russia and Eastern Europe} (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013).} This sense of group belonging fostered by public celebration is one reason theorists have identified it as an important nation-building ritual.\footnote{Rolf, \textit{Soviet Mass Festivals}, 6-7; Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), \textit{The Invention of Tradition}, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Jon E. Fox, “National Holiday Commemorations: The View from Below” in Rachel Tsang and Eric Taylor Woods (eds.), \textit{The Cultural Politics of Nationalism and Nation-Building}, 38-52, esp. 38-9, 42.} In addition, some have analyzed the dynamics of public festival and mass celebration as deriving in part from separateness, even opposition to, everyday life, a distinct “a discursive environment, which is symbolically isolated and must be entered across a threshold”; when the festival ends, participants re-cross the border back into ordinary, daily life.\footnote{von Geldern, \textit{Bolshevik Festivals}, 45, 134, 139.} The Stakhanovite overproduction of public celebration in the 1930s, however, eroded the distinction: The proliferation of events made the Soviet calendar into a progression from one momentous event to the next. Rare was the “ordinary day,” when nothing was being celebrated or commemorated. Festivity was the new norm, daily affirmation of Stalin’s claim about the new joyousness of Soviet life.\footnote{See Karen Petrone, \textit{Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin} (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).} Similarly, while the entire ten-day period of the Stakhanovite production dekada was ostensibly marked out as different from other time, in fact the regime aimed to establish the increased output of Stakhanovite periods into the new norm for everyday production. In practice, this normalization of heroic production and extraordinary joy as a new standard remained an unrealized ideal. Stakhanovite production goals regularly went
unmet and had to be revised downward, and even when production goals were reported as fulfilled, the rampant inaccuracy in measuring production output ensured that such achievements resided in the world of fiction and myth. Even when production goals were met, the quality of the output was sometimes so problematically low that it was unusable. Likewise, everyday Soviet life was less than miraculously joyous and consumer goods less than cornucopian. Still, this idea of erasing difference by making it a norm is significant for Soviet approaches to national cultures.

These same dynamics are recognizable in the all-Union festivals and exhibitions discussed in Chapter 1 as sites of cross-cultural exposure, familiarization, interaction, and integration. These events were occasions for crossing the boundaries between national cultures, for establishing cross-border ties, economic and cultural, that would continue to link participating groups after they returned home. Eventually, webs of production and consumption would pull all nations so close together in such intimacy, that the boundaries separating them would become meaningless. Just as the overproduction of festivity undermined the distinction between “ordinary” and “special” days, so the mutual sharing of cultures would make national artistic products so familiar that they would become part of a single common culture. A number of methods were employed – translation, hybrid cultural forms like the folk orchestra, books of songs (or dances or games or poetry) of the Soviet nations – to facilitate cross-cultural consumption and influence. The production-consumption nexus that features in Stakhanovite culture presented a path to Soviet unity and a key to the cultural rapprochement and merger of nations.

Thus alongside the changes in Soviet public culture between the 1920s and 1930s, there are notable evolutionary continuities, including Platon Kerzhentsev himself. As noted in Chapter 1, the 1920s and 30s saw an expansion of efforts to increase cross-cultural accessibility as a part of the development of Soviet nations. By 1936, the country’s leadership had declared Soviet nations built, and the dekada of national art was introduced as a ritualized form of cross-cultural consumption, part of a higher profile accorded Soviet national cultures many observers have noted starting in the mid-1930s. This surge in the visibility of Soviet minority cultures is largely a result of the consolidation of artistic organizations that followed the Central Committee decree of 23 April 1932 “On the Restructuring of Literary and Arts Organizations.” The 1934 Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers highlighted a new all-Union platform for ethnic cadres, and also showed the republics’ appreciation for the value of this new stage; the nationalities section of the Writers’ Union was created, in part at the request of republican representatives at plenums of the union’s Organizing Committee between 1932 and 1934, expressly to help coordinate this sort of exposure. Likewise, one of the tasks of the new All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs was to support development of national cultures, which, in large part meant exchange and exposure. As the austerity of the First Five-Year Plan began to recede, greater mobility increased opportunities for touring engagements and other culture-sharing possibilities. In addition, by 1935, a first wave of non-Russian republics (including Azerbaijan) was starting to mark their 15th anniversaries, an occasion for public stocktaking, celebration of accomplishments, and Kremlin receptions. In a commemorative book produced in Azerbaijan for

its anniversary, a section on artistic achievements stands side-by-side with industrial and agricultural triumphs, equating the two.\footnote{15 let Azerbaidzhanskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Sovetskoi Respubliki (Baku: Azərnəşr, 1935). In 1937 the book was removed from circulation because some of its heroes had been arrested as enemies of the people.}

Moscow’s intention to use the creative unions to help institutionalize the task of popularizing ethnic culture both within and beyond the national group is evidenced by the earliest documents of these nascent organizations. According to the charter (устав) of Azerbaijan’s branch of the Union of Soviet Composers, cultural nation-building and “creative exchanges” between brother republics were part of socialist construction, and the republican unions were responsible for selecting works for “popularization” – that is, deciding which music would be performed at union-sponsored concerts.\footnote{ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 11, səh. 11.} At the very first meeting of the members of the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union on 30 June 1934, two visitors, presumably from the central union’s Organizing Committee in Moscow who had come to help organize the local branch, outlined the republican union’s responsibilities and organizational structure. They referred to the Azerbaijani composers’ entry “onto the all-union arena,” making clear the goal of projecting the accomplishments of Azerbaijan’s composers outside the republic. The members of the new Azerbaijani union resolved to be in contact with the “creative centers of the Soviet Union” as part of their fight on the “musical-creative front” and stressed the need for “exchange of experience” with composers of the brother republics through correspondence, publishing, and collaboration with the Azerbaijani branch of the Union of Soviet Writers.

The Azerbaijani Composers’ Union took its assignments seriously. As early as the summer of 1934, a union representative was sent to Moscow to organize concerts of works of Azerbaijani composers with the stated goal of popularization.\footnote{ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, səh. 20-1.} On 13 August 1934, the
Azerbaijani Composers’ Union sent a note to the music section of the Azerbaijani SSR’s state publishing house to announce its appointment of a Composers’ Union representative and express its hopes for collaboration. Publication of music, after all, was a key means of distributing product, of enabling its performance, and, perhaps most importantly, of presenting evidence of activity. It was also one of the ways composers earned money and gained status in the field.400

In August 1934 the All-Union Radio Committee reached out to the new republican composers’ unions in an effort to include works by ethnic composers in its broadcasts. In a form letter dated 14 August, N. Savoley of the Radio Committee’s Directorate of National Broadcasting wrote to the Organizing Committee of the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union:

In the upcoming fall season, the Radio Committee plans, alongside current programs of the works of your composers, to give a special dekadnik [series of programs over a ten-day period] of Soviet composers of your republic. The dekadnik will include one symphony concert and 3-4 chamber or mixed concerts. The dekadnik will be presented as organized by the Radio Committee and the Union of Soviet Composers of your Republic.

The document goes on to state the terms of remuneration to the composers for the use of their works in the dekadnik: For unpublished works that have been bought by an organization, the Radio Committee will pay 5% of the price of the work (presumably the cost of the commission or the initial sale price to a theater) as honorarium to its author. For new and unsold works, the Radio Committee will either buy the work or pay an honorarium of 5% of its purchase price. “As both we [the Radio Committee] and you [the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union] have a common interest in propagandizing the work of your composers,” Savoley continued, “I hope we will agree on the terms.” His explicit requests: First, the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union should send a list of recommended works for the concerts of the dekadnik of Azerbaijani music, keeping in mind that the Radio Committee can provide complete performance in the native language. Second, the Radio Committee is interested in symphonic, choral, and chamber works of any kind.

400 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, soh. 23.
voice with accompaniment, instrumental ensembles for orchestra of national instruments of any kind. Third, the Radio Committee is interested in works by composers who belong to the core nationality and ethnic minorities of your republic (including Russians).  

This document is significant not only as a clue to the genealogy of the dekada of national art as a cultural institution, but also as an indication of Moscow’s interest in providing the art of (recognized) ethnic minorities exposure on a Union-wide scale. The reference to a “common interest in propagandizing” the artistic accomplishments of the ethnic republics not only expresses the center’s cultural policy priorities but also acknowledges that the periphery understands the value of such exposure as part of the composers’ union’s mission, as reflected in its charter. In addition to serving the center’s goals, this sharing was in the interest of composers, whose livelihoods depended upon royalties earned from the performance of their artistic products. One of the organization’s primary goals in its early years was to protect the author’s rights of its members and facilitate the popularization of composers’ works. In the Azerbaijani branch, composers were categorized according to their prominence, which was determined by the frequency and quality of the venues in which their works were performed. Such statistics were used to gauge the importance and “influence” of an artist. Each category carried a set of perks and benefits, and composers requested evaluation by the union board in attempts to be assigned to a higher category.  

401 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, səh. 74.
403 Categorization determined earnings as well as privileges such as housing, bread cards, and the right to patronize a special dining room. (ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, passim)
professional creative product, and the circumstances of this consumption were used to gauge its quality, underscoring the Stakhanovite-era interconnectedness of production and consumption.\textsuperscript{404}

In the format of the proposed music dekadnik we can see an evolution in the Soviet approach to cross-cultural exposure. By the time the Radio Committee in Moscow began to organize its dekadnik, radio committees had been established in the republics and were organizing orchestras of national instruments to provide programming material. Through these groups, local musical traditions underwent transformations in the form of instrument reconstruction, adoption of musical notation, harmonization and arrangement of existing music for the modified ensembles, etc. (See Chapter 2) This “alignment” of musical cultures – which meant conformity to European standards – facilitated the consumption of cultural products across nations. With a common scale and notation system, the (likely non-ethnic) members of the All-Union Radio Committee’s orchestra could play works written and arranged by professional ethnic composers; music could fulfill its promise as a universal language in which a new universal culture was taking shape. As a demonstration of cross-cultural interaction, the dekadnik itself was a performance of progress. In the Soviet Union, where the old “ethnographic” approach to other cultures was considered obsolete, nations interacted culturally in a process of mutual participation that banished the exotic and made national art everyone’s.\textsuperscript{405}

\textsuperscript{404} Only professionals were permitted to join the creative unions and work could not be commissioned from non-members or entered in official contests. On debates in the Composers’ Union about not admitting performers, see Tomof, \textit{Creative Union}.

\textsuperscript{405} The problem of how to present the peoples of the USSR is one that the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum in Leningrad faced as the Soviet Union passed its tenth anniversary and moved into the phase of socialist construction. An exhibit that focused on showing the vastness and diversity of the peoples of the Soviet Union ran the risk of alienating the visitor from his fellow citizens and of neglecting the progress made by “backward” groups. Faced with demands that museum displays “stop dwelling on the ‘rare, exotic, and primitive’” and “start showing the process of Sovietization,” ethnographers struggled to overhaul their exhibits. See Hirsch, \textit{Empire of Nations}, 194; Hirsch, “Getting to Know the ‘Peoples of the USSR’: Ethnographic Exhibits as Soviet Virtual Tourism, 1923-1934,” \textit{Slavic Review} 62/4 (Winter 2003): 683-709.
In October 1934, the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union was in touch with Savoley at the All-Union Radio Committee about sending the material for the dekadnik of Azerbaijani music. In an episode that brings into relief the realities of life at the time, it appears that a shortage of sheet music forced the Azerbaijanis to choose between two promotional activities. The opportunity for exposure through all-Union radio in Moscow trumped a series of concerts of Azerbaijani music in Georgia being planned for January and February 1935. The Azerbaijani Composers’ Union wrote to its Georgian counterpart explaining that it could not send sheet music for the winter 1935 concerts in Tiflis (Tbilisi) because the material was needed for the dekadnik of Azerbaijani music in Moscow, but promised to forward the music to Georgia as soon as it returned from the capital. Because of the lack of published music, scores had to be copied by hand and, in this case, time was too short to supply both Tiflis and Moscow. In addition, there was a severe shortage of blank score paper (among other paper goods) at the time. In the end, however, the music was not sent to Moscow, either. The Azerbaijani Composers’ Union had written to the Radio Committee with a request to cover the cost of sending a union representative to hand deliver the music to Moscow, but did not get a response. While the tragedy of this story pales in comparison with other horrors of the period, it does show the frustrations faced by producers, cultural and otherwise, who were trying to get things done. There is no trace of discussions of the music dekadnik in the protocols of meetings of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan’s Communist Party, and appeals to the Composers’ Union in Moscow for help apparently went unheeded.

Documents from early 1935 outlining a project to hold dekadniki of Azerbaijani music in various cities throughout the Soviet Union (Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, Kazan, 

406 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, səh. 50-2.
408 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, səh. 66.
Tashkent, Ashkhabad, Simferopol, Tiflis, Erevan) confirm the continued efforts of the Azerbaijani Composers’ Union to promote music by its members. These dekadniki were to be advertised as presented jointly by the local radio committee in each city and the Union of Soviet Composers of Azerbaijan. Representatives of the Azerbaijani union were to be dispatched to the cities in the second half of January 1935 to organize the dekadniki, the stated purpose of which was “the exchange of cultural valuables with brother republics and acquainting the broad masses of workers with the creative products of the Soviet composers of Azerbaijan.”⁴⁰⁹ The dekadnik repertory consisted of symphonic and chamber works, and a modest budget of 5500-6000 rubles was allocated to cover the planning trips and the copying of music materials for the concerts (which may have been linked with the 15th anniversary of the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, celebrated in late April 1935). In a letter to the chair of Azerbaijan’s Central Executive Committee (AzTsIK) expressing his own dire need for housing, which was in short supply in Baku at the time, Azerbaijani Composers’ Union chair Gasan Makhmudovich Refatov explained that without an apartment he could not continue his work and would leave Azerbaijan to accept one of the multiple job offers he had received from other republics. Foremost in his inventory of professional activities was his organizational role in the dekadniki of Azerbaijani music.⁴¹⁰

Just as they had resolved to do at their first meeting in June 1934, the Composers’ Union in Baku continued reaching out to its sister organizations in brother republics, and continued to encounter a frustrating lack of support from the center.⁴¹¹ Following the Radio Committee’s radio silence about the music dekadnik in 1934, the Composers’ Union in Baku worked to get more music by Azerbaijani composers published, seeking the help of the directorate of author’s rights in Leningrad in securing the cooperation of state music publisher Muzgiz. In a February  

⁴⁰⁹ ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 11, səh. 38; f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15.  
⁴¹⁰ ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 11, səh. 38, 56 (on anniversary connection), 53.  
⁴¹¹ ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 15, səh. 43; f. 254, siy. 1, iş 4, səh. 43; f. 254, siy. 1, iş 11, səh. 42.
1935 letter, Azerbaijani Composers’ Union chair Refatov complained that the Nationalities Section of Muzgiz had been ignoring Azerbaijani composers: in the preceding year, the house had published only a miserly amount of Azerbaijani music, and these works had been truncated and distorted, printed in incomplete and adulterated form. Even when policy endorsed the dissemination of ethnic cultural products by creating official demand for them, there were glitches in delivery systems that stymied the best efforts. Whether these bumps were the result of the shortages and supply chain inefficiencies for which the Soviet economy was famous, of the prejudices of managers in Moscow for whom ethnic art was not a priority for the allocation of scarce resources, or something else, is difficult to ascertain. A dekada of national art in Moscow, however, presented a breakthrough opportunity to promote Azerbaijani culture.

In 1936, officially declared a “Stakhanovite year,” production and celebration alike were in overdrive. With the new All-Union Committee of Arts Affairs in place and Platon Kerzhentsev at its helm, Moscow was introduced to a new vehicle for cross-cultural encounter, the dekada of national art, which joined the ranks of large-scale orchestrated public spectacles already populating the genre of public celebration in the Soviet 1930s (e.g., the olimpiada, the spartakiada, the Red Square parade, etc.). The Dekada of Ukrainian National Art in Moscow, held 10-21 March 1936, was the first, and established much of the script for subsequent dekady of national art. This script came to include coverage in the central press of preparation work, which, in the spirit of the Stakhanovite era, often relied on the language of speed and numbers to emphasize progress. As with other dekady of Stakhanovite production, the period of intensity preparing for an arts dekada was intended to inaugurate a new norm, and an October 1940

\[\text{412 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 11, səh. 49-49 tərs taraf.}\]

\[\text{413 For example: Belorussia’s theater of opera and ballet opened in 1933 and built up a repertory in just 3-4 years; since the establishment of the Buryat-Mongol drama theater, its staff has increased from 60 to 250; for the Armenian dekada in October 1939, 1,764 costumes were especially, sewn and 40 railway cars required to transport everything to Moscow from Erevan. Pravda, 5 June 1940, 4; 18 August 1940, 4; 3 September 1939, 6, respectively.}\]
Pravda editorial with the headline “The flowering of national art” warned against deceleration in production after it ended.\textsuperscript{414} With a dekada’s approach, the central press ran longer pieces introducing the cultural history of the spotlighted group, singling out canonical works and greatest artistic talents in an attempt to bestow a sort of minority cultural literacy upon the reading public.

A dekada of national art opened with a gala performance, typically the Moscow premiere of a national opera, at Russia’s “temple of art,” the Bolshoi Theater.\textsuperscript{415} It concluded with a lavish concert, again at the Bolshoi, with Stalin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and other members of the top echelon of government and Party leadership in attendance, followed by a Kremlin reception for the dekada delegation, at which folk songs and dances of the guest republic were performed by a Red Army ensemble. At the end of each dekada, awards (typically cash prizes or “valuable gifts”) and honors (such as titles) were distributed to outstanding individuals and collectives among the performers. Republican opera and ballet theaters typically left Moscow with the Order of Lenin and were often granted money for capital investments (such as theater renovation or housing for artists).\textsuperscript{416} Perhaps for this reason, some in the center came to regard the dekady of national art in Moscow as an opportunity for the periphery to cadge lucre.\textsuperscript{417}

\textsuperscript{414} M.V. Khrapchenko, “Rastsvet natsional’nogo iskusstva,” Pravda, 31 October 1940, 2. Singling out republics that had erred, the article explained, “In some republics there is an inclination to view the process of preparation for a dekada as the start of the work of developing the national creative strength and of creating new works. It is completely obvious that this is an incorrect point of view. The demonstration of accomplishments of national musical and theatrical culture should be a result of that systematic work that is realized from year to year.” The article’s author was a successor to Kerzhentsev as arts committee chair.

\textsuperscript{415} The phrase is Leonid Maksimenkov’s. Apparently, Moscow musician and theater figure N.S. Golovanov referred to the Bolshoi as Russia’s national theater, in which “all Russian classical heritage is collected.” Maksimenkov, Sumbur vmesto muzëki, 126, 38. Golovanov had a decades-long association with the Bolshoi that was marred by politically motivated gaps. For example, he was fired from the Bolshoi in 1928 for his “bourgeois values,” but reinstated in 1930, continuing until a second dismissal with Kerzhentsev’s arrival in 1936. He eventually returned to the theater, serving as its main director from 1948 until his death in August 1953. The performances for dekady of national art were held at the Bolshoi’s subsidiary stage (filial).

\textsuperscript{416} Serhy Yekelchyk notes that the awarding of the Order of Lenin to the Kiev Opera Theater at the conclusion of the Ukrainian dekada in March 1936 was “the first time a theater company had ever received the highest Soviet award.”
Before a dekada delegation returned home, it attended the required “results” meeting in Moscow at which Party officials and representatives of the capital’s artistic establishment gave a summary evaluation of the dekada performance, identifying areas needing further development. Boilerplate newspaper coverage, sustained throughout the festival, included reviews of dekada performances written by notable members of Moscow’s arts community and descriptions of dekada events. *Podlinnost’* [authenticity], *raznoobrazie* [variety or diversity], *neposredstvennost’* [immediacy but also authenticity], and *narodnost’* [accessibility, popular quality but also national quality], all qualities prized by the center in ethnic artistic production, quickly became buzzwords invariably invoked in praise of dekada art. Testimonials, a favorite of Stalin-era newspapers, from dekada presenters and audience members alike, contrasted tsarist oppression of ethnic minorities with Soviet freedom of national expression. Whereas the tsarist regime did as much as it could to isolate nations from one another, the Soviet era fostered mutually enriching cultural exchange. Following the Dekada of Tajik Art in 1941, People’s Artist of the RSFSR B. Livanov wrote, “Until now we didn’t know Tajik art. It has brought and will yet bring much benefit to us Muscovites…”

Of course, there were the *de rigueur* expressions of gratitude to Stalin, from individuals as well as collectives, such as a letter of thanks signed by 450 workers of the Kiev State Opera and Ballet Theater (the handwritten signatures were reproduced in the newspaper). In his article “Results of the Ukrainian Dekada,” Kerzhentsev attributed the festival’s success to “the high quality of the Ukrainians” as well as to “the interest and love for Ukrainian culture that lives

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417 Such is the impression given in Sergei Smolitskii, *Na bankovskom* (Moscow: Aegitas/House-Museum of Marina Tsvetaeva, 2016), 272. My thanks to Irina Zhdanova for this reference.
418 *Pravda*, 26 April 1941, 4.
419 *Pravda*, 25 March 1936, 1.
strongly among the workers of Moscow,” praised the authenticity of the Ukrainian music based on folk themes, and pledged his All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs would “systematically continue the exchange of creative efforts between the peoples of the Union.”\footnote{P. Kerzhentsev, “Itozi ukraïnskoï dekady,” Pravda, 22 March 1936, 4.} Ukraine’s dekada was followed by three more during Kerzhentsev’s tenure at the arts committee: Kazakhstan (17-25 May 1936), Georgia (5-15 January 1937), and Uzbekistan (21-30 May 1937).

A significant feature of dekada-related press was the declaration that the festivals had made the culture of one ethnic group into a common Soviet asset. For example, in January 1937, a Komsomolskaia Pravda article announced, “Ukrainian art is becoming the property of all the peoples of the country … All the best created by peoples in the past … flows into the mainstream of socialist culture.”\footnote{“Torzhestvo sovetskoi kul’tury,” Komsomolskaia Pravda, 24 March 1936. Bold in original.} Appraising the Dekada of Kazakh Art in 1936, Kerzhentsev commented that “a number of Kazakh motifs will enter our common musical frame of reference,” adding that several arias from Kazakh operas set to be published in Russian translation would “doubtless prove popular.”\footnote{Pravda, 24 May 1936, 4.} Thanks to the festival, wrote first secretary of Kazakhstan’s Communist Party Levon Mirzoian, “Kazakh legends, songs, and folklore have become known to the entire country.”\footnote{L. Mirzoian, “Kazakhstan-soiuznaia respublika,” Bolshevik No. 4, 1937, 25. Quoted in Martin, 445. Mirzoian had been sent to Kazakhstan in 1935 after being removed from his post in Azerbaijan. On the 1936 Dekada of Kazakh Art in Moscow, see Rouland, Music and the Making of the Kazak Nation, Chapter 7. Rouland suggests that the initiative for the Kazakh dekada came from Moscow. (365)} Not coincidentally, Kazakhstan, formerly an autonomous ethnic republic within RSFSR, was granted Union-level status the same year by the new Soviet Constitution, a development seen as reflecting the “consolidation of the Kazakh people into a nation,” an evolutionary step credited to Soviet nationalities policy.\footnote{Semyon Dimanshtein, quoted in Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 447.} In a return to the production-consumption nexus at the core of Stakhanovism, the comments of Kerzhentsev and Mirzoian...
reflect a dekada dynamic in which a group’s presentation of its cultural products for the consumption of outsiders is a rite of nationhood, a performative act that itself creates the nation.\footnote{Jeffrey Brooks has identified “cultural performance” by Soviet minority nations “as a rite of incorporation, a transition through which the participants acquired new values and new social standing.” He sees the dekada of national art, in particular, as “an occasion for the display of officially sanctioned non-Russian identities.” Brooks, \textit{Thank You, Comrade Stalin!}, 74, 96.}

At the same time, the popularization of national art through a dekada was a rite of Soviet integration. The Baltic states began planning their arts dekady soon after annexation by the Soviet Union, and a newly “reunited” Belorussia hurried to present its dekada in June 1940.\footnote{In October 1939, composer Dmitri Kabalevsky had to drop out of a commitment he had made to produce work for Azerbaijan’s national poet jubilee celebration in order to write a ballet for the Dekada of Belorussian Art in Moscow, held in June 1940. (ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, ĵ 77, sah. 18, 23, 25, 28, 7, 37-8)} In an echo of the logic behind the 1923 Agriculture and Craft Exhibition and the 1930 Olimpiada of National Art and Theater discussed in Chapter 1, the dekada of national art was “necessary for the creation of true Soviet citizens, for the knitting together of the vast State.”\footnote{Rena Moisenko, \textit{Realist Music: 25 Soviet Composers} (London: Meridian Books, 1949), 34.} The initial self-presentation and consumption were done in Moscow but literally radiated out from there, when dekada performances were broadcast across the Soviet Union by radio.\footnote{\textit{Pravda}, 14 January 1937.} During Georgia’s dekada in January 1937, \textit{Pravda} ran an article explaining that Moscow adopts the best products of the cultures of brother republics, while Kerzhentsev opined in the press about Georgian operas that should be part of the standard repertory.\footnote{\textit{Pravda}, 7 January 1937; \textit{Pravda}, 15 January 1937. A similar piece ran in \textit{Literaturnaia gazeta} of the same date. On Kerzhentsev’s particular motives for bringing non-Russian operas to the Bolshoi, see Chapter 1.} Along similar lines, a 1940 article praising the institution of the dekada mentioned that “after each dekada, the best works of national art appear in the repertoire of Moscow, Leningrad, and other theaters,” a statement perhaps intended as a reminder to directors of the country’s most prestigious theaters and an incentive to republican arts workers.\footnote{“Za dal’neishii rastsvet iskusstva vsekh sovetskikh respublik,” \textit{Pravda}, 5 October 1940, 1 (peredovaia).} Through the dekada ritual, the presenting ethnic group was affirmed as a nation and in exchange contributed a piece of its own cultural canon to a common pan-Soviet one. In
this way, like the “reward” dekady for Stakhanovite workers, the dekady of national art also became sites of production, in this case of individual nations as well as a greater Soviet nation. Of course, the terms and content of this “exchange” were determined by Russian-dominated Moscow, creating a power imbalance.\textsuperscript{431} Even if Kerzhentsev framed the dekada as an exchange, dekada planners in the republics were frank about referring to it as an “exam.”\textsuperscript{432}

Because the dekada of national art in Moscow was conceived as a cross-cultural encounter meant to foster unity among diverse peoples, there was a premium on the accessibility of the presented national art to a non-national audience. Perhaps for this reason, music, as a “universal language,” was the core of the programs presented during the first wave of dekady of national art between 1936 and 1941.\textsuperscript{433} While the recitation of national poetry, publication of selected national literature in Russian translation, and screening of national films in Moscow were often planned in conjunction with dekady in these years, these forms were not centerpieces, and some republics held separate dekady of national literature in Moscow, as Azerbaijan did in 1940. (See Chapter 4) Rather, the dekada script aimed to diminish linguistic difference as a barrier between nations. During Kazakhstan’s dekada in 1936, Kerzhentsev marveled that many scenes from the Kazakh operas \textit{Kyz-Zhybek} and \textit{Zhalbyr} “evoked reactions from audience members who don’t even know Kazakh.”\textsuperscript{434} A critic reviewing the closing concert of the Dekada of Armenian Art in October 1939 echoed that “not knowing Armenian did not keep the audience from enjoying” the songs performed.\textsuperscript{435} Alexei Stakhanov expressed the same sentiment to a newspaper correspondent during Azerbaijan’s dekada in April 1938, enthusing that the

\textsuperscript{431} Brooks discusses “lopsided exchange” in his \textit{Thank You, Comrade Stalin!}, xv-xvi, 96, 242, 227.
\textsuperscript{432} Examples of this language of testing and examination appear in ARDA f. 411, sity. 19, is. 123 (also numbered as 317), sity. 44; K. Dzhanaliev, \textit{Iskusstvo Sovetskoi Kirgizii} (M.: Iskusstvo, 1939), 7; ARDSPHA f. 1, sity. 235, is. 951, sity. 6; ARDSPHA f. 1, sity. 88, is. 379, sity. 35; Qlier, “Böyük imtahan,” \textit{Qommunist}, 17 March 1938, 3. More frequently the press referred to the dekada as a great celebration, as in \textit{Qommunist}, 5 April 1938.
\textsuperscript{433} The post-war wave of dekady included literature, theater, and film along with the other arts.
The development of Russian opera had been a triumphant cultural milestone for the nation’s elites, and Bolshevik thought posited Russia’s version of European cultural evolution as the model for the Soviet Union’s less advanced groups. As a complex European form, opera was viewed as a hallmark of cultural sophistication, and national opera as a hallmark of the nation’s cultural maturity. Moreover, the scale of nineteenth-century European grand opera made

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436 A. Staxanov, “Hər sahədə qələbə uƣrunda mübarizəjlə!” Qommunist, 14 April 1938.
437 Frolova-Walker, “The Soviet Opera Project,” 188. On Nietzsche and the penchant for Wagner among early Bolsheviks like Kerzhentsev, see von Geldern, “Nietzschean leaders and followers”; Mitchell, Nietzsche’s Orphans. Katerina Clark notes, “In Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk, all the arts were to be integrated into a whole, but among them, music was to be dominant.” [Clark, “The ‘New Moscow’ and the New ‘Happiness’: Architecture as a Nodal Point in the Stalinist System of Value” in Marina Balina and Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), Petrified Utopia: Happiness, Soviet Style (New York: Anthem Press, 2011), 189-200, here 193]
438 Marina Frolova-Walker writes: “Since musical nationalism in the Soviet republics was dependent on the model of nineteenth-century Russia, these states were expected to inaugurate their era of national art music with an opera, just as Glinka had done for Russia.” [Frolova-Walker, ‘‘National in Form, Socialist in Content’: Musical Nation-Building in the Soviet Republics,” Journal of the American Musicological Society, 51/2 (Summer 1998), 339]
it an aesthetic match for the Stalin era.\footnote{Philip Ross Bullock calls opera the “seemingly archetypal form of the Stalin era.” [Bullock, “Staging Stalinism: The Search for Soviet Opera in the 1930s,” \textit{Cambridge Opera Journal} 18/1 (March 2006): 81-108, here 91]} Just as “higher norms were a mark of the Soviet Union’s maturity as an industrial society,” the production of high art was a sign of the cultural maturity of Soviet peoples and testament to the genius of Stalin’s leadership.\footnote{Siegelbaum, \textit{Stakhanovism}, 91.} For all these reasons, “each national republic was required to build a national opera house and to create a repertory for it – certainly including at least one large, through-composed work – by the end of the 1930s.”\footnote{Frolova-Walker, “‘National in Form, Socialist in Content,’” 335.} To assist in achieving this goal, Moscow began sending young Russian composers to Central Asian republics in the early 1930s, and a number of them collaborated with local composers and librettists to produce operas and other dramatic musical works for the dekady.\footnote{According to Moisenko, “for the first few constructive years, Russian Soviet composers, scientists and technicians stood in \textit{loco parentis} to the musicians of non-European Union republics.” (\textit{Realist Music}, 33) On Evgenii Brusilovskii’s work in Kazakhstan (where he wrote \textit{Kyz-Zhybek} (1934), \textit{El-Targhyyn} (1935), and \textit{Zhalbyr}, which was composed for the 1936 Dekada of Kazakh Art), see Moisenko, \textit{Realist Music}, 57; Rouland, \textit{Music and the Making of the Kazak Nation}. Sergei Vasilenko, who was sent to Uzbekistan, in 1939 wrote \textit{Buran} in collaboration with Uzbek musician Mukhtar Ashrafi. (Moisenko, \textit{Realist Music}, 238) After graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, V. Vlasov and O. Fere were sent to Kirgizia “to organize a National Musical Theatre for the republic,” and collaborated with Kirgiz composer Abdylas Moldybaev on the first Kirgiz national opera, \textit{Aichurek}, which was presented at the Dekada of Kirgiz National Art. (Moisenko, \textit{Realist Music}, 140, 142, 148) One source asserts that the Dekada of Uzbek art held in Moscow in 1937 “fell short of expectation, because it lacked a national operatic spectacle on a large scale.” (Moisenko, \textit{Realist Music}, 238). In Uzbekistan, its dekada shortcomings were blamed on purged “enemies of the people.” (RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 458, l. 22)} An original national opera was expected as the highlight of any dekada program.\footnote{One source asserts that the Dekada of Uzbek art held in Moscow in 1937 “fell short of expectation, because it lacked a national operatic spectacle on a large scale.” (Moisenko, \textit{Realist Music}, 238). In Uzbekistan, its dekada shortcomings were blamed on purged “enemies of the people.” (RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 458, l. 22)} Azerbaijan’s opera presentations – which, like other parts of its dekada program, were carefully selected and thoughtfully calibrated to their anticipated audience – were key to the success of the republic’s 1938 arts dekada in Moscow.

**Azerbaijan’s Dekada Experience**

In the first days of January 1937, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, which had become a Union-level republic with the adoption of the new Soviet
Constitution a month before, created a committee to begin organizing a dekada of Azerbaijani art in Moscow. Within two weeks, an outline of programming options had been drawn up, including orchestras of folk instruments (both note and not), choral music, dance, and, of course, opera. In April, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan First Secretary Mir Jafar Bagirov wrote to Stalin and Molotov formally proposing a dekada of Azerbaijani art and describing the idea as particularly expedient because “Azerbaijani art – opera, drama, choral, orchestral and dance ensembles, as well as the cadres of Azerbaijani composers, directors, playwrights, musicians, actors, and, in particular, actresses – were in essence created under Soviet power.” While it was certainly true that there had been development and expansion in the arts since the end of Russian imperial rule in Azerbaijan and younger cadres were emerging, many of the republic’s brightest creative lights belonged to an older generation that had been educated before the revolution.

Of the four operatic works presented at the Azerbaijani dekada in 1938, two were written by Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885-1948) and one by Muslim Magomayev (1885-1937), both 1904 graduates of the Muslim sector of the Gori Teachers Seminary (located in Stalin’s hometown), where they learned Western musical notation and instruments as part of their Russian education. While neither man completed formal musical training (though Hajibeyov spent some time studying music in St. Petersburg and Moscow), as composers they were part of a group that in the decades before the October Revolution had begun experimenting with Western musical forms, including opera, producing works that became fixtures of Baku’s cultural scene. In 1908, Hajibeyov premiered his *Leili and Mejnun* in Baku. The work, considered Azerbaijan’s

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444 Previously, Azerbaijan, with Armenia and Georgia, had comprised the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (ZSFSR), which was dissolved by the 1936 Stalin Constitution. (RGASPI f. 17, op. 14, d. 114, l. 25)  
445 ARDSPIHA f. 1, syi. 88, iş 265, soh. 137.  
446 The two classmates had the same birthday and were also related by marriage: their wives were sisters (from the Teregulov family).
first national opera (and sometimes called the Muslim world’s first opera), is ascribed enormous significance in Azerbaijani cultural history not only as marking the birth of Azerbaijani opera but as establishing a tradition of cultural synthesis in musical production that became part of Azerbaijani national cultural identity. Magomayev, too, turned to composition, premiering his first opera, *Shah Ismayil*, in Baku in 1919. If nothing else, these works are important in the development of Azerbaijan’s self-identity as a modern culture in dialogue with the outside world, East and West. As mentioned in Chapter 1, both Hajibeyov and Magomayev played important roles in the institutionalization of formal music education and performance in Azerbaijan, and saw the value in exposure to other cultural traditions. The fourth opera presented in Azerbaijan’s dekada was written by Russian composer Reinhold Glière (1875-1956), who in 1923 had been commissioned by the republic’s Commissar of Enlightenment to write a national opera for Azerbaijan (and was named a People’s Artist of the Azerbaijani SSR for his efforts).

Perhaps not coincidentally, when Bagirov’s newly appointed dekada committee submitted its programming recommendations in mid-January 1937, selected members of Baku’s political and cultural elite had just attended a preview of *Koroglu*, Hajibeyov’s long-anticipated new opera. In late April 1937, as the Kremlin was reading Bagirov’s petition to hold an Azerbaijani dekada in Moscow, Hajibeyov’s new work had its official premiere in Baku. \[447\] Perhaps with the *Koroglu* ace up his sleeve, Bagirov knew that Azerbaijan was in a position to deliver the goods to Moscow and wanted to strike while the iron was hot. Unfortunately, the preparatory sailing was less smooth than Bagirov and his dekada planners could have hoped. As

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\[447\] On the Baku premiere of *Koroglu*, see Mina Gadzhieva, *Uzeir Gadzhibekov: Filosofskaia kul’tura muzykal’nogo myshlenia – k 120-letnemu jubileiu* (Baku: Elm, 2005), 22; Lor Melikova-Saiiar, *Ot legendy k opere: Evoliutsiia temy Keroglu v Sovetskom Azerbaidzhane* (Baku: Yazıçı, 1985), 106. *Koroglu* was well received, and in recognition of his contribution, its author was given the title People’s Artist of the Azerbaijani SSR on 23 September 1937. On *Koroglu*: *Bakinskii rabochii*, 16 May and 1 August 1937. On the honorific bestowed upon Hajibeyov: ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 2, soh. 30. Later that fall, Hajibeyov was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.
republican authorities were trying to figure out what to present to Moscow, the Great Terror was reaching a crescendo, decimating Azerbaijani elites. As described in Chapter 1, Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs lost two chairs in 1937, the second just weeks before the republic’s dekada “test” was scheduled to begin in Moscow, and in January 1938 the chair of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs was dismissed.

The constant turmoil of this period made administration more difficult in many respects, but the metonymic taint characteristic of Terror paranoia made an organizational challenge like the dekada a truly Sisyphean task. In a December 1937 letter to Bagirov, Kerzhentsev, after detailing a litany of complaints against the performance of Davud Rasulzadeh as chair of Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs, concluded with a statement removing him from the post and warned that all Rasulzadeh’s activities while at the arts directorate should be subject to careful review since there is information that he has close, personal ties with a series of now discovered enemies of the people. Any planning progress made during the tenure of an arrested leader was thus preserved at great peril. At a meeting of Azerbaijan’s dekada committee in late November 1937, participants commented that there was almost nothing left of the original government commission formed for the dekada, and expressed anxiety about the risks of including in the delegation someone “who it later turns out should be in prison.” Such a misstep could mar the entire event and become incriminating “evidence” against all involved. At a meeting on 14 February 1938, when the list of dekada participants was being finalized, Teymur Kuliyev, the chair of Azerbaijan’s Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), argued that choices should be made not only on the basis of musical talent but of social reliability, saying,

448 Not just in Azerbaijan, of course, but elites throughout the Soviet ethnic periphery were targeted, frequently on charges of “bourgeois nationalism.” Composers, however, suffered less than other creative groups. Mikkonen, Music and Power in the Soviet 1930s, 293, 372; Caroline Brooke, “Soviet Musicians and the Great Terror,” Europe-Asia Studies 54/3 (2002): 397–413.
449 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, iş 483, sah. 100-1.
“We have concentrated on the artistic side of things and stepped away from the political side.”

These concerns about political reliability are reflected in the hefty pile of kompromat on dekada participants Bagirov brought with him to Moscow in April 1938.

Even Hajibeyov was brought under suspicion when, during the November-December 1937 election campaign for the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, notable “enemies of the people” arrested by the NKVD attested to his nationalist inclinations and activities with the anti-Soviet Musavat Party. In a discussion of the Hajibeyov case in the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party on 1 December 1937, it was decided not to remove the composer as a candidate in the elections because of his great popularity and his value as the author of the new opera Koroglu. Certainly his disqualification as a candidate for elective office would have meant the removal of his opera from the dekada docket, depriving the festival program of its centerpiece.

When dancer Gamar Almaszadeh (Qəmər Almaszadə), who had relatives abroad and a brother-in-law arrested by the NKVD, became a target of denunciation in January 1938, the dekada planning committee set out to dissuade the accuser because Almaszadeh was essential to the dekada effort. Despite the hoopla over young cadres, much of the talent on which the Azerbaijani dekada hinged belonged to an older generation, making marginalization of this group impossible. The accusations against them were not pursued, but the artists could be sure that information about them, factual or not, was at Bagirov’s fingertips throughout the festival in Moscow.

While the delivery of “successful” ethnic art was considered a positive reflection on the center and, of course, Stalin, who was credited with any and all accomplishments, work that missed the mark was blamed on local officials and artists in the republic. If it was clear that the

450 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, şəh. 9.
451 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, şəh. 2-4, 27.
deka was a test, and a high-stakes one, it was less clear what material would be on the exam and what answers the center would deem correct. The deka planners took great pains to parse the signals emanating from Moscow, mining data such as evaluations of previous festivals for hints about mistakes to avoid and ways to show themselves in the best light. The importance of earlier festivals as reference points for the Azerbaijani is underscored by the programs from 1937 deka (of Georgia and Uzbekistan) that Bagirov carried with him to Moscow in April 1938. As an event dedicated to a single ethnic republic, the deka of national art was not formally structured as a contest, but, as in any interaction between Soviet center and periphery, there was judgment involved. In general, Moscow used constant comparison to foster competition (or perhaps sibling rivalry?) among the various republics as a managerial technique. In keeping with Stakhanovite values, timing and numbers mattered: Azerbaijan knew that its opera intermissions must not be too long (which had been a problem in previous deka), and its choir had to be at least as large as the ones the Georgians and Uzbeks had brought in 1937. As the deka tradition developed, the size of the delegations had expanded: about 300 traveled to Moscow for the Dekada of Kazakh Art in May 1936; five years later, in April 1941, Tajikistan sent 750 for the Dekada of Tajik Art. Delegation size became an issue in Azerbaijan, which originally sought permission to send 1100 participants but was instructed by Moscow to reduce the number.

Throughout the deka planning process, comments at meetings reflect careful consideration of the impression Azerbaijan would make in Moscow, especially by comparison

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453 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, səh. 27; ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, səh. 32, 57.
454 Pravda, 25 April 1936, 4; Pravda, 3 April 1941, 6.
455 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, səh. 3-4. These cuts, which occurred only a few months, and in some cases weeks, before departure for Moscow, elicited bitter complaints from the disinvited, some of whom complained that they were excluded because of their ethnicity. ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, səh. 15; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 378, səh. 1-4; Petrone, Life Has Become More Joyous, 192. In addition, orchestra and choir directors were concerned about the diminished size of their collectives, but Mirza Ibrahimov, the new chair of the Directorate of Arts Affairs, countered that they “had to show quality, not quantity.” ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, səh. 15.
with other republics. At a June 1937 meeting about plans for the dekada, one participant opined that the Soviet-themed opera *Nargiz* (Nərgiz) was the Azerbaijani’s “trump card” because it was “a response to all the problems that neither Georgia nor Ukraine solved” in their dekady. During a February 1938 discussion of the dekada production of *Koroglu*, concerns were raised about possible Uzbek influences reflected in the choreography of one scene, which might be perceived by the audience because the Uzbeks had presented their arts dekada less than a year before, in May 1937. Well aware that Moscow would be comparing them to preceding festivals of national art, the Azerbaijani sought to outdo their competition from the brother republics. Composer Reinhold Glière, who visited Baku in February 1938 to review the dekada program, assured readers of the newspaper *Qommunist* that Azerbaijan’s dekada would have more new material than previous dekady did and that Azerbaijani operas were free of the awkward pauses that had marred the dekada performances of the Uzbeks and Kazakhs.

Citing the political importance the center attached to the dekady, republican leaders urged planners to exercise the utmost care: “the smallest detail can ruin everything,” they warned. Everything had to be “dekadny” (dekada-worthy or dekada-ready) – demonstrating the highest level of quality and preparation and reflecting the culmination of Soviet progress and success. Planners were reminded that the Moscow audience was knowledgeable about Caucasian art. To ensure authenticity, tailors were brought from the provinces to make costumes and specially carved instruments were obtained. Hard-to-get luxury items needed for opera sets were located

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456 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 17, səh. 259.
457 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, səh. 80. A group from Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs had attended the Uzbek dekada. ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, səh. 15.
458 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, səh. 4, 12; Qlier, “Böyük imtahan.” Glière was named People’s Artist of the Uzbek SSR for musical services rendered to that republic. Such forthright public comparison with other republics was unusual and could be seen as boastfulness, so it is interesting that it is expressed here by a non-Azerbaijani with a Union-level profile who had ties to multiple ethnic republics.
459 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, səh. 9; f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, səh. 9, 24.
460 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, səh. 3; ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, səh. 17.
through newspaper ads and acquired from people who had saved them from before the revolution (though the committee had to check the legality of this). Like Stalin himself, many members of the leader’s inner circle were from the Caucasus or had spent time there. Stalin’s knowledge of Caucasian culture came not only from his Georgian roots and time in Tbilisi (a majority Armenian city before the revolution) but from the years he lived in Baku as a revolutionary. This intimacy with local culture doubtless aided the reception of Azerbaijani art by the Kremlin audience, to whom the traditional melodies and folk legends upon which the dekada program was built were familiar and, in the case of Stalin, reminiscent of his youth. At a 1935 Kremlin reception marking the 15th anniversary of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, Stalin reportedly asked the Azerbaijani delegation if the 1914 Hajibeyov operetta Arshin Mal Alan (Arşin mal alan) were still performed, and apparently raised the subject of Azerbaijan’s pre-revolutionary musical theater again at a 1937 meeting with Bagirov: when the Azerbaijani Party chief returned to Baku, he told the arts directorate that the dekada must include “old things.” This not only contradicted Kerzhentsev’s instructions to present operas that “reflect the revolutionary movement” but caused other problems with the Arts Committee, which wanted to limit Azerbaijan’s dekada program to three works, the same as Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The issue was not settled until 8 December 1937 (with the dekada planned for February 1938), when Bagirov finalized the program in a discussion with Uzeyir Hajibeyov.  


462 On Stalin’s connection with Baku, see Mir Jafar Bagirov, “Stalin i Azerbaidzhan,” Izvestia, 24 November 1936. In conversations within the Central Committee, Stalin was sometimes referred to as “Comrade Koba,” a name he used during his Baku days. For example, ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, i§ 409, sah. 235.

463 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, i§ 18, sah. 22 (on 1935 Kremlin reception); ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, i§ 123/317, sah. 17, 37; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, i§ 458, sah. 306.
In the end, the Azerbaijanis decided to present *Arshin Mal Alan*, a comedy about a cloth peddler who breaks local convention by contriving to see the face of a woman before he consents to marry her. Though the score was originally written for symphony orchestra, the dekada production of *Arshin Mal Alan* presented at the Bolshoi was accompanied, for the first time, by an “Eastern” orchestra (orchestra of Azerbaijani folk instruments).\textsuperscript{464} According to one member of the dekada orchestra, when the group finished playing, Stalin exclaimed to Hajibeyov, “Uzeyir, this orchestra is a triumph of Eastern music!”\textsuperscript{465} Stalin was, of course, the most important member of the audience. Describing his understanding of the dekada task, Azerbaijani singer Bulbul Mamedov (Bülbü Məmmədov) said, “First, it’s a showing of our art to the leader of the peoples of the whole Soviet Union [Stalin], and also the dekada preparation will raise us to a new level at which we will serve our heroic Baku.”\textsuperscript{466} Stalin and Molotov had made clear that dekada expectations were high, reportedly telling Bagirov they wanted to see something “world-class.” Explaining that conclusions about the republic’s accomplishments in every area, not just music, would be drawn from this dekada, Bagirov subsequently told Kuliyev that they had to put everything into making sure they presented themselves well.\textsuperscript{467} But, apart from a few hints, the specifics of what exactly constituted a good showing were not clear.

Dekada planning conversations among Azerbaijani cultural and political leaders reflect the principles that guided their decision-making as well as the anxiety that attended it. It was

\textsuperscript{464} I. Idayatzade, “Korotko o postanovke,” in Uzeir Gadjibekov, *Arshin Mal Alan* (Baku: Upravlenie po delam iskusstv pri SNK AzSSR, 1938), 11-12. On the Eastern/folk instrument orchestra, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The dekada group was the “note” orchestra Hajibeyov had created in 1931, since 1936 under the leadership of conductor Said Rustamov, who had scored the opera himself, introducing additional instruments. Ramil Qəsimov, *Azərbaycan Televiziya və Radiosunun Səid Rüstəmov adına Əməkdar xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri* (Baku: Yazıçı, 2012), 46, 59. Organizers had made a special trip to the Azerbaijani city of Kirovabad (known today as Ganja), near Karabakh, to recruit musicians and collect instruments. The opera is set in Shusha, a city in Karabakh. (ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iš 123/317, səh. 11)
\textsuperscript{465} Izzet Mamedova, quoted in Qəsimov, *Azərbaycan xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri*, 152.
\textsuperscript{466} ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iš 123/317, səh. 23.
\textsuperscript{467} ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iš 201, səh. 20.
imperative to showcase folk culture, including that of Azerbaijan’s minority groups, but care had to be taken “not to reduce ethnography to the primitive.” For opera, grand scale and polished execution were clear criteria, but Hajibeyov worried that the three Soviet-era works on the program reflected a lack of diversity: both his own Koroglu and Glière’s Shah Sanam (Şah Sənəm) featured a horse on stage and had a battle scene as their dramatic climax. Some traditions seemed incompatible with Soviet culture. The mournful tone of much Azerbaijani mugham (muğam) for example, violates the relentless optimism of socialism. It was essential to strike the right balance between the required elements: folk culture and polished high artistry; authentic traditional art and assimilation of techniques borrowed from the West; simplicity and sophistication; pride in the heroic national past and paean to the heroic Soviet present. Of paramount importance was accessibility of the art to the Russian audience. “It’s important for us,” one leading official said, “that both the Azerbaijani and the Russian viewer are satisfied.” This last requirement was a particular challenge – how to provide art that had authentic “local color” but not so much that it obstructed the understanding or enjoyment of cultural outsiders. And it was these cultural outsiders in Moscow who were judging the level of authenticity. In a discussion of how to alter one opera, a participant opined, “If we fix it for the Muscovites, then it won’t sound melodic for the Azerbaijanis.” Not everyone, it seems, was convinced that music was a universal language.

Modifications discussed for the dekada program reflect efforts to resolve these tensions and, above all, to produce the desired impression in the capital. For Arshin Mal Alan, Bagirov

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468 Folk art should be shown “how it is now, not in its primitive state.” (ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, sah. 59, 61) Minority ethnic groups in Azerbaijan include the Talysh and the Tat.
469 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, sah. 15. Hajibeyov said that these similarities “could make for awkwardness.”
470 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 19, sah. 44. Muğam is an improvisational style of instrumental and vocal music traditional in Azerbaijan.
471 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, sah. 29.
472 Ibid.
advised cutting dialogue because the Moscow audience would not understand it anyway and focusing on the music and dancing. At the same time, Hajibeyov insisted that all his choir members know Azerbaijani. Muslim Magomayev’s opera Nargiz, about the imposition of Soviet power in the Azerbaijani countryside in 1920, responded to the center’s request for works on Soviet themes. In his diary, Magomayev comments that he had set himself the task of writing Nargiz without any improvisation, which he described as a big step toward the mastery of European technique. The opera premiered in Baku late 1935, in connection with the 15th anniversary of the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, but was reworked for the 1938 dékada by others (composer Glière and conductor Niyazi) because Magomayev had passed away in 1937. Reinhold Glière’s opera Shah Sanam, commissioned in 1923 by Azerbaijan’s Commissar of Enlightenment, had been under revision for 11 years in response to various criticisms. For Moscow, the music for a scene showing a competition among ashugs (bards) had to be written down, not improvised. The Moscow premiere of Hajibeyov’s Koroglu, with an orchestra that combined Western and Azerbaijani instruments, was the dékada highlight. According to Sovnarkom Chair Kuliyev, Bagirov had instructed that the final act of Koroglu, an inspirational story of a Turkic people fighting for freedom, be made

473 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iš 201, səh. 2. Ironically, Kerzhentsev himself seems not to have adhered to this strategy of sensitivity to audience preferences and reception. In a 1937 discussion of whether foreign tastes should be considered when selecting works of Soviet music to promote abroad, Kerzhentsev said, “[W]hen we are displaying our country’s art, then such criteria are inadmissible. We must display not the works that foreigners will like, but those which are characteristic of our socialist country.” Cited in Caroline Brooke, “Soviet Music in the International Arena, 1932–1941,” European History Quarterly 31/2 (2001): 231–64, 253.
474 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iš 201, səh. 15.
476 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iš 18, səh. 26. In 1935 there had been talk that Moscow was interested in incorporating the best national operas into the Bolshoi’s repertoire, but since improvisation was beyond the ken of its performers, this element had to be removed from a score before it could be considered acceptable. (ARDСПІHA f. 1, siy. 74, iš 374, səh. 121-30)
477 ARDƏİА f. 361, siy. 1, iš 18, səh. 132.
as rich and grand as possible, as there was a time when people, who are now in prison, presented Azerbaijani art as the art of a backward, colonial people unable to create anything lofty. We must avoid this, we must show that the Azerbaijani people, despite being oppressed for centuries over the course of their entire history, nevertheless created such examples of art and literature that can stand on a par with works of world art and literature. We must show this. Not because we exaggerate but because we have to value national art from the point of view of Lenin nationality policy. That’s what we are striving for.\footnote{ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 123/317, səh. 16-7.}

This last comment hints at the complexity of the dekada dynamic. Organizers of dekady of national art were aware that the festival was Moscow’s formal, public evaluation of each republic’s cultural “progress” under Soviet rule. Evidence of development was validation of the regime as “new and irrefutable evidence of the success of the Leninist-Stalinist nationality policy of our Party,” and giving Moscow what it wanted paid dividends for the obliging republic.\footnote{Pravda, 1 June 1937; also quoted in Brooks, \textit{Thank You, Comrade Stalin!}, 96.} A successful dekada enhanced a republic’s prestige both among its own people and the larger Soviet population. Ten days in the spotlight on the all-Union stage allowed a republic to introduce its culture and lay the groundwork for further popularization throughout the Soviet Union, asserting its influence and position as cultural leader among brother nations. The Kremlin encouraged this as part of its pledge to promote national cultures as well as part of its agenda of creating a common Soviet culture through cross-national contact. But Azerbaijan had found it difficult to get the Russian-dominated organizations that controlled Soviet cultural life to comply. At a February 1938 dekada planning meeting, Mirza Ibrahimov, the new head of Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs, reported that he was negotiating with Moscow about releasing recordings of the best arias from Azerbaijani operas. Sovnarkom chair Kuliyev responded, “If we present things right, we won’t have to raise the question. They’ll come to us themselves.”\footnote{ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, səh. 12.}

This was, in fact, what happened. Organizations throughout the USSR were picking up on the center’s signal to engage with the touchstone artistic products of the cultures of the
various brother republics, and after Moscow’s positive response to the 1938 dekada, Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs received letters from amateur clubs and professional theaters from Kiev to Semipalatinsk requesting to purchase sheet music of works by Azerbaijani composers. Azerbaizhini art entered the repertory of theaters across the Soviet Union and Azerbaijani performers toured the country. Uzeyir Hajibeyov entered the highest echelons of the Who’s Who of Soviet music, was included on the juries of important all-Union music competitions, and was awarded the prestigious title People’s Artist of the Soviet Union. In a report about an upcoming all-Union conference devoted to the preparation of ethnic vocal cadres, the dean of the voice department of Azerbaijan’s State Conservatory, Bulbul Mamedov, wrote about spreading the Azerbaijani school of singing to other republics. In May 1938, immediately after Azerbaijan’s dekada, the Arts Committee had ordered the inclusion of Hajibeyov’s opera Koroglu in the repertoire of the Bolshoi Theater, and a production was slated for the 1940 season.

This was recognition Azerbaijan’s cultural leaders had long desired: in 1919, Hajibeyov had talked about new endeavors in Eastern music that would win the admiration of the Western musical world. In 1924, Muslim Magomayev, criticizing the approach to musical development of Azerbaijan Commissar of Enlightenment Mustafa Quliyev, wrote:

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481 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 77, səh. 14; f. 254, siy.1, iş 82, səh. 31; f. 254, siy. 1, iş 17, səh. 17. There had been similar developments after other dekady. The Rostov oblast’ symphony orchestra included Gul’sara, a work presented during Uzbekistan’s 1937 dekada, in its repertoire for the 1938-39 season, and in fall 1939 it presented the Georgian opera Kete and Kote. (ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 77, səh. 237-237 tərs taraf.; Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 24 October 1939)

482 ARDƏİA f. 254, siy. 1, iş 17, səh. 17.

483 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 77, səh. 150. Hajibeyov was eventually pressured to become a Party member. He was one of the few people for whom the requirement of completing a period of candidacy was waived, as per Stalin’s special request. (ARDSPİHA f. 1, iş 88, iş 413, səh. 19-30) In addition to Hajibeyov, Azerbaijani singers Bülbül Məmmədov and Şövkət Məmmədova were also honored with the title People’s Artist of the Soviet Union for their dekada work.

484 ARDSPİHA f. 1, iş 26, iş 715, səh. 10-6, here səh. 13.


486 Fərəh Əliyeva, XX əsr Azərbaycan musiqisi: Tarix və zamanla üz-üzə (Baku: Elm, 2007), 114.
It’s clear from the debates that Comrade Quliyev wants to have Turkic opera that could run not only here but on the stages of European theaters, competing with their operas. Who doesn’t want that? But Quliyev forgets the main thing, that European opera was created not by command, that it came to such perfection gradually …

The dekada, then, presented an opportunity for a republic to pursue its own agenda as well as Moscow’s. The new prestige accorded Azerbaijan as a result of its dekada success enhanced national pride and unity. The accolades earned, especially by Hajibeyov’s Koroglu, the score of which was available in Moscow bookstores by May 1938 (Figure 3.1), burnished the republic’s image both domestically and Union-wide. The opera, for which its composer was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1941, is still performed in Azerbaijan today, regarded as a work that “glorifies the national and patriotic feeling of the people.” Given the deadly consequences that allegations of nationalism carried in 1937-8, Azerbaijan’s dekada was a risky business. When Mirza Ibrahimov, as director of Azerbaijan’s Akhundov Opera and Ballet Theater, referred in October 1937 to the theater’s face as “not nationalist, but national,” what was the distinction?

The answer lies in a feature of Soviet cultural nationalism that is detectable in the earliest all-Union events discussed in chapters 1 and 2 and that is on display at the center of the ultimate cross-cultural encounter, the dekada of national art: the presentation of the nation to cultural outsiders. When it comes to national cultural production, considered a key element in the creation of national identity, the target audience is typically the group from whom the nation is (or will be) formed. In other words, the audience for national cultural products – whether a newspaper, novel, play, or school curriculum – is usually imagined as those in whom the sentiment of national belonging is to be engaged or awakened. The national theater, in a sense, is a stand-in for the nation, its walls the mimetic national borders, where the “assembled audience

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488 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 13. səh. 20-23 tərs taraf.
489 Melikova-Saiiar, Ot legendy k opere, 105. A gala performance of the opera was given in Baku in May 2013 on the occasion of former President Heydar Aliyev’s 90th birthday.
490 ARDƏİA f. 361, siy. 1, iş 18, səh. 24.
is addressed … as a national citizenry” and unified by the emotional appeal to their common national consciousness.491

In the Soviet scheme, however, where emphasis was on the cross-national cultural encounter, a nation was to evaluate its art for its potential to resonate across cultural borders. Any intimation of cultural incompatibility that might hinder mutual understanding and merger was to be avoided. National distinctness was acceptable, but inaccessibility was not. It was not that “the very existence of national culture was controversial,” but rather that national culture that sought isolation from outside influence and resisted consumption by others was counterproductive for the Bolshevik agenda of cultural merger, and, later on, even seditious.492 For this reason, in the Soviet era, national art was made, or modified, with a different imagined audience in mind than the kind usually discussed in the nation-building context. Dekada planners in Azerbaijan were obliged to imagine the Russian “other” as the consumer of Azerbaijani art, and to frame their presentations to appeal emotionally on a basis other than the exclusive national community. Stalin, for whom Azerbaijani national art already held a personal resonance, was primed to be a receptive consumer. The rest of the Moscow audience, however, was a blank slate when it came to Azerbaijani culture, likely encountering it for the first time. The presentations had to be adapted – “made melodic” – and contextualized to render the national art consumable to the non-national audience.493

492 Quotation from Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 182.
493 The Azerbaijani wanted the Russian audience to regard their cultural products as having artistic value and not mere ethnographic interest, which had traditionally characterized the Russian approach to cultures it viewed as “backward.” Art that was inaccessible risked being relegated to evaluation on an ethnographic rather than an artistic basis.
Figure 3.1. Moscow bookstore advertisement featuring the Koroglu score. Hajibeyov’s opera had its Moscow premiere on 5 April 1938 during the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art. In May, Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater added the opera to its repertoire. Literaturnaia gazeta, 10 May 1938, 6.

Hajibeyov, with his Russian education and interest in cultural cross-fertilization, excelled at this task. While some see Hajibeyov as guilty of destroying traditional Azerbaijani music by subjecting it to a denuding process of Russian-imposed Europeanization, in Azerbaijan he is widely regarded as the founder of professional, modern Azerbaijani music and promoter of national culture who raised Azerbaijan’s international profile. In particular, he is seen as a master of synthesis, especially “artistic synthesis of the national and international,” a feature that has
itself become part of Azerbaijani national cultural identity. Hajibeyov’s creative method, expressed in a 1941 article entitled “Learn from One Another,” is an echo of Gorky’s thesis at the Writers’ Union Congress in 1934 and eminently compatible with the goals of the Soviet cultural project. In an era of vague prescriptions for national cultural production, Hajibeyov demonstrated how to be a cultural nationalist and cultural internationalist at the same time. Moreover, in an echo of Dostoevsky’s identification of Pushkin’s Russianness, Hajibeyov’s talent and ingenuity at pioneering synthesis helped define a national trait. Here again, then, is an instance of red triangulation. As discussed in Chapter 1, borrowing, cultural synthesis, and ‘osvoenie’ are methods of cultural development modeled on the Russian experience that were useful paradigms for the Bolsheviks. Likewise, the importance of outside acknowledgement is a dynamic derived from Russian cultural nation-building habits of the 19th century.

The 1938 festival was a memorable turning point for Azerbaijan, in part because of the recognition it received on the Soviet “international” stage. Azerbaijani cultural production was officially consumed and valued, praised in the press, and green-lighted for further popularization. The accolades the dekada earned for Azerbaijani art established the republic as a cultural presence. The center’s appreciation of Azerbaijani culture, alongside Azerbaijani oil, was a symbol of the republic’s arrival, a mark of highly coveted prestige that recognized Azerbaijan’s value as a producer of intellectual, and not just raw, material. In the dekada context, a republic’s cultural accomplishments were its contributions, and to have them consumed by the center and the rest of the Union was not only an honor and point of pride, but an important step in the

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495 The article appeared in Bakinskii rabochii, 21 Dec 1941. It is cited in Abasova and Kasimov, “Uzeir Gadzhibekov – Muzykant-Publitsist.”
nation-building process. At the same time, these contributions to a multiethnic, all-Union cultural canon for universal consumption were a unifying instrument for building a Soviet nation.

As celebration, the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art was a tool of mass mobilization, though through a set of dynamics that changed depending on the audience. For the Russian audience in Moscow, Azerbaijan’s presentation was an introduction of the new, and the dekada of national art aimed to help Russians (and all Soviet citizens) assimilate Soviet multiculturalism. For Azerbaijan, the dekada’s mobilizational power at first extended only to the elites involved in its planning and execution. But once Azerbaijan’s dekada was hailed as a success, it became a vehicle of nation-building within Azerbaijan, not only in Baku but, with coverage in the regional press, throughout the republic. In Azerbaijan, in a sense, the cause for celebration was displaced – the source of national pride was not the dekada itself but the positive reaction to it from outside the nation. This validation was then harnessed to the end of consolidating national identity at home. For months after the dekada, prominent performers from Baku’s ballet and opera theater were sent on trips deep into Azerbaijan’s regions, where they presented highlights from the now-canonical dekada repertory.496 In 1939, when the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs organized an exhibit entitled “Fifteen years without Lenin with Stalin” (itself an odd commemoration) the Directorate of Arts Affairs of the Azerbaijani SSR held a contest for the production of paintings. Among the contest’s designated themes were “Stalin in the Government’s Box at the Bolshoi Theater during the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in 1938” and “Stalin among the Participants of the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art.” Stalin enjoying the Moscow premiere of Koroglu at the dekada was immortalized in a painting included in exhibits marking the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the Azerbaijani SSR and displayed at the Nizami Museum of

496 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, iş 511, səh. 98.
Azerbaijani Literature in Baku. The opera’s debut outside Azerbaijan, reduced to a Stalin-centric moment, was immortalized in oil on canvas, as important moments in national histories typically are.

RUSSIAN RESISTANCE

While the dekada of national art has been dismissed as a “symbolic demonstration of the friendship” of Soviet nations designed to compensate for a 1930s shift away from a more meaningful commitment to promoting ethnic minorities that had initially underpinned Soviet nationalities policy, I have argued for the significance of the institution as an opportunity for genuine nation-building on multiple levels. The success of Azerbaijan’s arts dekada in April 1938 was an important event in the development of Azerbaijani national identity. Likewise, the May 1938 decision of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs, which controlled Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater, to include Koroglu in the opera repertory of this most prestigious of Soviet venues, had enormous significance. The libretto was translated into Russian, and the composer Hajibeyov reworked the opera’s final act for the Bolshoi production. According to the lead article in Pravda on 5 October 1940, the dekada was intended to yield exactly this kind of outcome. The Georgian opera Abesalom and Eteri had been part of the Bolshoi’s repertoire for two years, incorporated following Georgia’s arts dekada in Moscow in early 1937. The festivals of national art popularized outstanding republican talent and artistic contributions on the all-Union stage and thus provided a framework for integrating the Soviet Union’s cultural diversity.

497 ARDOİA f. 345, siy. 1, iş 77, sah. 245; ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 202, sah. 39, 47; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 732, sah. 18.
500 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 715, sah. 25.
into a unified whole. The Pravda piece mentioned that dekady of Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian (as well as Tajik and Tatar) art were being planned for 1941.\footnote{Za dal’neishii rastsvet iskusstva vsekh sovetskikh republik.}

Yet the dekada institution’s potential for creating a multiethnic Soviet canon was left largely unrealized. The Bolshoi production of Koroglu referenced in the front-page Pravda article of October 1940 never materialized. In November, the theater notified Hajibeyov that his opera had been downgraded from the main stage to a smaller satellite stage; in December the theater canceled the production all together. The Georgian opera Abesalom and Eteri was also removed from the theater’s repertoire. In 1941, Tiflis-born Russian poet Riurik Ivnev (who had translated the Koroglu libretto into Russian for the Bolshoi) wrote to Party secretary Bagirov in Baku relaying the news of these changes. “No one knows the real reasons” for the theater’s removal of the national operas, he wrote, “but one thing is certain, that the ‘policy’ the theater is conducting has nothing in common with the policy of the party and the government.” Ivnev went on to explain that a drop in revenue from ticket sales had put most Soviet theaters, including the Bolshoi, in dire financial straits. Instead of looking next door on Kuibyshev Street (where the Arts Committee’s Moscow offices were located) for the cause of this situation, he said, the “sage men” at the Bolshoi decided to look “a few thousand kilometers away in Azerbaijan and Georgia.” Apparently, they had determined that such “distant” operas did not interest the Soviet audience and therefore the theater would not make money from productions of the Caucasian works.\footnote{Ivnev implies that Arts Committee policy (probably the lowering of ticket prices in an attempt to attract larger audiences) had caused the revenue problems.} Ivnev blamed persistent condescension toward the art of the brother peoples for the repertoire changes, adding that such an attitude showed the low cultural level of those in leadership positions at the Arts Committee and the Bolshoi. Obviously, no one at the Arts Committee was sufficiently knowledgeable about the creative work of the peoples that gave the
world Nizami and Rustaveli to understand and value these operas, he wrote. Because of this ignorance, these works are regarded as “stepchildren.” People Ivnev deprecatingly called “calculators of art” had put “commercial” and “false” considerations ahead of concern for the flourishing of national culture.  

The episode is a reminder that Soviet policy was plagued not only by ambiguity in Moscow – such as a lack of clarity and vision of what international culture and progress toward it would look like – but by ambivalence as well. Despite official declarations to the contrary, some of Moscow’s creative elite resisted the assimilation of the contributions of minority Soviet nations to the construction of an expanded, inclusive all-Union canon as a cornerstone of a culturally unified Soviet nation. Exposure through tour performances by groups from the republics as guests in the capital was admissible, but part of the Russian artistic elite refused to accept other nations’ art as “their own” by giving it a permanent home at Russia’s “national theater.” Such hostility to the project of cultural merger impeded its progress. (Other examples of Russian obstructionism and cultural gate-keeping are discussed in chapters 4 and 5.)

CONCLUSION

On one hand, the dekady of national art were just another iteration of the highly choreographed public spectacle that was the bedrock of Soviet propaganda. On the other, the dekada format and ritual were uniquely polyvalent amid the bumper crop of mass festivals and other activities of the era as a site of nation-building on multiple levels. The Moscow dekady that celebrated a nation’s cultural accomplishments were mechanisms of cultural canonization. For the presenting republic, they provided the framework within which national works were created.

503 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 715, səh. 25-7.
504 This ambiguity is discussed in Chapter 1 and referenced in chapters 3 and 5.
or modified and presented to the center for approval to become part of the republic’s cultural identity. The exercise of dekada preparation was a formative process for the nation because political and cultural leaders were obliged to design a carefully considered self-image to present. Outside reception and praise of this self-presentation was reflected back into the republic as a force for national pride and therefore unity.

At the same time, the dekada of national art, through the spread of each national culture to other ethnicities, was central to the construction of an all-Union multicultural artistic canon that was meant to be a cornerstone of Soviet identity and a tool for building a Soviet nation. The universal consumption of individual national cultural products integrated various groups into a unified, inclusive whole in a cultural analog of economic integration. Further, the modification of national cultural output to ensure universal consumption entailed standardization and the muting of difference. This standardization aided canonization and nation-building within the republic, while validation through admiration by outsiders created cultural capital that, in turn, boosted national pride. The dynamics of the national and the Soviet international were thus intertwined. Likewise, the conventions of the dekady of national art were full of symbolic acts of harmony, like polyphonic choral music, or integration of the discrete many into a combined, unified effort to reach a common operatic goal. Grand European-style opera based on national legend, set in the feudal or colonial past, and executed by modern ethnic artists whose talent was nurtured under the Soviet system, fit the symbolic bill, especially for ethnic art. Such a triumphalist, diachronic performance celebrated national specificity as well as progress toward convergence in Soviet modernity in a form appealing to outsiders, especially the Russian audience, in whose cultural footsteps the brother republics were to follow, even though some sought to keep them at a distance.
By the end of the 1938 dekada, Bagirov had come to appreciate the political value of popularizing Azerbaijani culture far more than he had in 1934, when Azerbaijan could not find money to send an emissary to Moscow to furnish musical scores for a radio festival devoted to Azerbaijani composers.\footnote{Ivnev’s 1941 letter to Bagirov about the Bolshoi’s removal of the Azerbaijani opera Koroglu from its repertoire is, likewise, evidence of Bagirov’s investment in Azerbaijan’s cultural profile on the all-Union stage.} The materials he brought to Moscow in April 1938 indicate his recognition of what was at stake during the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art, reflecting concerns such as accessibility of Azerbaijani art to a non-Azerbaijani audience, Azerbaijan’s uniqueness and competitiveness vis-à-vis other republics, and, of course, political reliability. Just as the 1923 Agriculture and Craft Exhibition had been, the dekada was a way of getting attention and resources from cultural decision-makers in the center to amplify Azerbaijani culture, yielding dividends in cultural capital that Bagirov could spend at home and outside the republic. On the eve of their departure for Moscow, Bagirov urged the dekada participants to evince modesty at all times during the festival – boastfulness was unacceptable.\footnote{ARDSPIHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 379, soh. 80. The term Bagirov used was ‘Stalin-like modesty’ (Stalinskaia skromnost’). For examples of dekada-related triumphalist rhetoric in Azerbaijan, see Qommunist, 8 April 1938, 3.} Upon their return, however, the rhetorical mood had changed, now dominated by words like ‘triumph,’ ‘success,’ ‘ascent,’ and ‘pride.’ Bagirov, apparently, wanted more. He was already planning his republic’s next nation-building mass cultural project, the canonization of Azerbaijani literature, culminating in the Union-wide celebration of the 800\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of poet Nizami Ganjevi.\footnote{ARDSPIHA f. 1, siy. 74, iş 511, soh. 99.}
CHAPTER 4
AZERBAIJAN’S LITERARY TURN

The institution of the national art dekada, with its copious periodical coverage and voluble praise of the works of national art presented, proclaimed Moscow’s commitment to the cultures of the Soviet brother nations. The 1938 Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in Moscow was a turning point for the Azerbaijani SSR and a great boon to Azerbaijan’s identity and self-esteem. The accolades the dekada earned established the republic as a cultural presence on the all-Union stage. The glow of effusive coverage in the central press and approval from the Kremlin allowed the consolidation and dissemination of an Azerbaijani national canon both outside the republic, as a contribution to pan-Soviet culture, and at home. In describing Azerbaijan’s 1938 dekada, a 1939 report to Azerbaijani Communist Party First Secretary Mir Jafar Bagirov from a department of the republican Party’s Central Committee called the event

a creative accounting of the Azerbaijani people before the peoples of the Soviet land, before the Party and Government, and before Comrade Stalin, who highly appreciated and warmly greeted Azerbaijani art and artists, which was a stimulus for the new ascent and evaluation of the art of the Azerbaijani nation.\(^{508}\)

Concomitant with this official approval was an increase in exposure for Azerbaijani art. National pride and confidence ran high, a mood that was reflected in rhetoric in the republic.\(^{509}\)

Yet, despite the dekada success of Azerbaijani music and dance, the popularization of Azerbaijani literature remained limited, which, given the primacy of the written word in Soviet culture, compromised Azerbaijan’s cultural prestige. While the Writers’ Union had organized events promoting Azerbaijani literature in Moscow, the celebration of Azerbaijani culture that

\(^{508}\) ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 77, iş 1227, sah. 26.
\(^{509}\) On these results of the dekada, see Chapter 3.
was the 1938 Dekada of Azerbaijani Art gave little attention to national literary achievement.\textsuperscript{510} Although a small exhibit detailing the theatrical history of Azerbaijan (including opera) was mounted in the foyer of the Bolshoi Theater during the dekada, performances of Azerbaijani plays were not part of the dekada program in 1938.\textsuperscript{511} Initial planning documents specify the inclusion of a Baku theater troupe presenting a range of national and international repertoire, but this element was eliminated.\textsuperscript{512}

There were a number of reasons for this underrepresentation of Azerbaijani literature in the 1938 arts dekada. On a practical level, in terms of making national art accessible to non-national audiences, language-based genres posed greater challenges than music- and dance-based ones. Generating quality translations was expensive, complex, and time-consuming.\textsuperscript{513} Symbolically, musical performance provided a more immediate demonstration of cross-cultural interaction and a better example of the universality of culture than literature, which was mediated through translation. In addition, music could reach a wider audience through radio.\textsuperscript{514} Elaborate operatic works and large musical groups like orchestras and choirs highlighted the collective over the individual and were better suited to the spectacle-oriented ethos of the time. While individual writers contributed to preparations for Azerbaijan’s 1938 arts dekada, and several members were selected to attend the festival in Moscow, the Azerbaijani Writers’ Union was in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{510} \textit{Ədəbijat ƣəzeti}, 29 February 1936, 4. On February 26, 1936, the central Writers’ Union arranged an evening of Azerbaijani poetry in Moscow, which included readings of translations of Azerbaijani classic and modern poetry by Moscow literary figures. The event was part of an “Azerbaijani poetry dekada” in the capital attended by a group from Azerbaijan’s Writers’ Union, who had stopped in Moscow following a poetry-focused Writers’ Union plenum in Minsk.
\item \textsuperscript{511} \textit{Ədəbijat ƣəzeti}, 4 April 1938.
\item \textsuperscript{512} ARDSPIHA f. 1, siy. 74, iş 453, səh. 216; f. 1, siy. 86, iş 127, səh. 13-23. The exclusion of the theater troupe was apparently done by order of the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs because the group was already scheduled to come to Moscow for an upcoming festival of national theater.
\item \textsuperscript{513} That said, the process of transposing traditional Azerbaijani music so that it could be represented in standard European musical notation was also labor-intensive. On efforts to adapt Azerbaijani music and instruments to Western notation and musical scales, see Chapter 2.
\item \textsuperscript{514} Stephen Lovell, however, has pointed out “the rise of the genre of ‘literary reading’ – a spoken performance of the written word” in the 1930s. (Lovell, \textit{Russia in the Microphone Age}, 93)
\end{itemize}
turmoil for much of the dekada planning period in 1937, when a brutal wave of purges washed over Azerbaijan, hitting intellectuals, especially writers, hard.\footnote{On writers selected to go the 1938 dekada in Moscow: ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iş 11, sah. 45, 10-10 tərs tərəf. On a literature dekada in Ukraine and forming a Nizami committee: ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iş 11, sah. 63-4, 58. On the 1937 Terror in Azerbaijan and turmoil in the republic’s Writers’ Union, see Audrey L. Altstadt, \textit{The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan, 1920-1940} (New York: Routledge, 2016), 188-204. In contrast to the Writers’ Union, the all-Union Composers’ Union was not yet fully organized. While the Azerbaijani branch of the Composers’ Union was extremely active in organizing the dekada, perhaps the lack of a full bureaucracy in Moscow allowed Azerbaijan more decision-making leeway than would otherwise have been the case. Challenging the view of music historian Richard Taruskin, Leonid Maksimenkov has pointed out that the Composers’ Union never achieved “centralized totalitarian control.” (Maksimenkov, \textit{Sumbur vmesto muziki}, 30-1) In addition, there is some scholarly consensus that the community of Soviet composers lost fewer members to the Terror than did its literary colleagues. See Caroline Brooke, “Soviet Musicians and the Great Terror,” \textit{Europe-Asia Studies} 54/3 (2002): 397-413.}

In 1938, as the bloody political storm subsided, survivors struggled to get Azerbaijan’s Writers’ Union back on its feet. On 5 April 1938, while the cast and composer of \textit{Koroglu} were preparing for the opera’s Moscow premiere at the Bolshoi Theater, the Azerbaijani Union of Soviet Writers was busy in Baku forming a committee to organize the 800th jubilee celebration of poet Nizami Ganjevi. As the company of Hajibeyov’s operetta \textit{Arshin Mal Alan} were readying to perform for Stalin in Moscow on April 9, the board of the Azerbaijani Union of Soviet Writers was in Baku making plans to hold a dekada of Azerbaijani literature in Ukraine in May.\footnote{ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iş 11, sah. 6, 63.}

Naturally, a dekada in Moscow was the goal as it offered a path to all-Union notoriety and the accumulation of maximum cultural capital, but Ukraine was a start. For all the official interest in and cultivation of other arts, the word remained king in Soviet culture, and making a demonstration of Azerbaijani literary prowess was essential to raising the republic’s profile.\footnote{Many scholars have noted the primacy of the written word in Bolshevik, Soviet, and Stalinist culture and the central role of literature as a tool of indoctrination, cultivation, and transformation of the population into Soviet citizens. For example, Clark and Dobrenko, \textit{Soviet Culture and Power}, 139; Jeffrey Brooks, \textit{Thank You, Comrade Stalin!}, 125 and Chapter 2 (“The Monopoly of the Printed Word”); Clark, \textit{Moscow, the Fourth Rome}, 82.}

Thus, the success of the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in the musical sphere notwithstanding, it remained a priority to exhibit the depth and richness of Azerbaijan’s literary history as evidence
of its high level of civilization. The Writers’ Union, still under scrutiny and eager to redeem itself, had its work cut out for it.\footnote{Articles critical of the Azerbaijani Writers’ Union continued to appear in April 1938. For example, “Azərbaycan Sovet Jazьcьlarь Ittifaqь işindəki noqsanlar haqqьnda,” Ədəbijat ƣəzeti, 12 April 1938, 2.}

At the Writers’ Union Congress in 1934, representatives of national republics had taken the podium to give speeches on the histories of their respective literatures, a reflection of official sanction for the use of the past and the articulation of a narrative of each nation’s cultural history.\footnote{At the 1934 Congress, Azerbaijani delegate Mamed Alakbarli had given a speech about Azerbaijan’s literary history that was “an act of canonization” in which “he named classical writer after writer, claiming each in turn for Azerbaijan.” (Schild, Between Moscow and Baku, 143)} In 1937, a celebration of Pushkin on the 100\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of his death had signaled a new opportunity for the expression of cultural nationalism: the national poet jubilee. By summer 1938, buoyed by his republic’s arts dekada success, Azerbaijani Communist Party chief Mir Jafar Bagirov was laying plans to publicize Azerbaijani achievement in letters. The campaign vehicles, standard genres from the gallery of Soviet cultural production, were the literary anthology, the dekada, and the national poet jubilee. While the planners of the 1938 Dekada of Azerbaijani Art had been most concerned with delivering what Moscow expected, those involved in the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature, held in Moscow in 1940, had evolved an agenda beyond that.

Part of the shift in agenda is attributable to the different historical moments in which the respective dekady took place. The 1938 festival was executed at the height of the purges, whereas by 1940 a European war had changed the dynamic both inside and beyond the Soviet Union, which was busy assimilating new lands in the West while working to unite the entire population in preparation for looming armed conflict. This project to gather the Soviet peoples together relied heavily on the Friendship of Peoples idea and the use of Russian as a unifying force. While flattering this all-Union project as required, Azerbaijan found a way to exploit it by
appropriating elements for use toward its own ends. This chapter examines how Azerbaijani cultural leaders managed to do this as part of their maneuvering to assert Azerbaijan’s national literary profile through the release of an anthology of Azerbaijani poetry and a festival of Azerbaijani literature in Moscow. (Azerbaijan’s national poet jubilee is covered in Chapter 5.)

**The Anthology of Azerbaijani Poetry**

The feverish pace of building socialism in the 1930s included “cultural construction” for minority Soviet nations. This entailed the establishment of a national cultural canon that could be inculcated in members of the ethnic group as well as shared with fellow Soviet citizens of other ethnicities. A dekada was an invitation to frame a national narrative, which the central press helped disseminate for Union-wide consumption. The 1920s and ‘30s in Azerbaijan had seen a cycle of abortive attempts to establish a stable narrative of the nation’s cultural history, but no sooner were articles and books published than their content or authors were discredited by a shift in political winds. An extensive round of seizures of “counterrevolutionary Trotskyite-Musavatist and nationalist literature and textbooks” had occurred in 1936-7, with published material removed from circulation and authors arrested. To meet the demands of Azerbaijan’s arts dekada in 1938, experts from outside the republic were enlisted to take up the task of telling its national narrative in the central press. Prominent figures from Moscow’s art world were more likely to draw readers, and non-ethnics who wrote about Azerbaijani cultural history were not dogged by the specter of accusations of nationalism.

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520 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 77, iş 1266, passim. The Musavat Party ruled independent Azerbaijan from 1918 until Sovietization in 1920.

521 William Fierman makes a similar argument about late Soviet attempts to rehabilitate Uzbek intellectuals purged in the 1930s such as Fitrat: “In certain cases it is safer to allow Russian authors to undertake the work of rehabilitation; they are invulnerable to charges of Uzbek bourgeois nationalism, Pan-Turkic leanings or Pan-Islamic tendencies.” [Fierman, “Uzbek Feelings of Ethnicity. A Study of Attitudes Expressed in Recent Uzbek Literature,” *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* Vol. 22, No. 2/3 (Apr-Sept 1981), 187-229, here 189]
While the sharing of national culture among Soviet nations had long been a part of the Bolshevik cultural agenda, the formation of the Union of Soviet Writers brought an increase in these efforts. At the Writers’ Union’s First Congress in August 1934, Gorky had stressed the need for nations to learn about each other’s literary cultures, and called for more translation activity to facilitate this. These appeals spurred efforts to inculcate the national canon at home as well. In the mid-1930s Azerbaijani authorities moved to inscribe elements of the national cultural pantheon (which was still under construction) onto the republic’s map with the renaming of a number of streets and cultural institutions in honor of important national figures and the placement of elaborate grave markers at their burial sites.\(^522\) (Monuments also appeared, but these were more costly in terms of time and financial resources.\(^523\)) In another example of such inculcation, members of the republican Writers’ Union fanned out across Azerbaijan giving lectures “to acquaint the Baku proletariat [and] Azerbaijan’s kolkhoz workers … with the life and work of Sabir,” an Azeri writer whose death was commemorated in 1936.\(^524\)

Gorky’s call generated an avalanche of translation work, often involving languages for which there were insufficient cadres of translator resources. To cope with this, reliance on *podstrochnik* (interlinear texts used as an intermediary in the translation process) was widespread. In the *podstrochkin* system, a line-by-line literal prose translation from the original into the destination language was provided to a poet, who, without knowing the original language, reworked the *podstrochkin* into verse.\(^525\) \("[T]he *podstrochkin* often consisted of only a...\)
crude rendering of original source text “content” in the target language,” and “[t]here was seldom any form of communication or interaction between the producer of this intermediary text … and the nominal translator.”

Although the use of *podstrochniki* was originally seen as “a necessary but temporary evil,” the practice “increasingly gained acceptance over the course of the 1930s,” leading to the category of “poet-translator,” typically a Russian-speaking poet who earned a living by doing *podstrochnik* translation. The result of the *podstrochnik* approach was that “much of what was produced as Soviet literature of non-Russian origin was not genuinely, or not entirely, or not at all, the work of ‘nationalities authors’” and “in the final analysis amounted to an annihilation of the original, if the latter is understood in terms of genuine cultural traditions.”

It also provided additional opportunity for censorship.

The nationalities sector of the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow was instrumental in coordinating these translations, and a number of its members made careers out of this work. For the national republics, it was a goal to enlist the best-known poets to do the translations, as celebrity involvement helped generate interest among readers. In 1936, the Azerbaijani Writers’ Union’s commission on organizing the anthology of Azerbaijani poetry commented, “[F]or translation work it is essential to attract the best poets and as many as possible.” Since its

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526 Susanna Witt, “The Shorthand of Empire: *Podstrochnik* Practices and the Making of Soviet Literature,” *Ab Imperio* 3/2013, 155-90, here 158. On *podstrochniki*, see also Maurice Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia: A Cultural History*. This reliance on indirect and mediated forms in translation is at odds with the valued standard for performance of national art, which was often praised for its “directness” or “immediacy” (*neposredstvennost*). On the virtue of ‘immediacy’ in performances during the dekady of national art, see Chapter 3.

527 Witt, “The Shorthand of Empire,” 164, 166, 159-60, 185. Witt thus concludes, “The building of a new national culture was often concomitant with the actual destruction of any genuine culture there was.” (161)


529 ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iş 5, sah. 42.
creation, the nationalities sector had been working with the Creative Work of the Peoples [Tvorchestvo narodov] editorial department to publish Russian-language anthologies of national literatures. A Goslitizdat production plan for 1935 included a collection of “Azerbaijani” poetry slated for publication that year, and an “anthology of Turkic poetry” was announced for 1936.\(^{530}\)

In April 1936 the board of Azerbaijan’s Writers’ Union discussed the anthology and appointed a committee to select works for inclusion and supply Russian interlinearss to Moscow poets contracted to produce Russian poetic translations. In the summer of 1936, *Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan* (Literary Azerbaijan) reported that the *Anthology of Turkic Poetry* was in production, giving the names of several Russian poets who were providing translations of “works of Turkic classics and contemporary poets of Azerbaijan.”\(^{531}\)

By September, however, some problems had arisen, namely a shortage of funding, translations not done, and poor quality of those that were. The Writers’ Union in Baku resolved to monitor the project more closely and appointed a committee to review the translations coming in from Moscow.\(^{532}\) By late 1936, however, political purges had begun, and throughout 1937 Azerbaijan’s Writers’ Union was consumed from without and within by suspicions, accusations, expulsions, and, eventually, arrests, including of many of those in charge of the anthology project.\(^{533}\) The upheaval in the Azerbaijani Writers’ Union was documented in the pages of the republican press, and even garnered all-Union attention through a scolding article in *Pravda* in

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\(^{530}\) RGALI f. 613, op. 1, d. 4731, l. 3; f. 631, op. 6, d. 132, l. 10. “Turkic” referred to the language and ethnicity of Azerbaijani Turks and remained in broad use until 1937, when it was replaced by “Azerbaijani.” See Harun Yilmaz, “The Soviet Union and the Construction of Azerbaijani National Identity in the 1930s,” *Iranian Studies* 46/4 (2013): 511-33. The Azerbaijani poetry volume planned for 1935 may have included the work of non-Turkic poets from Azerbaijan as well as Turkic ones and been called “Azerbaijani” for that reason.

\(^{531}\) ARDƏİA f. 340, sity. 1, iți 5, sity. 16 tərs taraf. *Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan*, 1936 No. 7-8, 67. *Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan* was a publication of Azerbaijan’s Union of Soviet Writers.

\(^{532}\) ARDƏİA f. 340, sity. 1, iți 5, sity. 41-2.

\(^{533}\) On the 1937 repressions in Azerbaijan, see Camil Hasanov, *Ağ ləkələrin qara kölgəsi* (Baku: Gəncəlik, 1991), especially the chapters “‘Ağ ləkələrin’ qara kölgəsi” and “Saksakəli günərər harayi.” See also Teyyub Qurban, *Düşmənlərinən güclü şəxsəyyət* (Baku: Şirvanaşər, 2011); Ziya Bünüyədov, *Qırmızı Terror* (Baku: Azərnaşər, 1993).
June 1937 that described an organization beset by petty factionalism, with a leadership riddled with Musavatists and other nationalists. The article blamed the raging “sickness” on neglect by local authorities as well as by the board of the central Writers’ Union in Moscow. Two of those mentioned as leading rival groups within the union – the poets Samad Vurgun (Səməd Vurğun) and Suleyman Rustam (Süleyman Rüstəm) – survived the vortex of 1937 and emerged to play key roles in the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in 1940.534

In spring and summer 1937, the Azerbaijani press reported on the Anthology of Azerbaijani Poetry’s progress. In May, an article in Bakinskii rabochii announced that a special brigade of Moscow poets, selected by the board of the Union of Soviet Writers of the USSR, was in Baku working energetically. The group had completed nearly two-thirds of the translations for the anthology, which would make the “many centuries of poetry of the Azerbaijani people … into the property [dostoinie] of all peoples of the Soviet Union.” The harmful work of nationalists and counterrevolutionaries had stalled the anthology for a long time while these enemies of Azerbaijani culture and literature had purposely engaged in “scholastic debates about one poet or another” as a delay tactic, the article explained. Enemies of the people had done their best to make the anthology look “meager and feeble,” treating the classics as secondary and distorting national epic. But once this was discovered, the article said reassuringly, the Union of Soviet Writers of Azerbaijan was able to put the anthology back on the right track. An accompanying article by two of the anthology’s translators added that learning about (osvoenie) the cultures of the brother republics was one of the “combat missions” of Soviet poets.535

534 Bakinskii rabochii, 5 May 1937; G. Ryklin, “Ukhishchrenie vraga (V soiuze sovetskikh pisatelei Azerbaidzhana),” Pravda, 8 June 1937, 4. The rivalry between the poets Vurgun and Rustam, who were the same age, went back at least to the 1920s, when both began their literary careers and studied together in Moscow. (ARDSPIHA f. 1, op. 48, d. 249, passim).
In August 1937, the press reported that, after two years, the translations were complete, and the volume would appear by the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in Moscow (at that point scheduled for February 1938). The coverage employed the full complement of cultural unity vocabulary. A piece in the Azerbaijani-language press stressed the Russian people’s long-held interest in the cultures of the brother republics, which the tsarist regime had discouraged. As a result, for many years the Azerbaijani classics were unknown to all but the smallest circle of Russian readers. Now Soviet power had provided the opportunity for the translation of Azerbaijani and Russian poetry into one another’s languages, allowing the “initiation [of Soviet readers] into the treasures of Azerbaijani poetry” and their “assimilation [osvoenie] of our classical literary heritage.” The anthology translation work done by brigades of Russian writers was a “wonderful promise of even greater rapprochement [sblizhenie] of the brother cultures of the peoples of the USSR” and would pass “creative experience” from the Azerbaijani people “to the artists of Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Belorussia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and the whole Soviet Union” in an act of “great interaction of cultures …” At the same time, the volume, which was also to be published in Azerbaijani, would direct Azerbaijan’s artists to the best works of the national literary heritage. Like the dekada of national art, the anthology played a culturally consolidating role for the “sharing” nation (here, Azerbaijan) as well as for the multiethnic Soviet Union.

At the same time, an article in Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan struck some less cheerful notes. In an indication of the continuing discord in the republic’s Writers’ Union, the unsigned piece accused those in charge of the anthology – namely its editors, Seyfulla Shamilov and Samad Vurgun – of harming the project with their “irresponsible, unparty-like behavior” such as making

unilateral decisions without any discussion and directing anthology work to their friends. With the intercession of the volume’s Russian co-editor (Vladimir Lugovskoi) and Bagirov, instructions for completing the project were issued, but the Russian translations still had to be reviewed, and, given “that the line translations do not inspire confidence, this [review] work will have to be done with great care.” By mid-October 1937, Baku had not sent corrected translations back to Moscow, and Bagirov again became involved when the general secretary of the central Writers’ Union, V.P. Stavskii, inquired about them.

The atmosphere of the Terror, which intensified again in Azerbaijan in October 1937, raised the stakes of personal and professional rivalries, such as those in the Writers’ Union. In mid-October, a group within the union moved against Samad Vurgun, excising his work from the poetry anthology. In the end, the anthology was not released by the 20th anniversary of October, as the board of Azerbaijan’s Writers’ Union had resolved at an 11 October meeting.

A “gift” edition (the “Baku edition”) produced by Azerbaijan’s state publishing house, Azerneshr, was issued in a print run of only 500 copies in time for the Dekada of Azerbaijani Art in 1938, with editorial credit given to Russian writer Vladimir Lugovskoi and administrative credit to Azerbaijani writer (and head of Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs) Mirza Ibrahimov. It included Vurgun’s work, but he was not credited as editor.

In October 1937, the embattled Vurgun had gone to Bagirov for support, and was sent to Moscow in November to testify before the central Writers’ Union. Narrating the situation in the

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537 “Ob antologii Azerbaidzhanskoi poezii”; on accusations against Shamilov and his expulsion from the union in late July 1937, see Altstadt, The Politics of Culture, 195, 197.
538 ARDSPIHA f. 1, siy. 77, iş 1191, sah. 151.
539 On heightened terror in Azerbaijan in October 1937, see Altstadt, The Politics of Culture, 197.
540 ARDOĬA f. 340, siy. 1, iş 9, sah. 155-6.
541 Ibid., sah. 149.
542 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 201, sah. 11. One scholar speculates that Lugovskoi was given sole editorial credit so as to avoid charges of nationalism. A.O. Tamazishvili, “Iz istorii izuchenii v SSSR tvorchestva Nizami Giandzhevi: Vokrug jubileia—E.E. Bertel’s, I.V. Stalin i drugie,” Neizvestnye stranitsy otechestvennogo vostokovedeniia, vypusk 2 (Moscow: Vostochnaia literatura RAN, 2004), 173-98, 176-7.
literary community in Azerbaijan, Vurgun, who had studied the Persian and Turkic classics and
was vociferous about their eternal value, described the unwillingness of the “enemies” to publish
the classics of Azerbaijani literature.\textsuperscript{543} Subsequent projects to promote Azerbaijani culture on
the all-Union level indicate that Vurgun’s devotion to the “classics of Azerbaijani literature” may
have been the basis of his cooperation with Bagirov (or at least part of it). In April 1938, Vurgun
was put in charge of editing the poetry for the Azerbaijani-language edition of the \textit{Anthology of
Azerbaijani Poetry} and was made its executive editor in July, after “mistakes” discovered in the
introduction revealed the current editors as unsatisfactory.\textsuperscript{544} The “Moscow edition” of the
Russian-language anthology, edited by Lugovskoi and Vurgun, was released by state publishing
house for literature GIKhL in 1939, receiving attention in the central press and widely distributed
in connection with the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature of 1940.\textsuperscript{545}

\textit{The Literary Gazette}’s September 1939 review article on the anthology drew intense
criticism from Azerbaijani literary critic Jafar Jafarov (Cəfər Cəfərov).\textsuperscript{546} Arguing that the
anthology “opened before the Russian reader a new poetic world, hitherto known only by
random fragments and individual excerpts,” he excoriated the review’s author, Adelina Adalis,
“for her ignorance of Azerbaijani literature, even as she pretended to be an expert on the
subject.” After enumerating some of what he saw as the author’s most egregious errors and
distortions, he added that she misquoted the very anthology she was meant to be reviewing,
attributing this to her inattentive reading of the volume, even though she was one of its

\textsuperscript{543} On Bagirov and Vurgun’s interview in Moscow: ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iṣ 9, səh. 132-46; Altstadt, \textit{The Politics
of Culture}, 198-99. Of Vurgun’s collaboration with Bagirov, Altstadt writes, “[the writer] saved himself and his
career … Of that, there can be no doubt.” On Vurgun’s knowledge and support of the classics: A. Adalis, “Samed
\textsuperscript{544} ARDƏİA f. 340, siy. 1, iṣ 11, səh. 63, 69, 90, 95.
\textsuperscript{545} Brief reference to the two editions – the “Baku edition” from Azerneshr and the “Moscow edition” from GIKhL
– is made in “Vystavka azerbaidzhanskoi literatury,” \textit{Pravda}, 19 May 1940, 4. See also, A.O. Tamazishvili, “Iz
istorii izuchenia v SSSR tvorchestva Nizami Giandzhevi,” 173, 175.
\textsuperscript{546} The review article by Adelina Adalis appeared in \textit{Literaturnaja gazeta}, 26 September 1939, 5.
translators. Citing the “illiterate things” she wrote, he concluded that the article was “insulting” as such a preponderance of errors demonstrates disrespect. Jafarov’s rabid criticism was not limited to the author of the review. He took the newspaper’s editors to task for printing an article riddled with “unpardonable inaccuracies,” adding that “anyone who sets out to write about the literature of one or another republic, should, out of a basic sense of respect for that nation, correctly lay out the few facts he knows.” Since drafting Moscow creative intelligentsia to write about the arts of the minority republics was a staple of the Friendship of Peoples campaign and provided niche employment to a number of the Russian cultural elite, Jafarov was taking aim not only at Adalis but at the entire infrastructure and set of practices used to promote ethnic literature.547 Far from betraying any fear of accusations of nationalism, Jafarov’s article blasted Adalis for her comment that in the anthology some poets were identified as Azerbaijani for the first time.548 There was apparently no penalty for his assault; Jafarov was part of the literature dekada delegation sent to Moscow in May 1940.

THE NIZAMI PROBLEM AND THE STALIN SOLUTION

One of the “delay tactics” employed by the “enemies of the people” who had attempted to sabotage the Anthology of Azerbaijani Literature was “[e]ndless debate … about whether or not to include in the anthology the poets Khagani (Xaqani) and Nizami, Azerbaijanis by nationality who wrote in Persian.”549 The effort to canonize Nizami as Azerbaijan’s national poet can be traced at least to 1934, when Mamed Alakbarli (Məmmədkasım Ələkbərli), an Azerbaijani delegate to the First Congress of Soviet Writers, said that “before the revolution the

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548 Tamazishvili suggests Jafarov’s attack was motivated by this particular comment by Adalis. Tamazishvili, “Iz istorii izuchenia v SSSR tvorchestva Nizami Giandzhevi.”
Gandzha [Ganja] native was considered Iranian ... But from the materials we have at our disposal, it is clear enough to see that Nizami is a Turkic [tiurok] from Gandzha, lived and composed in Gandzha, and died there.”  

“His grave was discovered there,” Alakbarli continued, and “[i]t was decided to restore it and put up a monument. One of Gandzha’s main streets is named for him. To popularize Nizami, to translate him – this is one of our main tasks.” The same year, a press item listing the publishing and translation projects in production at the literature department of the Azerbaijani branch of the Academy of Sciences (AzFAN) included the preparation of a Turkic translation of the Sharafnama (the first part of Nizami’s Iskandernama, about Alexander the Great) by “our famous classic poet Sheykh Nizami of Ganja.” In March 1934, at the third plenum of the Writers’ Union’s Organizing Committee, an Azerbaijani delegate reported that the editorial board of his republic’s publishing house had “tasked specialists with translating into Turkic selected poems by Azerbaijani writers of the 12th and 13th centuries – Khagani Shirvani, and Nizami, who wrote their works in Persian.”

In Soviet cultural politics, nationalism was a fraught and slippery category. “Nationalist” views and positions were sometimes so labeled on the basis of a contorted logic, or even no logic (and no basis) at all. The progressive bourgeoisie and reform-minded Islamic modernizers of the 19th and early 20th century in Azerbaijan, a group contemporary with the development of Azerbaijani national identity, and supporters of the Musavat Party that ruled Azerbaijan during

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550 In the 12th and 13th centuries, the city of Ganja (Azerbaijani: Gancə; Russian: Gandzha or Giandzhda) was “the major cultural, as well as commercial, center of Azerbaijan.” Conquered by Russia in 1804, the city was known as Elizavetpol in the imperial period and as Kirovabad from the 1930s until the late Soviet period, when it reverted to its original name. [Tadeusz Świetochowski and Brian C. Collins, Historical Dictionary of Azerbaijan (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 55-6]


552 İngilab va mədəniyyət No. 12, 1934, 61.

553 Kathryn Douglas Schild, Between Moscow and Baku: National Literatures at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California-Berkeley, 2010, 145. Her translation. It is not clear how much progress was made on this task in the mid-1930s. In 1939, work on translating Nizami’s poems into Azerbaijani from Farsi was still ongoing. Samad Vurgun was one of the translators. (RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, l. 9)
its brief period of independence following the collapse of the Russian Empire (1918-20), were branded nationalists in the Soviet era. While some members of this group had sought to distance Azerbaijani culture from its Persian influences, others remained interested in reform and modernization efforts taking place in Iran.\textsuperscript{554} By the 1930s, ties with people in Iran were seen by Soviet authorities as signs of political unreliability and potential disloyalty. At the same time, any orientation toward Turkey invited suspicions of pan-Turkism. During an extremist episode in 1929-30, authorities in Azerbaijan took aim at the tar, a traditional stringed instrument used in Azerbaijani music, saying it was not native to Azerbaijan but a Persian import. Those who spoke out for preserving the tar were branded nationalists. Yet when the leaders of the anti-tar and other cultural revolutionary campaigns were removed by Moscow, they, too, were called nationalists. Similarly, both those who supported and rejected Glière’s opera Shah Sanam were called nationalists at one point or another. The rival groups in Azerbaijan’s Writers’ Union in the 1930s called each other nationalists. Earlier, those interested in preserving the literary and other cultural traditions of Azerbaijan’s past were considered nationalists, but by the mid-1930s, in connection with the anthology, those who wanted to lay emphasis on more contemporary literature at the expense of the “classics” were called nationalists. (See Figure 4.1)

The twelfth-century poet Nizami Ganjevi is named for the city in which he lived, Ganja, located in the western part of today’s Republic of Azerbaijan. Verifiable information about his biography is limited. Nizami is most famous for five long poems written in Persian, known collectively as \textit{Khamsa}.\textsuperscript{555} The scholarly establishment, locally as well as in Russia and the West, had long considered Nizami a Persian poet, and early Azerbaijanis who set about the task


\textsuperscript{555} The \textit{Khamsa} (which means “five” in Arabic) is known in Persian as \textit{Panj Ganj} (Five Treasures) and in Russian as \textit{Piateritsa} (Quintet or Five). In Azerbaijan, it is most commonly known as \textit{Khamsa} (Xəmsə).
of assembling a history of the national literature focused on Turkic-language and bilingual (Turkic and Persian) writers, poets, and playwrights. A 1903 history of Turkic literature by Fedirun-Bey Kocharli (Kocharlinskii) referred to Nizami as a “Tatar” from Ganja though did not explicitly include the poet in the Azeri Turkic literary canon, beginning the history of “Tatar literature” with the eighteenth-century poet Vagif. A 1930 Azerbaijani publication acknowledged the influence of Nizami on “Turkic [i.e., Azerbaijani] literature,” referring to him as “the greatest romantic Persian poet” and noting that he “lived and worked in Azerbaijan.” In 1936, a section on Azerbaijani culture for a draft of a textbook on the history of the USSR mentioned “Nezami” among other “talented poets” who “dedicated their works to local feudal lords and received lavish gifts from them,” explaining, “[t]he language of this literature was still Persian: Turkic was at that time used only in conversational speech.”

For Soviet nation-builders, anything or anyone who could be proven to have origins in the geographical territory of a given republic became part of that republic’s cultural patrimony. In the Azerbaijani case, “Azerbaijani national identity and historical narrative constructed after 1937 stressed the indigenous nature of the Azerbaijani people and was based on

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556 Not only did the Nizami entry in the 1897 edition of Brokgauz & Efron’s Encyclopedia identify the poet as Persian, but Soviet press coverage of events connected with the 1000th anniversary of the Persian poet Firdousi in 1934 and the Third International Congress on Iranian Art, held in Leningrad in September 1935, placed Nizami among the classics of Persian literature. [E.M. Krymskii, “Nizami,” in Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar’ (St. Petersburg: Brokgauz i Efron’, 1897), Tom XXI; Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 29 September 1934, 17 June and 5 September 1935]


558 M. Kuliyev, Oktiabr’ i tiurkskaia literatura (Baku: Izd. AzGNII, 1930), 9.

559 RGASPI f. 17, op. 120, d. 371, l. 24. The description of Nizami as a beneficiary of the feudal system quickly changed to one that stressed his objections to it. The transliteration “Nezami” is reflective of modern Persian pronunciation, whereas “Nizami,” which quickly became the standard rendering of the poet’s name in both Azerbaijani and Russian, more closely resembles the pronunciation of the time when the poet lived. [E.E. Bertel’s, Nizami: Tvorcheskii put’ poeta (M.: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1956), 20] On Baku’s contribution to Moscow’s all-Union history textbook project, see Harun Yilmaz, “The Soviet Union and the Construction of Azerbaijani National Identity in the 1930s,” Iranian Studies 46/4 (2013): 511-33, 529-30. He says the text quoted above was sent to Moscow for review but never published, and most of the team in Baku who wrote it were lost to the Terror.

a territorial definition. The territorial approach found support at the highest level – from Joseph Stalin himself.561 That Nizami could be associated with Azerbaijan by dint of territory (that in his day was part of the Persian Empire) thus provided a basis for cultural claims according to the Soviet understanding of ‘nation.’ In keeping with this notion of territoriality, Nizami, who lived in the city of Ganja, indisputably within the boundaries of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan, was Azerbaijani. A shift toward primordialism in Soviet conceptions of nation at this time helped blunt any discomfort with the ahistoricism of calling Nizami, who lived in the 12th century, Azerbaijani.562

The poet’s use of the Persian language, however, was a bigger complication for the Azerbaijanis when it came to claiming Nizami as founder of their national literary canon. For Stalin, common language was one of a nation’s defining features, without which a national community was “inconceivable.”563 This Herderian notion underpinned the promotion of national languages as a cornerstone of Soviet policy toward national minorities. Part of the Bolshevik strategy of national liberation was to guarantee the rights of children, artists, and intellectuals to receive education and express themselves in their native language. Accordingly, the rhetoric surrounding the dekady of national art stressed this linguistic aspect of national freedom. For example, a Ukrainian opera singer described the thrill of rehearsing at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater to perform an opera in Ukrainian during the Dekada of Ukrainian National Art because in her youth under the tsarist regime Ukrainians had not been permitted to print books in their own language.564 Given this emphasis, the celebration of a national poet whose oeuvre was

564 Pravda, 23 March 1936, 4.
not written in the national language (and had not become available in the national language until recently) could be difficult to square.

Stalin’s solution was conveyed in Pravda on 3 April 1939, in the printed text of a speech about world culture given to Kiev intelligentsia by Ukrainian poet Mykola Bazhan. Bazhan recounted a recent conversation between Stalin and writers Aleksandr Fadeev and Petr Pavlenko, head of the Writers’ Union and editor of the new journal Druzhba narodov (Friendship of Peoples), respectively. Stalin reportedly asked the writers if they were familiar with Tajik, Kyrgyz, Kalmyk, and Lak literature, which, “unfortunately, are still entirely unknown to the Soviet reader,” and then brought up Nizami, dismissing the notion that he is an Iranian poet simply because he wrote in Persian. Stalin allegedly quoted passages from Nizami’s work in which the poet himself complained that he was not permitted to address his people in his native language and was forced to resort to Persian.565 Given the jobs of Stalin’s interlocutors, the popularization of ethnic minority literatures was probably a topic on the meeting agenda. In addition, Stalin had a habit of intervening in the arts, harboring “pretensions to expertise in a range of cultural fields and frequently act[ing] as an arbiter in them.”566

The mention of Nizami was likely inspired by correspondence with Bagirov. The Azerbaijani Party secretary had written to Stalin, Molotov, and Zhdanov requesting permission to celebrate Nizami’s 800th jubilee in 1941, explaining in a letter dated 6 December 1938 that “in many of his works Nizami himself complains about the Shirvanshahs [dynastic rulers of

565 Pravda, 3 April 1939, 3. Bazhan spoke Ukrainian to his Kiev audience on April 2; Pravda printed a Russian translation of the speech the next day. At a 23 February 1939 meeting in Moscow of the Writers’ Union’s Nizami Jubilee planning committee, Fadeev made a reference to the same Kremlin meeting with Stalin and Pavlenko, and to Stalin’s citation of a particular spot in Nizami’s work as confirmation that the poet is Azerbaijani. (RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, ll. 16-7)
Persia] forcing him to write not in his native Azerbaijani but in Iranian.” In a 10 January 1939 letter addressed to Zhdanov, Bagirov gave an overview of Nizami’s work, laying out the claims for his Azerbaijani ethnicity and sketching out a grand narrative of the poet’s life and output that fit nicely into Soviet themes. “The best evidence that N[izami] G[anjevi] belongs to Azerbaijani literature,” Bagirov argued,

is the romantic poem *Leili and Mejnun*, which the poet intended to write not in Farsi but in his native Azerbaijani. The Shirvanshahs who ruled at the time demanded that the poet write not in his native Azerbaijani but in the official language of that time, Farsi, about which the poet himself complains in the introduction to this poem.

While Bagirov did not quote the passage from *Leili and Mejnun* in either letter, the January 10 missive to Zhdanov identified its precise location. In the same letter, Bagirov referred to a recent meeting he had with Stalin at which Nizami and the jubilee were discussed. Perhaps Bagirov quoted the precise lines of Nizami’s complaint of linguistic oppression in person to Stalin at that meeting. In any event, it was not mere coincidence that Stalin brought up Nizami at the Kremlin meeting with Pavlenko and Fadeev; the Azerbaijanis had scripted this.

Stalin’s endorsement of Nizami as Azerbaijani, reported through Bazhan’s speech, provided the poet additional credentials in the Soviet context as an artist who had been oppressed on the basis of ethnicity, not permitted to write in his own language. Further, in an injustice that lasted centuries, the world had ascribed him to Persian literature. Only Soviet rule, and Stalin, had righted this wrong and restored Nizami to his people. This “restoration narrative” was featured prominently in the rhetoric of the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in 1940, and the refrain of a discerning and heroic Stalin returning Nizami to his people became a feature of the

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567 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 22, iş 356, səh. 70. The 6 December 1938 letter was signed by Bagirov and Teymur Kuliyev, chair of Azerbaijan’s Soviet of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom).
569 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 22, iş 356, səh. 23-7, here 26. Bagirov also referred to Zhdanov’s presence at the meeting with Stalin and the instructions Stalin gave to prepare a series of articles about Nizami Ganjevi for the central press.
homiletics surrounding the Nizami Jubilee. The assertion that Nizami wanted to write in Azerbaijani but was forced to write in Persian implies that his work is “itself a translation of a nonexistent Azerbaijani original … Returning that imagined text to its national language is thus the process of locating and realizing a latent national potentiality in the original text.” The “restoration narrative” about Nizami, then, is useful to Azerbaijan on a number of levels.

**The Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature**

Organized jointly by the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow and its republican analog in Baku, the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow was held 15-25 May 1940. It was scheduled to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the Sovietization of Azerbaijan and ostensibly intended to celebrate Soviet Azerbaijani literary accomplishments over two decades of Soviet rule. Yet part of “Azerbaijan’s campaign to be recognized as a major Soviet literature” was an emphasis on its literary past. It thus used the literature dekada to lay the groundwork for the 800th anniversary of Nizami Ganjevi, approved and slated for celebration in 1941, by introducing him to the Moscow literary establishment as Azerbaijan’s national poet. The trajectory of the dekada’s literary program, which culminated in an event devoted to Nizami on the festival’s final

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570 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, səh. 16.
571 Schild, *Between Moscow and Baku*, 145. Schild’s interesting insight is part of her discussion of the “delicate process” of “[t]ranslating national writers into the national language,” which, she explains, “differed from other modes of translation.”
572 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 23, səh. 154. The Sovietization of Azerbaijan is conventionally considered to have occurred on 28 April 1920, when Soviet troops entered the republic, which had proclaimed its independence on 28 May 1918. The dekada was initially presented in the press as a celebration of Soviet accomplishment. For example, Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan No. 4-5, 1940, 91; Vyshka, 16 May 1940; Vyshka, 5 May 1940; Bakinskii rabochii, 16 May 1940.
573 Schild, *Between Moscow and Baku*, 145; Pravda, 9 May 1940, 3.
574 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 148, səh. 12; f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, səh. 3. By the dekada’s end, Orientologist E.E. Bertels was clear about its goal when summing up the results of the event: “The dekada was a shining step in the preparation for the celebration of the Nizami Jubilee.” (*Bakinskii rabochii*, 26 May 1940)
night, reflected this agenda. Even the funding for the dekada was drawn from the budget of Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee committee.\textsuperscript{575}

Like its 1938 arts dekada, Azerbaijan’s 1940 literature dekada received plenty of coverage in the central press, including pieces that introduced readers to Azerbaijani literary history. As in 1938, this treatment helped establish a coherent narrative of Azerbaijani cultural development that served to consolidate national identity at home – both as an opportunity for inculcation within the nation and as an exercise in self-presentation to an imagined audience of cultural outsiders for whom Azerbaijani culture was new. Soviet nationalities policy ensured that there was just such an audience. With regard to the performance format, however, there were qualitative and quantitative differences between the two dekady. The 1938 event aimed to be spectacular, featuring a delegation of hundreds, extravagant theatrical performances attended by Moscow’s top Party brass, and a Kremlin reception. In contrast, the literature dekada, with a delegation of approximately 50 – including 12 prose writers, 12 poets, and performing artists [singers, musicians, ashugs and dancers] to provide concert entertainment – was lower key.\textsuperscript{576}

As a result, the 1940 event was truly literary – it focused on words and storytelling, in particular the written word and narrative fixity. Promoting its literary credentials was a priority for Azerbaijan, which saw an opportunity to distinguish itself as a cultural leader by highlighting a venerable literary tradition that stretched back hundreds of years. Emphasizing the richness and ancientness of Azerbaijan’s literary past, press coverage stressed its relevance to the present, asserting that “the writers of the Azerbaijani SSR use the glorious traditions of the native progressive-democratic classical literature in their work.”\textsuperscript{577} In this way, the literature dekada presented an unbroken cultural narrative line from Nizami in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century, a golden age of

\textsuperscript{575} ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 105, səh. 21; f. 411, siy. 18, iş 217, səh. 186.
\textsuperscript{576} Vyshka, 5 May 1940; Pravda, 13 May 1940, 6.
\textsuperscript{577} Izvestiia, 12 May 1940, 3.
Azerbaijani cultural achievement, to the present Soviet moment, when Azerbaijan had entered a new golden age, thanks to Soviet rule, Soviet nationalities policy, and, most of all, Stalin. Nizami represented the pinnacle of cultural achievement in the East when the East was the center of the world’s cultural life; today, Azerbaijan was once again in the cultural avant-garde. Azerbaijan’s literature dekada reflects a “struggle to accumulate literary capital” that Pascale Casanova has described as part of emerging nationhood. A strategy she identifies for acquiring such literary capital was on display at the 1940 event: the drive to “reestablish a lost historical and cultural unity” as part of an “aspiration to ennoblement through the reappropriation of an ancient heritage.”

During the literature dekada, special book kiosks set up throughout Moscow sold Azerbaijani literature, including the Russian-language poetry anthology published in 1939 and a second anthology of Azerbaijani literature put together and translated into Russian expressly for the event. The dekada’s first day saw the opening of an exhibit of Azerbaijani literature at the Moscow Writers’ Club, with hundreds of books on display “characterizing the various stages of the development of Azerbaijani literature” and “introducing the Soviet reader to dozens of new names.”

A review of the exhibit dutifully pronounced the contemporary (i.e., Soviet) poetry section as “the richest” but stressed the continuity between past and present by juxtaposing two quoted lines of poetry, one from the twelfth-century poet Khagani, the other a description of

Ancientness, Casanova explains, is important because “literary nobility very largely depends on how far back [nations’] genealogies can be traced.” [Pascale Casanova, The World Republic of Letters, trans. M.B. Debevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 240-1]

Izvestiia, 12 May 1940, 1; Veshka, 5 May 1940; Pravda, 9 May 1940. The Azerbaijani press reported that works by its national writers sold “with great success.” (Literaturnaia gazeta, 20 May 1940) The book kiosk locations included the Moskva Hotel, Sverdlov Square, Mokhovaia Street, the lobby of the Conservatory, and the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition. (Bakinskii rabochii, 18 May and 20 May 1940)

Pravda, 9 May 1940; Vecherniaia Moskva, 13 May 1940; Pravda, 13 May 1940; Izvestiia, 16 May 1940; Pravda, 19 May 1940, 4; Literaturnaia gazeta, 20 May 1940. The dekada exhibit’s introduction of new Azerbaijani names conflicts with Fadeev’s statement during the dekada that Azerbaijan’s “great strength of spirit gave birth to the glorious classics-humanists Nizami, Fuzuli, Vagif, Sabir, Fatali Akhundov, names that are dear to the heart of every thinking person in the world,” which suggested that the names were not new but already familiar to everyone. [Literaturnaia gazeta, 20 May 1940, 1; Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan No. 4-5, 1940, 96-7]
The choice of the Vurgun lines is unremarkable for the era’s cult of personality, but the Khagani quotation – “I am the inspirer of great truths/ And the prophet of singers of my land” – recalls the 1828 Pushkin poem “Prorok,” with its ideal of divine inspiration and Pushkinian image of the poet as prophet, transplanting these themes to Azerbaijani soil. By making a connection between Khagani and Pushkin, the passage points up cultural ties between Russia and Azerbaijan. This valence was another dékada refrain, usually in the context of the help and guidance given to Azerbaijan by “the great Russian nation.” Yet in this example, the reader is aware that the Azerbaijani part of the equation vastly predates the Russian, overturning the trope of the Russian “older brother.” The juxtaposition implies that Azerbaijan’s artistic sophistication and pantheon of poetic genius is the equal of, and more venerable than, Russia’s. Thus the review manages to put forth two different, and contradictory, narratives – one that meets the Soviet standard, another that accommodates Azerbaijani desires and goals for recognition and veneration.

Literature dékada events followed a common script, whether at the Moscow Conservatory or the Palace of Culture of Moscow’s Stalin Automobile Factory: opening remarks from a member of the Moscow Writers’ Union, a lecture on Azerbaijani literary history followed by Azerbaijani poets reading their work in Azerbaijani with Russian poets reading Russian translations, then a concert to conclude the program. Not only was the Friendship of Peoples theme in evidence during the dékada, but festival events were consciously depicted as acts of

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581 “Vystavka azerbaidzhanskoj literatury,” Pravda, 19 May 1940. The source of the lines by Vurgun is a poem about the Stakhanovite cotton worker from Azerbaijan Basti Bagirova (Bəsti Bağırova).

582 Like Nizami, Khagani wrote in Persian. The Russian translation of the original Persian that appeared in Pravda is: “Я великих истин вдохновитель/ И пророк певцов земли моей.” “Prorok” is the Pushkin poem Dostoevsky recited at the Pushkin Jubilee in 1880. [Sandler, Commemorating Pushkin: Russia’s Myth of a National Poet (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 89]

cultural harmony and even cultural merger. In her account of the dekada’s opening event, writer Marietta Shaginian painted a portrait of “mutual understanding,” cross-cultural intimacy (the poets already know each other through their translation work and many use the familiar form of address, she explained, describing the warm atmosphere of comradely closeness), and erasure of boundaries: the evening unfolded against the backdrop of a constant stream of music, with a Chopin waltz played by the decorated pianist Yakov Flier dissolving into the cooing sounds of a tar, and the voices of Moscow singers dissolving into Azerbaijani ones. Bakinskii rabochii rhapsodized that the language of Soviet Azerbaijan’s literature was “close and understandable to all the nations of our country.” At one dekada event, an Armenian writer read from the works of Nizami in Russian translation, foregrounding the interethnic cultural appreciation and interaction that the institution of the dekada was meant to foster.

At Moscow’s elite Lenin Military-Political Academy, a training institution for Soviet military leaders, Samad Vurgun delivered a speech about the “2000-year history” of the Azerbaijani nation and its literary achievements. In particular, he related the Nizami restoration narrative, describing the nationalist-Musavatists, pan-Turkists, and other enemies of the people who tried to deny Nizami to his native people because he wrote in Persian and crediting Stalin with returning the poet to the Azerbaijani nation. In addition to introducing Nizami as a

584 Marietta Shaginian, “Prazdnik druzhby,” Vyshka, 18 May 1940.
585 Bakinskii rabochii, 15 May 1940.
586 Pravda, 16 May 1940. The Azerbaijani-Armenian cultural interaction was especially important given the history of friction between the ethnic groups. Azerbaijan was home to a significant Armenian population, both urban and rural. The republic’s Union of Soviet Writers had Armenian and Russian sections, and the union’s newspaper was published in three languages. Representatives of all three groups were carefully included in the dekada delegation. An Armenian writer who attended the dekada literary evenings described the closeness of Azerbaijani literature to the Armenian people: “the best traditions of Azerbaijani literature … have always been integral [svoistvenyi] to Armenian literature.” He declared that to him, as an Armenian writer, “Nizami and Vagif are as close as [Armenian literary classics] Sayat-Nova and Tumanian,” and pledged to use his powers of translation to make the best of classical and contemporary Azerbaijani poetry the patrimony (dostoianie) of the Armenian reader. [Vyshka, 9 June 1940]
587 Vecherniaia Moskva, 23 May 1940 (reprinted in Azerbaijani translation in Moskvada Azərbaycan ədəbiyyatı dekadası). Tamazishvili cites this element of Vurgun’s speech as giving a “new accent” to the theme of Nizami’s
cultural keystone and the Nizami restoration narrative with Stalin as hero, Vurgun narrated his nation, giving a thumbnail sketch of Azerbaijani cultural history that established the load-bearing walls of the national historical-cultural edifice. In a Foucauldian sense, this was a moment of Azerbaijan’s assertion of discursive power, and the setting – a military school, a doubly disciplinary institution at the center of Russian-dominated Soviet space – is not incidental.\(^{588}\)

Vurgun’s dissemination of the national narrative framed by Azerbaijani entrepreneurs of cultural nationalism to an external audience was an act of discursive national self-determination. At the same time, it furthered the merger-oriented Soviet cultural agenda of cross-cultural exposure and familiarization among nations.

The time and place of Vurgun’s speech point up the polyvalence and multi-purpose character of the dekada in other ways, as well. Early in his speech, Vurgun explained Azerbaijan’s cultural relationship with Iran, important both because of the upcoming Nizami Jubilee and the geopolitical situation in 1940. According to Herodotus and Strabo, Vurgun narrated, the forebears of modern Azeris had a sophisticated culture from which Iran borrowed heavily.\(^{589}\) This assertion established the ancientness, separateness, and influence of Azerbaijani culture, all features important for nation-building, both in general and in the Soviet context. Such a position about Azerbaijani precursors to Persian culture helped lay a foundation for Azerbaijani claims to more than Nizami. By May 1940, when the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature was held in Moscow, the cultural absorption of newly Soviet lands in Western Belorussia and Western Ukraine was underway, and the annexation of these areas may have stimulated Soviet interest in

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\(^{589}\) The text of Vurgun’s speech given at the Lenin Military-Political Academy appears in *Moskvada Azərbaycan ədəbiyyatı dekadası*, 254-5. On ancient Media (a state Vurgun discusses that was located in the territory that is now Azerbaijan), see Shnirelman, *The Value of the Past*, chapters 9-10.
Southern Azerbaijan, a region in northern Iran with a heavily ethnic Azeri population. Starting in 1941, Soviet forays into Iran were pursued in cultural as well as military terms, and the irredentist aspirations of Azerbaijani Party chief Bagirov were a driving force behind this initiative. Some of those who had organized the 1940 Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow, cultural leaders such as Azerbaijani Writers’ Union chair Suleyman Rahimov, were sent to Iran in 1941 to work on cultural and propaganda activities.

Azerbaijan’s method of locating the nation in cultural production – and in literature, in particular – capitalized on the values of Soviet culture in several ways. Given Soviet esteem for the written word, no Soviet nation could be considered advanced without a written literature of its own. This state of affairs reflected not only an underlying Eurocentrism but red triangulation. While print capitalism and the establishment of a literary canon are widely acknowledged tools of nation-building, as discussed earlier, Russia’s literary development – its speed, excellence, and the admiration it inspired in the eyes of Europe – was a particular source of national pride. Likewise, national literature was an area in which Azerbaijan, with a centuries-long written tradition, could claim accomplishment, leadership, and influence. Moreover, the cultural self-assertion and contributions of a small nation were a particular tribute to the justice of Soviet ideology at a time when fascism was crushing small (and not so small) nations throughout Europe.

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590 Dzhamil’ Gasanly, SSSR-Iran: Azerbaidzhanskii krizis i nachalo khолодnoi voiny (Moscow: Geroi Otechestva, 2006), 15, Chapter 1. Hasanli’s (Gasanly) archival research indicates that the Azerbaijani SSR footed the bill for supplies sent to support Soviet troops occupying Southern Azerbaijan, and Bagirov’s pep talks to Soviet Azerbaijanis leaving to serve in Iran centered on nationalist appeals.

591 Gasanly, SSSR-Iran, 24-5.

592 The Nazi invasion of France and the low countries began on 10 May 1940; the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow started five days later. The point about small nations was made explicit by Rahimov at a meeting of Baku intelligentsia after the dekada when he said, “today the self-determination of small nations has been trampled.” (ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, sah. 18)
All these sentiments are evident in speeches given at an All-Baku Meeting of Intelligentsia, organized jointly by the Union of Soviet Writers of Azerbaijan and the agitprop department of the republican Party’s Central Committee following the dekada. Summarizing the importance of literary capital, literary critic Jafar Jafarov declared that “art and literature make a nation’s name.” Explaining the dekada’s importance not only for Azerbaijan but for Soviet literature and world literature, he continued:

Our dekada has enormous significance in the sense that it revealed a nation small in number, the Azerbaijani nation that, thanks to its literature and poetry, will always be seen as one of the most popular names in world literature. … It used to be that world literature was considered Western literature – Eastern literature did not stand on an equal footing with European literature. And this dekada showed that in the East there is a nation, small in number, that had a great literature, a great art, and which broke the chains that Europe had put on. … This is one of the biggest accomplishments of our dekada, which showed, that Azerbaijani literature is one of the leaders in the family of Soviet literatures and … defines and influences the direction of the development of Soviet literature.593

Jafarov’s comments reflect an awareness of “an expanded cultural horizon” brought about by “the adoption of the non-European into the ‘Great Family’ of the multiethnic Soviet Union and into the purview of world culture.”594 This cultural inclusivity was similarly reflected in a conference planned by the Main Directorate of Educational Institutions at the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs for fall 1940 to discuss “the teaching of courses on the history of the music of the peoples of the USSR for conservatories and music schools.” The departments of the history of music of the peoples of the USSR at Moscow and Leningrad conservatories had developed curriculum for these courses, and directors and teachers of music schools throughout the Soviet Union had been asked to send their feedback “about necessary additions to the program (especially to that part of the course devoted to studying the development of musical culture in the national republics.” The curriculum aimed to study “the musical cultures of

593 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 122, səh. 7 tərs tərəf-8.
594 Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome, 220, 191.
individual peoples and their mutual connection, in particular in departments of the history of the musical culture of the Russian people,” and it was thus “essential to have data about the development of musical culture of other peoples of the USSR.” The literature section of the curriculum consisted largely of publications connected with the various dekady of national art in Moscow, an indication of the festivals’ purpose of raising awareness of musical traditions and developments in non-Russian Soviet republics. Likewise, in 1935 the Politburo had given instructions that a new history textbook of the Soviet Union was “to include the history of the minority peoples, not just of Russia.” This injunction “could be read in two ways – as oriented towards greater internationalism, or towards national consolidation. It was both.” Such projects reflect the “insistence on the unity of the individual and the whole – the state – in an organic totality” that motivated the dekada of national art and other institutions in which nationalism and internationalism were symbiotic parts of a single dynamic. Projects like the textbook and the music course point to the development of an all-Union multiethnic canon of cultural products as a feature of a common Soviet culture meant to bind the country together.

**DEKADA OUTCOMES**

The project of expanding the cultural tent to include East and West on one shelf attracted a number of supporters. By including non-Western contributions in the “treasurehouse of world

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595 RGALI f. 962, op. 1, d. 618, ll. 3-4, *passim*.
596 Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 174, 190. Clark writes, “Arguably, in the 1930s, the causes of nationalism, internationalism, and even cosmopolitanism were not distinct but to a significant degree imbricated with one another in a mix peculiar to that decade.” In addition, she explains, “Until 1935 the understanding [of how far the expansion of ‘world literature’ and ‘world culture’ and would extend and what its compass would be] had been mostly in terms of some European variant. But starting around 1935 the purview expanded within the Soviet Union.” (5, 190) While I argue that the development of this “internal internationalism” is detectable before 1935, observers of 1930s Moscow may see clearer signs of increased or more ritualized expression of it in the middle of the decade. I agree that mid-decade is when Soviet “internal internationalization” is manifested in intensified efforts to create an all-Union multiethnic canon as a feature of a unified, and unifying, Soviet culture. On the Kremlin-sanctioned textbook project and how it played out in various ethnic peripheries, see Harun Yilmaz, *National Identities in Soviet Historiography: The Rise of Nations under Stalin* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
culture,” something Gorky’s World Literature project had aimed to do in 1919, Moscow gained leverage and credibility, both at home and abroad. Integrating artistic accomplishments of “Eastern” cultures of the Soviet Union in this treasurehouse helped Moscow define itself in opposition to imperial Russia and make a more convincing claim to being the cultural capital of a diverse population than tsarist Russia had made for Petersburg. Moscow writers active in the translation and promotion of national minority literatures comprised a group of stakeholders, who used opportunities like the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature to argue their case.

In June 1940, Moscow writer Petr Skosyrev took the Moscow publishing establishment to task for neglecting the prose writers and playwrights of Azerbaijan. Questioning the commitment of Moscow literati to Soviet principles of multiculturalism, he charged Moscow critics with ignoring non-Russian literature and with forgetting “that Soviet prose is not only created in Russian,” an echo of Gorky’s words at the 1934 Congress of Soviet Writers. The recent Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature, Skosyrev wrote, had revealed the distance between Soviet words and actions regarding multinational literature, and he accused literary Moscow of subscribing to the century-old attitudes of Prince Viazemsky, who considered Eastern poetry to be the student-like work of children and supported Western domination of the literary canon. Skosyrev wrote:

We are accustomed from childhood to value the work of great masters of word and idea, we for so many years naively assumed that the heights of world poetry are full of the names of Europeans we know well: Homer, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pushkin, Byron. But here on the pages of the “Azerbaijani Anthology,” Antokol’skii, Dolmatovskii, Simonov and others have only just started to lift the curtain that is hiding from us the genius Nizami … The rarified circle of greatness … it turns out is much wider than we were led to believe from childhood. To the great names of Europe we should add many names of geniuses of the East. The Azerbaijani nation alone gave humankind such giants as Nizami, Nasimi, Fizuli, Vagif.

Petr Skosyrev was an advocate for promoting the literatures of Central Asia and the Caucasus and did a stint as editor of the journal Druzhba narodov in the late 1940s. P. Skosyrev, “V sviazi s dekadoi…,” Literaturnaia gazeta, 26 May 1940, 3. Reprinted in Azerbaijani as “Dekada Münasibatile,” Ədəbiyyat qəzetı, 2 June 1940, 4. Flaunting his own knowledge of Azerbaijani prose, Skosyrev
Novelist Marietta Shaginian had words of criticism for the way in which Soviet nationalities policy was being applied to literary production. Responding to the claim that Azerbaijan, while excelling in the field of poetry, was lagging behind in its production of artistic prose, she argued that if the output of Azerbaijani prose writers did not match that of their Russian counterparts, it was a reflection of an admirable laconicism characteristic of the Azerbaijani prose style. Rather than lagging, Azerbaijani writers had put their language, molded by a centuries-old poetic tradition, in the service of contemporary prose and thereby avoided the verbose devices that clog up Russian books. Instead of conforming to a Russian novelistic style, she maintained that Soviet literature of the East should preserve its laconic style and considered it invalid and unfair to evaluate the accomplishments of Azerbaijani prose writers by the number of printed pages they produced. Furthermore, she recommended that Russian writers pay close attention to Azerbaijani prose because they have something to learn from it. Although she veered into territory that might be considered Orientalist (for example, she compared the laconicism of Azerbaijani prose to ancient Egyptian art – “with two or three basic lines and points, sparing in the extreme but at the same time unforgettable and expressive”), Shaginian’s comments recovered the more balanced rhetoric of cultural exchange present a decade earlier (see the discussion of the 1930 Olimpiada of National Theater and Art in Chapter 1). This discourse, in which nations, including Russia, had much to learn from each other had become increasingly drowned out by prescriptions about imitating Russia.599

Naturally, Azerbaijanis also saw opportunities in a canon expansion that valued non-European contributions as much as European ones, and they were eager to secure their place in

asserted that the short stories of Azeri writer Jalil Mammadguluzadeh (Cəlil Məmmədquluzadə) stand in world literature beside those of Maupassant and Chekhov.  
599 Marietta Shaginian, “Problema azerbaidzhanskoi prozy,” Literaturnaia gazeta, 20 May 1940, 4. Interestingly, Shaginian is also suggesting here that the “national form” of Stalin’s oft-repeated “national in form, socialist in content” formula has more meaning than Western scholars have typically ascribed to it.

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it. For Azerbaijan, the dekada was an opportunity to put itself on the Soviet and world literary map, to cement ties with sympathetic allies in Moscow, and to make connections with cultural decision makers in the capital. But it also used the dekada as an opportunity to make demands and register complaints. Despite the Kremlin’s endorsement of the Nizami Jubilee, planners in Azerbaijan continued to struggle for cooperation from the Moscow cultural establishment. This was symptomatic of a more general lack of interest in and respect for the cultural output of Azerbaijan evinced by the Moscow community. Azerbaijani Writers’ Union chair Suleyman Rahimov campaigned in Izvestiia for greater visibility for Azerbaijani literature by appealing to Russian cultural pride and a common Soviet community:

All Soviet nations, aside from their own language, also have the Russian language, which we all have in common and which is dear to us all ... And it is a great honor for all of us to see our work in this wonderful language, to know that the Russian people are reading you.

This pandering was motivated by strategy, as the dominance of Russian language was increasing at this time. On 1 January 1940, Azerbaijan had switched from a Latin alphabet, in use since 1924, to a Cyrillic-based one. In 1938-9, by order of Stalin, non-Russian schools in ethnic republics had started strengthening Russian-language instruction. Thus behind Rahimov’s flattery was the knowledge that Russian translation was an important step in reaching a wider and ever-widening audience and thus in raising awareness of Azerbaijani culture.

Samad Vurgun’s tack was more straightforward, echoing the tone and vocabulary of Jafarov’s criticism of The Literary Gazette’s review article of the Anthology of Azerbaijani Poetry: “It is insulting [obidno] that the Russian reader barely knows Azerbaijani prose.” While

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600 I. Andronov, “Nasushchnye voprosy,” Izvestiia, 24 May 1940, 3.
Vurgun praised the Russian translations of Azerbaijani poetry such as those in the anthology (noting, however, that the Russian poets who worked on them do not know Azerbaijani), he scolded publishers and Moscow journals for wasting paper on low-quality translations and for ignoring important writers of the brother republics. Not a single Azerbaijani play, he pointed out, has been performed on Moscow or Leningrad stages, adding that it is the task of Soviet criticism to search assiduously for creative gems in brother republics and systematically show the best works of all-Union literature. Central Writers’ Union chair Fadeev echoed Vurgun, though less caustically:

The Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow puts before us the issue of translation and publication of works of writers of brother republics. We published an anthology of Azerbaijani poetry, the Azerbaijani almanac, an anthology of Kazakh poetry. But this is not much. We must develop this translation activity … We must take an interest in how the works of the great classic [Nizami] are translated and take all measures so that his oeuvre becomes the patrimony [dostoianie] of all nations of the Soviet Union.

The Azerbaijani delegation returned to Baku for a coda of dekada assessments and publicity. In a resolution on the dekada’s results, the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party declared the festival a success and turned to the home front, mandating activities “to acquaint the broader masses of workers of Azerbaijan with the enormous accomplishments of Azerbaijani literature.” Newspapers were instructed to devote a page to “results of the dekada,” and celebrations featuring dekada participants were held in Baku and the republic’s regions. The resolution called for activities to bolster the project of codifying and enshrining Azerbaijan’s literary past, charging local literary, research, and publishing organizations with the task of writing a “scientific history of Azerbaijani literature” as well as “historical works” about heroes of the Azerbaijani nation. It also mandated publication of an anthology of Azerbaijani prose classics, restoration of the gravesites of “classics of Azerbaijani

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602 Andronov, “Nasushchnye voprosy.”
603 Pravda, 27 May 1940. Reprinted in Vyshka, 29 May 1940 and, in Azerbaijani, in Ədəbiyyat qəzeti, 2 June 1940.
literature” that were languishing in disrepair, and increased resources for translations into Russian, which “deeply facilitate the dissemination and popularization of Azerbaijani literature.” With all the attention it gave to pre-revolutionary heritage, the resolution suggested that the way forward for Azerbaijani culture hinges on looking back into the past.

The post-dekada speechifying in Baku, done largely in Azerbaijani, gives some insight into Azerbaijani cultural leaders’ aspirations for their country. Gatherings with dekada participants and Baku intelligentsia were part homecoming pep-rally and part strategy meeting about the next steps in the project of popularizing Azerbaijani culture. Literary critic Jafarov declared that criticism should “not be narrowly national but should go beyond the borders of its republic, since its task is the popularization and propaganda of our literature beyond the borders of our republic.” He called on Azerbaijanis to “bring the literature of our republic to Moscow and through Moscow to the entire Soviet Union.”

Samad Vurgun extended the boundaries of this sentiment:

This is only the beginning … we should strive … to provide many such great works so that they thunder across the entire Soviet Union and whole world, so that our stuff is translated into the main languages of the world … the millennium-long history of the literature of the Azerbaijani nation, starting with Nizami Ganjevi up to today, has been the richest, most advanced literature in the East … Today Azerbaijani Soviet literature is an example for all Eastern peoples … today if Azerbaijan’s Soviet literature is on the cutting edge of great Soviet literature, we cannot stop with that. We must raise the banner of Azerbaijani literature not only in the Soviet Union but on a worldwide scale.

Jafarov added that world literature now is not only European literature, it is Soviet literature, of which Azerbaijani literature is a leader, having defined the heroic-romantic style currently so popular in Soviet letters. “Our contemporary prose is linked with our classical prose,” he said, “and our classical prose is linked with our classical poetry. We must preserve

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604 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, sah. 1-3; f. 1, siy. 23, iş 148, sah. 51-3; f. 1, siy. 23, iş 272, sah. 148-9.
605 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 122, sah. 9.
606 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, sah. 42, 20-23, 21-21 tərs taraf.
Thus the speeches of Jafarov and Vurgun worked to establish continuity in Azerbaijan’s cultural development, revive pride in Eastern literature and its place in the canon of world literature, and posit Azerbaijan’s historical place at the forefront of Eastern literature and now of Soviet literature, establishing the nation’s literary avant-gardist credentials. Vurgun quoted Russian poet Vera Inber, who had written in *The Literary Gazette* that Azerbaijani literature has started to influence Russian literature. In Russia’s narrative of its national cultural development described in the Introduction and Chapter 1, the influence of Russian literature and music on European culture signaled the nation’s arrival as a major player on the world cultural stage. Thus Vurgun’s reference to Inber’s comment provides another example of red triangulation. Azerbaijani culture had advanced to such a level that instead of imitating and learning from Russia, it was now accepted and acknowledged by Russia, engaging in cultural dialogue and influencing it.

While some at the meeting with the Baku intelligentsia spoke proudly about the Azerbaijani language, quoting Marietta Shaginian, for example, on its beauty and other merits, Vurgun was blunt: “only through Russian will our literature become known. That is why all writers in the future must study Russian.” Certainly this theme dovetailed with Moscow’s priorities, which included spreading Russian as a lingua franca, but taken together with other comments made at the Baku meetings (such as those about Azerbaijan’s small size and the West’s neglect of Eastern literature), the insistence on Russian points to a different local agenda: the nation’s accumulation of cultural capital and prestige by promoting the treasures of

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607 He is referring to Samad Vurgun’s 1938 play *Vagif*, which had just been nominated for the Gorky Prize (and went on to win it). Vurgun was awarded the Stalin Prize for the play in 1941. (ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 148, soh. 7-9 tərs taraf)

608 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, soh. 23 tərs taraf.

609 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, soh. 17-8; Marietta Shaginian, “Problema azerbaidzhanskoi prozy”; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, soh. 22 tərs taraf.
Azerbaijani culture beyond the nation. Pascale Casanova identifies dependence on translation as an inevitable conundrum of the literatures of small nations. As “translated men,” literary authors in small languages are caught in a dramatic structural contradiction that forces them to choose between translation into a literary language that cuts them off from their compatriots, but that gives them literary existence, and retreat into a small language that condemns them to invisibility or else to a purely national literary existence.

For those that choose to cross literary borders, translation is essential and translators the medium through whom “the literatures of the periphery are linked to the center.”

The advocacy of Rahimov, Vurgun, and others for the translation of great works of Azerbaijani literature into Russian reflects a desire to make their nation visible to those beyond it. Vurgun’s comments suggest a view of Russian not as a destination language but as a conduit to the outside world. Conveniently, their words also played to a Soviet agenda that purported to illustrate its revolutionary respect for all brother nations while promoting Russocentrism. For a larger goal of cultural merger imagined by Lenin, translation into Russian was a familiarizing step that helped move brother nations closer together culturally. Translation into Russian was, likewise, part of creating an all-Union artistic canon to which each nation contributed cultural products to become the common cultural patrimony of all members of the multiethnic Soviet nation. In this way, Azerbaijan was able to emphasize points of intersection between otherwise divergent local-national and Soviet-international goals, creating the appearance of consonance, even when the republic’s aspirations passed through the center but did not stop there. At the same time, the impulse to locate the nation not only in its cultural output but in foreign recognition of and esteem for it – to be national and international at the same time – is taken from the imperial Russian playbook.

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Young writer: Ah, when will a monument like that be put up for me?
Classical Azeri poets Fuzuli and Vagif: Excuse us, young man, it’s our turn first…

Figure 4.1. Building monuments and the nation. A 1935 cartoon notes the official canonization of national cultural figures through the placement of public monuments. The statue in the background is of Sabir (1862-1911), a prominent Azeri poet, satirist, and social critic. If Western-oriented intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries had become emphasized over older classical Azeri writers, the 1930s saw the rehabilitation of the more distant literary past as relevant to the present and as a source of national identity. Ədəbijat əqəzeti, 9 March 1935

CONCLUSION

A comparison of the rhetoric surrounding the Azerbaijani dekady of 1938 and 1940 reveals a detectable shift. In 1938, Bagirov had stressed the standard of modesty to which all dekada delegates should adhere in Moscow, as if they represented a young debutante nation
trying to impress curious admirers in the capital with her Soviet upbringing.\textsuperscript{611} In 1940, a small group of writers went to Moscow as experts and proudly taught it about Azerbaijan’s venerable and illustrious literary tradition. They also made demands and openly criticized Moscow’s creative community for disrespecting Azerbaijani literature. The change in tone is attributable to several factors. The success of the 1938 dekada had bolstered Azerbaijan’s cultural prestige and, therefore, confidence. In addition, the self-presentation the festival entailed had pushed Azerbaijan, political risks notwithstanding, to articulate a coherent story of its national cultural history that stressed its ancientness, heroes, and achievements. The theoretical literature on nation-building acknowledges such narratives, and their inculcation in the national community, as an important tool in the consolidation of national identity. I argue that the exercise of projecting the national narrative outward – a process that requires imagining a community not of co-nationals but an audience of cultural outsiders encountering a new national culture – is also valuable to the construction of national identity. Furthermore, it is a step Soviet nationalities policy encouraged, even insisted on, as part of a grand agenda of cultural merger and its more immediate manifestation of creating a unified Soviet identity.

More specifically, the framing of a narrative of national cultural development enabled the reclamation of the past, both distant and recent, permitting an acknowledgment of continuity between pre- and post-revolutionary culture. The reestablishment of this connection repudiated once and for all the position, espoused by some, especially in the 1920s, that all pre-revolutionary Azerbaijani culture should be deposited in the museum with the Arabic alphabet and chador.\textsuperscript{612} Such an assertion of continuity was authorized by an officially sanctioned shift to a primordial conception of the nation that is associated with mature nationhood. Azerbaijan had

\textsuperscript{611} ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 379, səh. 80.
\textsuperscript{612} Fərəh Əliyeva, \textit{XX əsr Azərbaycan musiqisi: Tarix və zamanla üz-üzə} (Baku: Elm, 2007), 192.
not only received the center’s approval of its move in this direction but Stalin’s explicit help. Not only had the leader expressed interest in seeing pre-revolutionary musical theater as part of Azerbaijan’s 1938 arts dekada, but he sanctioned Azerbaijan’s claim to Nizami as a national poet, putting Azerbaijan in control of this narrative. There were many reasons for the enormous significance placed on the Nizami anniversary; one of them is the way in which Stalin was imbricated into the story of Nizami, furnishing an ideal means to flatter the cult of both simultaneously.

The literature dekada, timed to coincide with 20th anniversary of Sovietization and therefore ostensibly about achievement since the dawn of the Soviet era’s new day, became Azerbaijan’s opportunity to introduce Nizami via the Azerbaijani narrative about him ahead of the upcoming jubilee. This, as discussed in the next chapter, gave Azerbaijan scholarly and narrative control and amounted to a reconceptualization of Azerbaijani history and narrative time. Azerbaijani dekada planners were helped in this task by the Writers’ Union, and especially by those, like Skosyrev and Shaginian, who (motivated perhaps by careerism, perhaps by internationalist idealism, perhaps by some combination of both) called out the recalcitrant Moscow literary community for its Russocentrism. The 1940 literature dekada aided the consolidation of this alliance as well.

The 1940 Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow hinged on a theme of narrowing gaps of various kinds – cultural, temporal, linguistic, geographical, ethnic, professional, personal. It forged cross-cultural links that brought nations closer together; was a boon to translation; and placed the oldest and newest examples of Azerbaijani literary achievement on a single continuum, connecting classical and contemporary Soviet literature and integrating Eastern and Western literature in the process. Years later, the event was evaluated in the scholarship as “a
serious push for ‘close’ familiarization with Azerbaijani literature and its systematic study” and as giving rise to many articles by “well-known Russian writers and critics” that “shed light on many significant phenomena of classical as well as Soviet literature.” Shaginian’s article “Goethe and Nizami,” which examines Nizami’s influence on the German poet and considers “the literature of West and East in its historical unity” is cited as just one example of the dekada’s fruits.\footnote{Seyfulla Asadullaev, \textit{Dukhovnoe obshchenie i vzaimnoe poznanie} (Baku: Yazyči, 1986), 268.}

Of course, for all the gap-closing and narrative and cultural coherence catalyzed by the dekada, plenty of contradiction and disparity remained. Not least of these was an unresolved tension between unity and diversity that inhered in Soviet nationalities policy. This was manifested in the institution of the dekada, which was designed both to validate art as particularly national and to make the same art into the common property of many nations (or at least of a unified multiethnic Soviet nation). In this way, the dekada sought simultaneously to create and undermine boundaries, to define and blur difference. The same tension is reflected in two principles that propelled the Nizami Jubilee locomotive: 1) Nizami’s fundamentalness to Azerbaijani culture and national spirit, and 2) Nizami’s universality. Azerbaijan’s celebration of Nizami’s 800th jubilee is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5  
(DI)VERSIFYING THE NATION: THE NATIONAL POET JUBILEE

In February 1937, the centenary of the death of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin was lavishly celebrated across the Soviet Union, with related activities spanning the entire year. While other writer anniversaries had been celebrated in the Soviet era (for example, Leo Tolstoy’s 100th jubilee in September 1928), the Pushkin Jubilee was “the first large-scale, government-sponsored event during the Soviet era celebrating a pre-revolutionary writer,” and it transformed the Russian national poet “into a hero to be admired and emulated” by Russians and non-Russians alike. Pushkin admiration was an activity in which all Soviet brother nations could be united. In addition to making a model of the poet himself, the Pushkin Jubilee set the standard for subsequent celebrations of national literary figures. Since “all officially recognized Soviet nationalities were supposed to have their own nationally defined ‘Great Traditions’ … all Soviet peoples possessed, or would shortly acquire, their own classics, their own founding fathers and their own folkloric riches.” Thus, after the Pushkin Jubilee, each ethnic group sought to popularize its own canon-defining poet (or, when authorship was not possible to establish, a founding national text), often through an anniversary celebration on a Union-wide scale.

615 The nationalities sector of the Writers’ Union in Moscow helped coordinate planning for Pushkin Jubilee celebrations in the ethnic republics. For example, see RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 133. The All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs kept tabs on jubilee plans in other branches of the arts throughout the Soviet Union. For example, see RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 56.
The year 1939 alone saw all-Union commemorations of Ossetin poet Kosta Khetagurov (80th birthday); Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (125th birthday); the Armenian epic *David Sasuni* (1000th anniversary); Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem (80th birthday); and nineteenth-century Russian writers Mikhail Lermontov (125th birthday) and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin (50th anniversary of his death). Such cultural events offered useful political opportunities. For the group supplying the cultural figure being celebrated, a jubilee was a chance to frame and disseminate a national cultural narrative, thereby consolidating national identity.617 For the Soviet project, celebrations of national writers and poets were moments of intense cross-cultural interaction that brought people closer together. Like the dekada of national art, a national writer jubilee was an orchestrated exchange in which a nation presented its cultural self to its Soviet brothers, who responded with interest, respect, and admiration. In the process, the national figure became a contribution to an all-Union multiethnic canon that became (or was supposed to become) the common cultural heritage of all Soviet citizens, uniting them. The celebration was thus an act in which the nation demonstrated its distinctiveness, which was validated by other nations accepting this uniqueness. At the same time, the bearer of national essence – celebrated writer and literary output – was made familiar to others and assimilated into a universal culture.

Major anniversary celebrations consumed significant resources and required extensive coordination. For literary figures, the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow was charged with supporting the presenting republic in its negotiations with an often uncooperative publishing bureaucracy in the center. Typically, the Writers’ Union would form a committee for a given jubilee and maintain contact with representatives from jubilee committees across the republics. While one weary member of the Biuro of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers

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617 In the Soviet context, jubilees were not limited to the anniversaries of people, national epics, or momentous events: milestone birthdays of institutions such as newspapers were celebrated as well. For example, the 35th anniversary of the 1906 founding of the newspaper *Bakinskii rabochii*, which Stalin had edited, was marked in 1941.
complained of jubilee committee fatigue, Writers’ Union chair Aleksandr Fadeev admitted, “We’ve had quite a lot of different jubilees ... In essence the union has turned into a jubilee organization ...”\textsuperscript{618} The literary jubilee became such a fixture in Soviet public life that a 1960 article, “Introduction to Jubilee Studies,” satirized the practice by describing the methodology of “jubilee science.”\textsuperscript{619} Though it stopped short of qualifying as its own branch of science, the Soviet jubilee did develop its own rituals, institutions, choreography, anatomy, and rhetoric.

Chapter 5 considers Azerbaijan’s corner of the Soviet national poet jubilee industry, which centered on the 800\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of Nizami Ganjevi, the twelfth-century poet who lived in the city of Ganja, a thriving multicultural Caucasian urban center located in the western part of what is today the Republic of Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{620} The chapter begins with a discussion of literary jubilee precedents in Europe and Russia and their influence on the Soviet institution, then moves on to the example of Azerbaijan’s national poet jubilee experience, focusing on the particular challenges and opportunities presented by Nizami and his celebration. Political and cultural leaders in Azerbaijan took their task as propagandists for their national culture seriously and saw the Nizami Jubilee not only as a way to fulfill the demands of Moscow’s nationalities policy but as a vehicle for their own nation-building aspirations. In particular, I examine the ways in which Azerbaijan relied on the theme of cultural synthesis to navigate the tensions inherent to the Soviet national project as reflected in the Soviet national poet jubilee project.

JUBILEE GENEALOGY AND PRECEDENT

The 1937 Pushkin Jubilee has been interpreted as a manifestation of the reemergence of Russian cultural dominance in Soviet nationalities policy and a watershed in establishing the

\textsuperscript{618} RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 268, l. 34; f. 631, op. 15, d. 345, l. 22.
\textsuperscript{619} R. Uralov, “Vvedenie v jubileivedenie,” \textit{Voprosy literatury} No. 7 (July) 1960: 77-80.
\textsuperscript{620} Ganja (Gəncə) was known for much of the Soviet period as Kirovabad.
primacy of Russian national culture for the entire family of Soviet nations. The jubilee, which was observed throughout the Soviet Union, celebrated Pushkin “as a great Russian, not a great revolutionary.” Rhetoric and policies from 1935 on – for example, a shift from Latin- to Cyrillic-based alphabets for national minority languages; a Politburo mandate to expand the study of Russian in native schools; references to Russia as “older brother” and “first among equals” – point to growing Russocentrism. Yet at the same time there was an increase in the visibility of national minority cultures and in efforts to familiarize the Soviet population with the national cultures of their fellow citizens as a means of fostering closer ties and a unified Soviet identity. The requirement that each nationality not only identify its own national Great Traditions but share them across ethnic lines served to keep Soviet Russocentrism in check. The 1937 Pushkin Jubilee exerted a Russifying influence, but in a different way than typically assumed.

The Pushkin commemoration established a script followed by subsequent jubilees in which national poets were elevated to the all-Union level where they stood alongside Pushkin, as well as cultural representatives of non-Soviet nations, as part of an international canon. The literary jubilee mania of the late 1930s and ’40s had some particular features that gave the script a Soviet stamp, such as the massive translation projects undertaken to make a given national writer’s work available to all Soviet citizens. Another was the rehabilitation of the national cultural past for use in the Soviet present. Pushkin, for example, was Sovietized down to the

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621 Martin, The Affirmative Action Empire, 456; David Brandenberger, National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2002). For the 1937 celebration of Pushkin, “the single greatest emblem of the new Soviet-Russian high culture, the Radio Committee provided an extensive cycle of programmes in all the languages of the USSR and for all social and age groups.” (Stephen Lovell, Russia in the Microphone Age, 91)

622 Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment,” 443. Until the mid-1930s, the argument goes, official nativization (korenizatsiya) policies had aimed to denude Russian culture of its ethnic dimension as a means of thwarting great power chauvinism and to identify Russian language and culture with revolution. The celebration of Pushkin as a Russian therefore represented an abandonment of that strategy.

623 Serhy Yekelchyk has made a similar point. Serhy Yekelchyk, Stalin’s Empire of Memory: Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet Historical Imagination (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
assertion that he would have favored the collective farm system. His work was made “consonant with the spirit of vitality, energy, and optimism required of the new Soviet hero” and with “the new slogan of realism.” Ethnic republics followed suit, recasting their literary masters as Soviet heroes and transposing their centuries-old work as relevant to contemporary Soviet life. In addition, Stalin was typically worked into the jubilee, if not as part of its narrative then at least as a metonym in its mise-en-scène: “in the vestibule of [Pushkin’s] restored Moika 12 apartment in Leningrad, for example, busts of Stalin and Pushkin were placed alongside one another.” Yet many elements of the Soviet national jubilee – even those, such as imposing statuary, which seem so comfortable in the Soviet setting that they must be its offspring – are, in fact, derived from earlier habit.

The practice of marking a poet’s jubilee is traceable at least to 1769, when the leading Shakespearean actor of the day, David Garrick, orchestrated a celebration in the bard’s home of Stratford. When the financially strapped town approached Garrick to donate a bust of Shakespeare for display outside its new town hall, the theater impresario not only obliged, but organized a grand multi-day celebration. The centerpiece of the extravaganza (much of which was rained out) was the unveiling of the Shakespeare statue commissioned by Garrick. At the ceremony, which had to be moved indoors, Garrick recited his Ode to Shakespeare, written especially for the occasion, to the accompaniment of a 100-person choir. Press coverage and other jubilee-related publicity announced and fostered the interest in the poet’s biography and milieu, the connexions of his writing with medieval times, the emphasis on subjective, emotional reaction … and

624 Katerina Clark, Moscow, the Fourth Rome, 309.
626 Ibid., 195-6.
627 The date was thus determined on the basis of Stratford’s construction plans, as 1769 was not a round anniversary for Shakespeare (1564-1616).
most specifically, the concept of Shakespeare as almost literally a creator of living characters.629

While the 1769 jubilee is associated with the rise of bardolatry and the establishment of Shakespeare as England’s “national poet with universal relevance,” it drew severe criticism from a large, even majority, segment of the public, who considered the event blasphemously idolatrous.630 None of Shakespeare’s plays were performed as part of the jubilee, though the celebration itself generated a new work for the stage: in response to the general view of the jubilee as a debacle (Garrick referred to it as his “folly”), its organizer wrote a play satirizing the event.631 Nevertheless, the 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee set a precedent for the public celebration of a national poet’s anniversary, establishing elements – theatrics, creation of tribute art, installation of statuary, press coverage, and publicity for locales connected with the poet – that were features of later events honoring national writers, including those organized in the Soviet Union.

In contrast to its reception in England, Garrick’s 1769 Jubilee was regarded in France and Germany as “a spontaneous folk movement … endorsed by the entire English nation.” In German-ruled Strasbourg, the young Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who were ardent admirers of Shakespeare, were inspired to organize their own celebrations of the bard, held in Frankfurt and Strasbourg on 14 October 1771.632 These celebrations, at which speakers referred to “Our Shakespeare,” are considered a foundational moment in Germany’s

630 John Cunningham, “‘Solemn and appropriate Shakespearean music’: The Stratford Tercentenary of 1864” in Jansohn and Mehl (eds.), Shakespeare Jubilees, 57-78, esp. 57.
632 October 14 is the Protestant name day for ‘William.’ Winburn England, “Garrick’s Stratford Jubilee,” 91, 95.
relationship with Shakespeare, in which he was adopted as a German national figure.⁶³³ In the terms of the Soviet ideal of cultural unity discussed in Chapter 1, Germany made Shakespeare its own (*osvoil*). At the same time, widespread admiration for Shakespeare outside of England demonstrates how a national poet can be rendered universal through reception and consumption by an extra-national audience.

In 1864, the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth was marked in England and a number of other European countries, where government commissions were appointed to organize commemorative events.⁶³⁴ Imperial Russia had its own view of such proceedings. Tsar Alexander II had refused permission to use Petersburg’s Bolshoi Theater for a public celebration of Shakespeare’s jubilee, considering it inappropriate to celebrate the “birth of a foreigner, even if a great poet, with the direct participation and as if by order of the government.”⁶³⁵ Instead, Alexander’s Russia soon became something of a pioneer in the mass public commemoration of its own national literary figures. While erecting civic monuments and marking important anniversary dates are standard tools of nation-building frequently employed by governments in the age of nationalism, the large European states gravitated more toward symbolic or allegorical representations of the nation, like Marianne, and commemorations of military or political events,

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⁶³⁴ Jansohn and Mehl (eds.), *Shakespeare Jubilees*; Calvo and Kahn (eds.), *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*. Notably, in connection with this jubilee, Shakespeare’s Stratford house was opened as a museum, initiating the practice of the literary house-museum that became extremely popular in the Soviet Union. On Shakespeare’s house-museum, see M.C. Régnier, “Shakespeare’s Jubilee in France in 1864: a crown for two great writers, William Shakespeare and Victor Hugo,” in Jansohn and Mehl (eds.), *Shakespeare Jubilees*, 111-27, esp. 113-4. The literary museum was also pioneered in connection with Shakespeare, when, in 1789, a London publisher opened the Shakespeare Gallery, a three-room display of paintings by British artists depicting scenes from Shakespeare’s plays. It is considered the “first museum dedicated to Shakespeare,” and likely the first museum devoted to a literary figure. [Jennifer Schuessler, “A 1796 Shakespeare Exhibition Has Become Virtual Reality,” *The New York Times* (Washington edition), 17 December 2015, C3]

like the Battle of Leipzig. In contrast, Russia, while not neglecting its military and political notables, also focused national identity on cultural figures, especially writers. Pushkin was the first literary figure to be honored with a national monument in Russia when a statue was installed in Moscow in 1880, serving as the centerpiece of the Pushkin Jubilee held that year. Speaking at the monument’s dedication ceremony, Dostoevsky identified Russia’s “striving for universality and for the brotherhood of all mankind” as the source of the strength of its national character. “We Russians,” he said,

longed for the reunion, for the unity of all mankind! … we took unto ourselves the geniuses of foreign nations. We accepted them all, making no distinctions. We instinctively reconciled differences and contradictions … Perhaps to become a true Russian, to become fully Russian, means simply … to become brother to all men, to become a universal man.

Russia’s national destiny, then, was universalism. As discussed in Chapter 1, Dostoevsky pointed to Pushkin’s connections with other cultures and his capacity to transmute these “foreign” influences as a unique talent of the poet that reflected Russia’s national character. By declaring Pushkin universally relevant and locating the poet’s quintessential Russianness in this universal relevance, Dostoevsky presented Pushkin as national and international at the same time. These two aspects of the poet were mutually affirming and therefore inextricably linked; Pushkin could not be reduced to one or the other. Unlike Shakespeare, however, whose greatness and universalism were already validated by broad admiration from outside his national community, the discovery of Pushkin’s genius by a wide circle of the world’s nations was yet to come. Pushkin and Russia were the universal future.

637 As a jubilee celebrated in a non-jubilee year and organized around the unveiling of a monument, Russia's Pushkin Jubilee in 1880 recalls Garrick's Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769.
Though unveiling “a monument to a private person in 1880 was actually quite a daring thing to do in a nation that previously so honored only autocrats and generals,” within a few decades the practice expanded with the opening of a monument to Gogol in Moscow in 1909, the writer’s centenary, and proliferated from there. At the same time, Russia’s quest for foreign validation of its cultural achievements expanded as well. Russian newspapers covering the Gogol Jubilee ran headlines such as “Europe Congratulates Russia,” also invoking a martial rhetoric of Russian literature’s “military expansion’ into the West” and its “peaceful occupation” of Europe. While the language was sometimes more inclusive – as a reference to Gogol spreading his power beyond the limits of the Slavic world to all of humanity – the focus remained on reception in Europe. Russian newspapers reported on any mention of Gogol in the foreign press, and “most of the jubilee assemblies highlighted not Gogol but precisely the response of the West.” As mentioned in the Introduction, one observer pronounced that after the jubilee “Russian literature [was now] an equal member in the family of West European literatures.”

The ritualized collective celebration of people and events considered important to the national narrative serves as an act of unification and inculcation. Associated activities, such as the placement of monuments and renaming of streets, give permanence to otherwise fleeting occasions by inscribing them onto the landscape and topography of daily life. Material culture – especially the dissemination of iconic images reproduced in special editions of books, commemorative postage stamps, coins, medals, lapel pins, posters, etc. – appeals to the visual

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639 Stephanie Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 9-10; Moeller-Sally, *Gogol’s Afterlife*, 121.
and the tactile while satisfying an acquisitive impulse. While these sorts of production were common to various European, Russian imperial, and Soviet iterations of the national literary jubilee, Russia’s jubilee celebrations developed particular jubilee formulations that carried over from the imperial era and lodged in the Soviet script. The Pushkin Jubilee of 1937 preserved the poet’s image as embodiment of the Russian national character that was cemented by Dostoevsky’s worshipful speech in 1880. It likewise reprised, with some updating, the poet’s combination of the national specific and international universal, presenting “Pushkin and the October Revolution as the Russian people’s ‘gifts’ to the world.” The themes of brotherhood and reconciliation became central to the institution of the Soviet national poet jubilee, intertwining the national and international. The linkage of national and international, likewise, underlay the attention to reception of national culture by an extra-national, and international, audience, a Russian legacy that was a hallmark of Soviet jubilee culture. Such continuities represent another instance of the red triangulation – Soviet cultural practice derived from Western Europe mediated through Russia’s own nation-building experience – that we have already seen as a feature of Soviet nationalities policy from its conception.

While the Pushkin Jubilee established the contours of the script followed by a string of minority republics celebrating their own national poets, it was the 750th jubilee of Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli in late 1937 that pioneered the adaptation of Russian Soviet jubilee choreography for ethnic minority use. Georgia’s Rustaveli efforts served as a springboard and a guide for Azerbaijan’s own jubilee planning in a range of ways, from budgetary and personnel

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641 On the role of public rituals in nation building, see Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 263-307, esp. 271. On examples of these activities in connection with Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee: ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iṣ 109, sah. 34; f. 411, siy. 8, iṣ 14, sah. 96; ARDŞPIHA f. 1, siy. 48, iṣ 274, sah. 2; f. 1, siy. 74, iṣ 511, sah. 99; RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, ll. 11, 30. On collective celebration in the Soviet Union, see Malte Rolf, Soviet Mass Festivals.

642 Sandler, “The 1937 Pushkin Jubilee as Epic Trauma,” 196.
issues to the number of monuments erected in honor of the Georgian poet. At a time when demonstrations of minority nationalism in the Soviet Union could carry life-threatening risk, Georgia benefitted from its association with Stalin, and its culture achieved a special status: “Every Russian started to love Georgia earlier than he knew her … It was remembered first as a theme of poetry and only after that as a country …” The connection between Georgia’s two famous sons was made plain during the Rustaveli Jubilee when writers from all over the Soviet Union, who had gathered in Tbilisi in December 1937 for a Writers’ Union plenum in honor of Georgia’s national poet, decamped en masse from the Georgian capital to make a pilgrimage to Stalin’s hometown of Gori.

In turn, Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee planning benefitted from its Georgian proximities. On their way home, some of those who attended the Tbilisi plenum stopped in Baku, where they were introduced to Azerbaijani hospitality and culture. Since Rustaveli had been a young contemporary of Nizami, Azerbaijani narrative framers did not miss the opportunity to link the two men (pointing out that Nizami, as the older of the pair, had influenced the Georgian poet), using a broader Caucasian identity and an oblique approach to deflect what could be interpreted

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643 References to the Rustaveli Jubilee as the first of an ethnic national poet: RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 293, l. 80. On the Pushkin Jubilee as a conscious model for other jubilee planners: ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 147, səh. 24-41, esp. 15, 27; ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 109, səh. 29-29 tar. tar. On the Rustaveli Jubilee as a guide for Azerbaijan: ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 401, passim; ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 147, səh.12, 29; f. 411, siy. 8. iş 14, səh. 67; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 1060, səh. 34.


as nationalist Azerbaijani sentiment coalescing around Nizami. Azerbaijani’s own Rustaveli Jubilee preparation provided relevant research and useful organizational experience on which to build for the Nizami event, bringing into focus the objectives, methods, and parameters of ethnic national poet jubilee practice. Noting that Georgian planners were approaching Rustaveli “not in a narrow sense but as a whole epoch,” the Azerbaijanis followed suit, using the Nizami Jubilee to shine a spotlight not only on the poet and his era but on all of Azerbaijani history and culture. In 1940, Azerbaijani poet and playwright Samad Vurgun (Səməd Vurğun) described the new Nizami Museum being organized in Baku as reflecting “the history of the Azerbaijani people before Nizami, in the time of Nizami, and after Nizami approximately to the present.”

Discussions at meetings of Azerbaijan’s Rustaveli Jubilee committee in 1937 illustrate how the Soviet emphasis on mutual ties and influences among nations, a theme that preceded the Friendship of Peoples ethos of which it became a prominent feature, was valuable for a nation’s self-study and identity consolidation: “The most important point is to consider the influence of Rustaveli’s work on the Azerbaijani nation and its poetry and vice versa, [and] what in Rustaveli’s work reflects the Azerbaijani nation.” This exercise in contemplating one’s own nation in relation to others sharpened an awareness of national self-presentation that is distinct from (though related to) national consciousness. It was a distinctive dimension of Soviet nationhood that was learned from the Russian example, and Soviet events like dekady of national art and national poet jubilees made this vantage point indispensable in the Soviet cultural context. The guiding principle for Azerbaijan’s Rustaveli Jubilee committee was

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647 For example, Literaturnyi Azerbaidzhan No. 8-9, 1939, passim.
648 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 147, ss. 10, 14, 16.
649 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 48, iş 274, ss. 6. The Georgians’ broad approach included archeological digs; research into the daily life, social structure, and economy of the poet’s time; and restoration of contemporary landmarks.
650 RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 472, ll. 3-5.
651 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 147, ss. 10.
652 It is a dynamic that outlived the Soviet era and persists today in a number of post-Soviet states.
“internationalism”: “We have to … show the enemies of the people that for us nationalities don’t exist, that we are international.” To demonstrate this internationalism at the Baku Soviet’s plenum honoring Rustaveli on 30 December 1937, there was a proposal to have actors from the city’s Jewish theater read “a few excerpts [from] Shota Rustaveli in Jewish [sic].” At the same time, a big portrait of Nizami was prominently displayed at the plenum.653

Another realization brought by Azerbaijan’s Rustaveli Jubilee planning experience was the amount of work that lay ahead for the Nizami Jubilee. In contrast to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia had initiated planning for their respective jubilees years in advance, and when it came to the establishment and dissemination of national historical and cultural narratives, Azerbaijan already lagged.654 At a 1937 meeting of Azerbaijan’s Rustaveli Jubilee committee, one artist admitted to knowing “less about eighteenth-century Azerbaijan than about thirteenth-century Georgia.” The head of Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs at the time, Davud Rasulzadeh (Davud Rəsulzadə), confessed that he had not known that Nizami authored a version of the Leili and Mejnun legend. “What does our preparation for the [Rustaveli] exhibition tell us? It tells us that we know little about the history of Azerbaijan,” the committee chair concluded.655

The Challenges of Nizami

While the genesis of Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee initiative has yet to be fully documented, conjecturers have identified some factors that likely led to the decision. The rivalry over cultural prestige among the republics of the South Caucasus behooved Azerbaijan to find an equivalent to Georgia’s Rustaveli, whose jubilee had reportedly been in the works since at least

653 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 147, səh. 22, 31, 48.
654 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 1059, səh. 19. Following Georgia’s 750th jubilee for Rustaveli in late 1937, Armenia had celebrated the 1000th jubilee of its national epic, David Sasuni, in 1939.
655 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 147, səh. 49, 39, 53.
1934. The same year, a modernizing, nationalizing Iran had marked the millennial of Persian poet Firdousi, renaming streets in his honor, publishing new editions of his work, and building a new mausoleum at his gravesite. The state organized mass events, including a gala celebration in Tehran with an international guest list. The Firdousi Jubilee was observed in the Soviet Union as well, with events in Moscow and Leningrad, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Iran’s example of an Eastern nation celebrating a national poet in Western fashion with an international profile may have inspired Azerbaijan. The official Soviet reaction to the 1934 Firdousi Jubilee may have provided encouragement as well. The Soviet central press presented the event as an opportunity for Russians and other nationalities of the European part of the USSR to learn about the culture of their fellow Soviet citizens to the East. Consistent with the language of cultural unity discussed in Chapter 1, press coverage of Firdousi-related events appeared under headlines such as “We are learning about the cultural heritage” (or, We are making the cultural heritage our own).

Whatever its origins, the decision to promote Nizami as Azerbaijan’s national poet was a bold and ambitious one that brought a raft of opportunities and challenges. One of these, as discussed in Chapter 4, was the language of Nizami’s oeuvre, which was not Turkic but Persian.

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657 On the Firdousi Jubilee in Iran, see Afshin Marashi, Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State, 1870-1940, 124-31; Adeeb Khalid, Making Uzbekistan, 310-1. The new mausoleum, a neo-classical structure designed jointly by Europeans and an Iranian architect, was pictured on the country’s currency. (Marashi, Nationalizing Iran, 127, 131)
658 A Soviet delegation that included Azerbaijani representatives attended the Tehran celebration, presenting a gift of high-quality photographs of Firdousi manuscripts in the collection of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Within the Soviet Union, academic and cultural institutions organized exhibitions, lectures, evenings, and publications devoted to the Persian poet. (Literaturnaia gazeta, 22 and 30 May, 1934; I. Iras’, Mirza Gulam, “Jubilei Firdousi v Persii,” Literaturnaia gazeta, 9 July 1934, 4; Inqilab ve Mədənijət No. 9-10, 1934, 51)
659 A.O. Tamazishvili has mentioned Iran’s 1934 Firdousi millennial in connection with Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee initiative. (Tamazishvili, “Iz istorii izuchenia v SSSR tvorchestva Nizami Giandzhevi,” 174)
For this reason, the Western (including Russian) academy, as well as experts in Iran, had long regarded Nizami as a Persian poet. Within Azerbaijan, Nizami had been widely acknowledged as a major influence on the local literary tradition, but nation-building intellectuals in the late imperial and early Soviet periods had generally stopped short of explicitly claiming him as a national poet. The issue had been part of public discussion at least since August 1934, when Azerbaijani delegate Mamed Alakbarli (Məmmədkasım Ələkbərli), in a speech to the First Congress of Soviet Writers, referred to Nizami as “a Turkic [tiurok] from Ganja,” correcting the “many European and Russian specialists” who erroneously “consider him Persian.”

The Nizami issue arose in Azerbaijan in 1936-8 in connection with the *Anthology of Azerbaijani Poetry* project, which became something of a battleground during purges of the republic’s intellectuals in 1937. In the end, Nizami was included in the anthology, his prior exclusion was dismissed as the work of saboteurs, and a working relationship was forged between Azerbaijani Communist Party chief Mir Jafar Bagirov and poet Samad Vurgun. (See Chapter 4) Over the next years, both men were central to efforts surrounding the Nizami Jubilee, which was originally planned for 1941 and celebrated in 1947.

If Nizami’s presence in the anthology had put an end to the debate about the poet within Azerbaijan, it hardly settled the matter outside the republic. From the start of planning, the architects of the Nizami Jubilee were aware of the dimensions of the task they faced. At an initial meeting to discuss the jubilee in Baku on 25 July 1938, writer, poet, and literary critic Mikayil Rafili (Mikayıl Rəfili) summarized,

> We have a lot of work ahead of us to convince our Soviet Orientologists … at a fundamental level we are changing … the bourgeois history of Azerbaijani literature and

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661 Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s”ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934: stenograficheskii otchet, 114.
even of world literature, because many thought and think, in the mistaken tradition of Iranian Orientologists, that [Nizami] is an Iranian poet.662

In February 1939, Samad Vurgun told the Nizami Jubilee Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow:

We have to uproot [these remnants of the past – i.e., persistent perceptions of Nizami as Persian poet]. We must create a scientific, objective understanding about Nizami and his work among our Soviet people.663

To accomplish this, Baku had to control the establishment and dissemination of the Nizami narrative.

From the ideological perspective of the center, a chief aim of national writer jubilees was the sharing of national “cultural riches,” such as the works of Nizami, across national lines, not merely to make them more widely known, but so that they “become the property of all peoples of our motherland.”664 Since such sharing hinged on translation, a key “chokepoint” for control of Nizami was the Russian prose interlinearss (podstrochniki) from which translations into other Soviet languages, as well as into Russian verse, were made. Baku’s main rival for expertise in all matters Nizami was the Soviet Academy of Sciences’ Orientology Institute in Leningrad, which still in 1938 was dominated by Russian scholars chiefly of a pre-revolutionary vintage, just as it had been in the days of Gorky’s World Literature publishing project.665 The issue of controlling

662 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 48, iş 274, sah. 3-4. On Rafili, see Teyyub Qurban, Həqiqət olduğu kimi (Baku: Adiloğlu, 2011).
663 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, l. 17.
664 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 22, iş 356, sah. 5-10; E.E. Bertel’s, “Genial’nyi poet Azerbaidzhana,” Pravda, 3 February 1939, 4. Evgenii Eduardovich Bertel’s (1890-1957), who headed the Soviet Academy of Sciences’ Orientology Institute from its founding in 1930 until his death, was considered the Soviet Union’s premier Iranologist of his day. See Muriel Atkin, “Soviet and Russian Scholarship on Iran,” Iranian Studies Vol. 20, No. 2/4 (1987): 223-71, esp. 231. His article about Nizami, which he had reportedly written in Baku while there “on assignment of the Presidium of the AN SSSR [Soviet Academy of Sciences] to lead the translations of the works of Nizami Giandzhevi into Russian and Azerbaijani,” was the first to appear in the central press in connection with the jubilee. Bagirov had sent the article’s text first to Zhdanov on 10 January 1939 and three days later to Pravda. (ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 22, iş 312, sah. 334)
665 On Gorky’s World Literature publishing house, see Chapter 1. On Soviet reliance on interlinearss, see Chapter 4.
translation was raised at the Nizami Jubilee meeting in Baku in July 1938 by the (unidentified) chair:

I would suggest basing translation of Nizami’s works into Russian in Baku. It is precisely through Russian that we will be able to introduce what we think about Nizami and what we are doing. We must do this in Baku. Because if we entrust it to the Institute of Orientology in Leningrad – they look at this matter a little differently.666

A number of factors contributed to the particular complexity, and sensitivity, of the Nizami translation issue. Lacking manuscripts of Nizami’s work contemporary with the poet, scholars have relied on later manuscripts corrupted by errors and interpolations by scribes and on compilations of poetry that do not indicate sources.667 As a result, textual authenticity has been a topic of debate in Nizami scholarship. The Soviet Institute of Orientology took on the task of establishing an authenticated original based on textological research, and in September 1938 warned the Azerbaijani branch of the Academy of Sciences that translations of Nizami for publication “must adhere to these critically compiled text-originals.”668 Stylistically, “Persian poetry is noted for its abundant use of rhetorical figures,” its “elaborate (often termed ‘artificial’ or ‘decorative’) imagery,” and “ambiguity of … poetical metaphor.” Nizami is especially known for the complexity of his style and language, which are characterized by word play, “linguistic invention,” exploitation of ambiguity and polyvalence, and recasting of stock metaphors and language to create new imagery and layers of meaning. These features make his poetry resistant to translation, especially for Western readers, to whom the “allusions, commonplaces, and types found in Persian poetry [are] often unfamiliar.”669 Furthermore, the volume of Nizami’s oeuvre

666 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 48, iş 274, səh. 266.
668 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 414, səh. 105.
necessitated editing and selection of passages for highlighting and publication. In short, the preparation of Nizami’s texts for presentation to Soviet readers, including Azerbaijanis, required extensive decision-making and therefore presented significant opportunities, perhaps more than the usual translation process, to shape meaning.

At a February 1939 meeting of the Writers’ Union’s Nizami Jubilee Committee in Moscow, Samad Vurgun, who co-chaired the committee with Russian poet Vladimir Lugovskoi, gave his view of the particular circumstances surrounding the Nizami translation situation:

The main problem is that the scholars [at the Orientology Institute] will set about this gravedigging and will interpret the same word in different ways. We don’t need that … There is some difficulty in that Azerbaijan, which is the center of all this work, itself must translate these texts and therefore can’t monitor this translation in the way that, for example, the Georgians did the translation of Shota Rustaveli … The control question is very complicated …. With regard to discrepancies in political spots, there is disagreement between the professors and people who are more patriotically disposed toward Azerbaijan.

For the Rustaveli Jubilee, Tbilisi had reviewed poetic translations into Russian and other languages. Ukraine’s Taras Shevchenko Jubilee Committee sent representatives to the brother republics to consult on translation questions. In the case of Nizami, however, it was not Azerbaijan but the Institute of Orientology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences that was considered the seat of Nizami scholarship. Azerbaijan set out to vie for control.

The Azerbaijanis aimed explicitly to build a “scientific base” on which their interpretations of Nizami could rely and to assert themselves as experts through academic research. All of Azerbaijan’s creative and intellectual resources were mobilized to gather and produce new knowledge about the nation. The Nizami Institute of Language and Literature of the Azerbaijani branch of the Academy of Sciences was formed with this in mind, and with the

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670 Bertels estimated the Khamsa, the set of Nizami’s five long poems, as comprising approximately 120,000 lines. (ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, is 109, sah. 4 tars taraf)
671 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, l. 21.
caveat from republican authorities that its research must be solid. Starting in 1938, archaeological digs were conducted at sites throughout the republic considered to be important centers in Nizami’s time. A dig near Ganja that preceded the construction of the new Nizami mausoleum yielded finds, including human remains said to be the poet’s, that were taken as incontrovertible scientific verification of Nizami’s burial place. Ancient architectural monuments were catalogued, studied, photographed, and restored. The Nizami Jubilee became an excuse to invest in all of Azerbaijan’s historical landmarks, of the Nizami era and beyond, often with money from the Nizami Jubilee budget. The emphasis on immovable property conforms to Soviet notions of national identity based in territory, a logic that supported the argument for Nizami as Azerbaijani.

Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee Committee took the unusual step of sending the Turkic republics and Georgia the Azerbaijani interlinears ("originals in Azerbaijani") of Nizami’s work along with the Russian ones. In addition, the committee made recommendations about which works and excerpts to translate into each Soviet language, taking into account the respective audience as well as which passages best served Azerbaijani political goals: “For us it is very important for the jubilee to do translations first and foremost of those works of Nizami where he underlines his connection with Azerbaijan,” said one committee member.

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672 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iš 62, sah. 12.
673 ARDСПИHA f. 1, siy. 23, iš 698, sah. 83.
674 ARDСПИHA f. 23, siy. 698, iš 37, sah. 64-9.
675 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iš 14, sah. 37.
676 Victor A. Shnirelman, Who Gets the Past?, esp. 7, 10-11.
677 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, ll. 1-2, 25-6. In the transcript of the conversation about this, Tajikistan is mentioned along with “nations of Turkic nationality,” although this could be a stenographic error. It was also suggested that the interlinear translators include metrical data about Nizami’s originals. Perhaps the Azerbaijani felt that they could influence translations into other languages by providing Azerbaijani interlinears along with the Russian ones. Or, maybe these steps were an effort to preserve as much of the poetic form of Nizami’s work as possible, especially for Soviet nations whose literature was part of the Eastern tradition. From this point of view, Russian linguistic and cultural mediation was certainly an unnecessary and counterproductive detour.
678 There were, however, differences of opinion over which works these were. For instance, Bertels had identified one poem (Iskandernama, which Bertels himself was translating) as “most vividly outlining Nizami’s connection
Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan had assigned Vurgun and Mirza Ibrahimov (along with a team of Azerbaijani literary experts) the task of combing the works of Nizami for textual evidence to buttress an ideologically acceptable narrative about the poet’s life and work as well as to support Nizami’s Turkic nationality and identity and the duress under which he wrote in Persian. In an (undated) letter addressed to Bagirov, Vurgun and Ibrahimov catalogued useful passages:

Per your instructions, having gathered specialists in the history of Azerbaijani literature, in particular Nizami, and scientific workers of AzFAN [Azerbaijani Branch of the Academy of Sciences] … we checked the materials at our disposal … [list of four manuscripts and their dates] and established that in fact in all editions and manuscripts there is an introductory chapter to the poem *Leili and Mejnun*, where Nizami expresses his sharp dissatisfaction and protest against the demand of Shirvanshah Akhsitan to write the poem not in his native language but in the Persian language, which is foreign to him …. In Nizami’s *Khamsa* the poet makes a number of statements in which he expresses his deep dissatisfaction with the forcible imposition of the Persian language on the Azerbaijani people and against the contemptuous, insulting attitude of the feudal elite toward the language of Nizami’s native people.679

This argument is the basis of Stalin’s reported acknowledgement of Nizami as an Azerbaijani poet at a Kremlin meeting with writers, an anecdote referenced in a speech given by a Ukrainian poet in Kiev on 2 April 1939 and reproduced in *Pravda* the following day. This incident, which flatters Stalin’s erudition, engendered the Nizami “restoration narrative” discussed in Chapter 4. If for their Rustaveli celebration the Georgians had exploited a connection with Stalin, then the Azerbaijanis outdid them by weaving Stalin himself into the fabric of the story of their national poet’s trials as bringer of justice. Azerbaijan’s political leaders had for many years stressed Stalin’s special relationship with their republic based on his years living in Baku, even referring to him as a “son of the Azerbaijani nation” and an admirer of

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679 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 1060, səh. 54-8; ARDƏİ A f. 645, siy. 2, iş 303, səh. 1-6.
the Azerbaijani culture and language. By 1940, the Nizami restoration narrative, with Stalin as hero, had been established within Azerbaijan and was ready for Union-wide propagation through the Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow, with Samad Vurgun as the ideal spokesman. Not only did the young former Komsomol member and Order of Lenin recipient have political and artistic chops, he also had literary jubilee credentials. Vurgun had won a Pushkin medal for his Azerbaijani translation of *Eugene Onegin* done for the Pushkin Jubilee, and he was responsible for translations of Rustaveli’s *Knight in the Panther Skin* as well as works of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko for the respective jubilees in 1937 and 1939. By 1940 Vurgun was in the all-Union cultural spotlight again as a nominee for the Stalin Prize for his 1938 historical play about eighteenth-century Karabakh poet Vagif (Vaqif).

Bagirov complained repeatedly to Moscow about the persisting belief among editors, academics, and writers that Nizami was a Persian poet. He singled out Persian-Tajik poet Abu’l Qasim Lahuti as a particular culprit. It is not surprising that Bagirov found Lahuti’s pronouncements especially threatening, as Lahuti, a native speaker of Persian who grew up in Iran before coming to the Soviet Union in 1922, was in a position to have an unmediated relationship with Nizami’s text and had an interest in arguing for the poet’s importance for Tajik literary culture on the basis of shared language. There was, in fact, resentment in Tajikistan over what was seen there as Azerbaijan’s appropriation of Nizami. In letters to the Kremlin, Bagirov reiterated the evidence for Nizami’s Azerbaijani ethnicity, casting dissident views in

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680 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 697, səh. 15; f. 1, siy. 23, iş 148, səh. 17 tərs taraf-18. Stalin had even been credited with speaking Azerbaijani himself, though there is no evidence that this was true. He lived in Baku intermittently between 1907 and 1910.
682 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 148, səh. 7-8. In 1941, Vurgun won the Stalin Prize for *Vaqif*. In his 1939 play *Xanlar*, about the life of Azerbaijani Bolshevik Khanlar Sarafaliyev (Xanlar Sarafəliyev), Vurgun included Stalin as a character. (RGALI f. 962, op. 3, d. 537, l. 2)
684 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, l. 22; f. 631, op. 6, d. 293, l. 80.
political and ideological terms. Not only was Nizami’s use of Persian an example of cultural imperialism and national oppression, but the ascription of Nizami to Iran (which was also reportedly preparing a celebration for Nizami’s 800th jubilee) was the work of bourgeois Western academics and a ploy of “scholars” from Turkey and Iran who were really counterintelligence agents. The works of “obscurantists-Pan-Islamists, Pan-Turkists and other carriers of Asian reaction” that once “clogged the educational institutions and libraries of Azerbaijan” had been purged, but the utmost watchfulness was still necessary. At a February 1939 meeting, the Writers’ Union jubilee committee in Moscow discussed the academy’s resistance to Azerbaijani claims on Nizami. Word had circulated about Stalin’s position on the matter, but, Vurgun said, a clear instruction from the Central Committee of the Party was needed. This signal appeared in Pravda on April 3 in the form of Bazhan’s speech. (See Chapter 4)

Despite the Kremlin’s – and explicitly Stalin’s – endorsement, discussions at jubilee committee meetings in Moscow in 1940 and 1941 show that jubilee planners in Azerbaijan continued to struggle for cooperation from cultural establishments in the center. Editors dragged their feet. Vurgun reported that the journal Novyi mir “simply refuses to print any [of Nizami’s] poetry, saying they will publish one article.” Sovetskii pisatel’ declined to publish a translation of one Nizami poem (The Treasurehouse of Secrets) “because some reviewer said it was a religious, scholastic poem and has nothing in common with contemporary life.” Journals such as Krasnaia nov’ and Vostok had identified Nizami as Persian. Although a 1940 report on the progress of jubilee preparation stated that the “political tension surrounding the Nizami jubilee”

685 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 88, iş 459, səh. 69-70; f. 1, siy. 88, iş 104, səh. 101.
686 RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, l. 18.
had been resolved, comments by Azerbaijani leaders through 1947, when the Nizami Jubilee was
finally held, suggest otherwise.\(^{688}\) At a jubilee preparation meeting in April of that year, the chair
of Azerbaijan’s Soviet of Ministers (formerly Council of People’s Commissars) referred to a
recent statement by Party secretary Bagirov that the jubilee celebration was not just about
marking Nizami’s 800\(^{th}\) anniversary but “a political decision, that puts an end to all judgments
about whether Nizami is an Azerbaijani poet or not.”\(^{689}\) The Nizami Jubilee was an act of
Azerbaijan’s national self-assertion.

In December 1940, with the jubilee still planned for the following year, Vurgun told the
jubilee committee in Moscow that not a single issue of an Azerbaijani periodical comes out
without a mention of Nizami, and, starting in January 1941, the same should be true of the
central press, especially *The Literary Gazette*.\(^{690}\) Ubiquity was only part of Vurgun’s mission:

> We demand from Russian comrades that they get to know our history of literature, that they write
about it, etc. This is good. However, this doesn’t mean that we ourselves, local writers, literature
specialists, and historians don’t have to write about our own poets, whom we know better and
more than anyone else, for the Russian central press.\(^{691}\)

Vurgun issued this call for more work by Azerbaijanis on their own literary history not in Baku,
but to a mostly non-Azerbaijani group in Moscow. It should be the words of Azerbaijanis, he
was implying, rather than Russian scholars or writers, that delivered Nizami and Azerbaijan’s
cultural history to Moscow and the rest of the Soviet Union, and his comment was a request to
the Moscow community to help in this endeavor. Vurgun wanted the jubilee to amplify
Azerbaijani voices and showcase Azerbaijani talent and expertise as another part of the national
self-assertion that motivated the Nizami Jubilee initiative. The jubilee was not only an

\(^{688}\) ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, səh. 24-5. When the Moscow journal *Oktyabr’* was preparing in 1947 to print a
text about Nizami written by Marietta Shaginian, the Azerbaijanis requested to review the material prior to
publication. (ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 276, səh. 301)

\(^{689}\) ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 289, sah. 18.

\(^{690}\) RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 472, ll. 3-5,13-4. *The Literary Gazette (Literaturnaia gazeta)* was the newspaper of the
central Writers’ Union.

\(^{691}\) RGALI f. 631, op. 15 d. 472, ll. 36-7.
opportunity to assemble and codify a narrative of Azerbaijani history and culture as part of fostering national identity within the republic. It was a chance to engage in the self-presentation to, and validation by, an international audience that is also a factor in consolidating national identity. The institutions of Soviet cultural infrastructure – such as the press, publishing, academies of science, and, of course, celebration – were a boon to both aspects of the project.

The Opportunities of Nizami

Nizami presented challenges for Azerbaijani leaders at a time of political uncertainty both inside the Soviet Union and globally. Yet many of these same challenges – instability of manuscript texts, dearth of information about the poet’s life, the volume and language of his output, the complexity and esotericism of his style – also presented opportunities for entrepreneurs of Azerbaijani cultural nationalism that made Nizami’s 800th Jubilee an occasion not to be passed up, particularly in the context of Soviet cultural values. As evidence of a distinguished written literary tradition that predated those of many Western nations (including Russia), Nizami was a refutation of charges of cultural backwardness. At the same time, the ancientness and sophistication of the written text, the source of its prestige, was what gave Nizami framers interpretive space. Lest it seem, however, that Nizami’s potential for textual distortion and invention is what drew Azerbaijani nation-builders to the poet, we can identify the many native advantages of Nizami that made him worth fighting for.  

692 Many scholars in literary and translation studies (among them Kathryn Schild, Susanna Witt, Rebecca Gould, Maria Khotinsky, Evgeny Dobrenko, and Katharine Holt, all cited in this dissertation) have noted the opportunities linguistic translation provides for text-tampering. Yet such translation is hardly a necessary condition for such tinkering. For example, on rewritings of and other alterations to Shakespeare in English, see Michael Dobson, The making of a national poet: Shakespeare, adaptation and authorship (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1992), Introduction and Chapter 3.
Nizami was both refined and of the people: his was high art, yet many of his subjects were taken from folk legend familiar in the region. Nizami’s output was not only voluminous, but encyclopedic, engaging every aspect of life and field of knowledge from music to botany. As a result, there are few topics that cannot be connected to him in some way. A favorite reference in Azerbaijan that “more than 30 different instruments common in medieval Azerbaijan are mentioned” in Nizami’s works demonstrates not only his expansiveness but his richness as a historical source about the cultural life of his era. His works – which cover the generic gamut from love stories and adventure to history and legend – both instruct and entertain, innovate as well as pay tribute to tradition. Eminently Soviet-compatible themes of realism, social criticism and justice, the heroism of the common man, valorization of physical labor, and perseverance in overcoming obstacles are prominent in Nizami’s poetry. He put ordinary shepherds and stonecutters and multidimensional images of women at the center of his poetry, flouting the established poetic practice of praising shahs and rulers. All this lent Nizami to Soviet framing as a cultural revolutionary, who introduced “an entirely new idiom, unuttered by anyone before him, especially in the East. Not only in form, but also in content, the poems of Nizami lay a new path for poetic endeavor ... overturning all the literary traditions that existed before.”

One story – a tale of determination, ingenuity, and love starring a Slavic princess associated with the color red – is uncannily tailor-made for Soviet political use. Excerpted and published in editions for every conceivable audience, including a richly illustrated one for children, few Soviet texts about Nizami failed to mention the tale of the Slavic princess as

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693 Sam Hodgkin, personal conversation, 20 November 2016.
694 Kerim Kerimov, Orkestr azerbaizhanskikh narodnykh instrumentov (Baku: Krasnyi Vostok, 1959). Cited in Qasimov, Azərbaycan Televiziya və Radiosunun Səid Rüstəmov adına Əməkdar xalq çalğı alətləri orkestri, 44.
696 Ismail Idayatzade, introduction to the program for a 1947 production of the opera Khosrov and Shirin (Xosrov və Şirin) based on the poetry of Nizami, at the Azerbaijan State Opera and Ballet Theater named for Akhundov. (ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 382, səh. 14)
evidence of the long friendship between the Russian and Azerbaijani peoples. Vurgun, who hailed Nizami as a revolutionary and a democrat, called him one of the writer-giants who broke out of the narrow cages of literariness [and] entered onto the wide path of social development, [who] were carriers of the best, most progressive ideas of humanity …. who created not only a new literary style, but an entire cultural break in the spiritual work of their people, who opened a new avenue of progressive development of the nation.

While descriptions of Nizami as a visionary who “sang the praises of utopian socialism long before Thomas More” and dreamed of the Soviet Union 800 years before its creation might seem far-fetched, the humanistic, progressive portrait of Nizami is neither simplistic nor fabricated from whole cloth. Scholars unaffiliated with the Soviet and Azerbaijani causes have characterized the poet in similar ways as an enlightened, worldly man of science and letters and remarkable literary innovator.

Along with Nizami’s progressivism, the Azerbaijani narrative emphasized his “internationalism,” defined both in terms of the content of his work and his place in the canon of world literature. This was not merely for the benefit of the Russian reader or Soviet ideologue. Rather, it goes to the core of Azerbaijan’s self-image. The multilingual poet had deep knowledge of the ancient and Byzantine worlds; he had read the Greeks and engaged them in his work.

Cultural interconnections and recombinations are a feature of Nizami’s poetry, evident in its

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697 The story of the Slavic princess appears in Nizami’s poem Haft Paykar (known in Azerbaijani as Yeddi gözəl; in English as The Seven Beauties or The Seven Portraits; in Russian as Sem’ krasavits). It is the basis of a 1952 ballet of the same name by Azerbaijani composer Qara Qarayev.


699 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iš 266, səh. 6. Nizami’s final poem relates the life story of Alexander the Great, framed as a treatise on good government and search for utopia that ultimately led him to discover a utopian society living in what is today Siberia. (Bertel’s, Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, 44)

700 RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 472, l. 6. In the plan for the Nizami Museum, a section of the exhibit exploring the poet’s themes includes among them “friendship of peoples.” Some other themes named in the document are “struggle with religion,” “the position of women in Azerbaijan,” and “the people (working classes).” (ARDOİA f. 345, siy. 1, iš 101, səh. 8)

701 Bertel’s, Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, 10.
form as well as its content. Bertels, analyzing one Nizami poem, argues that the poet persuasively combines the fantastic with extreme realism, to extraordinary effect. In this skill, Bertels asserts, Nizami is not only the equal of European literary masters, but even their superior because he innovated such techniques centuries ahead of them. An Azerbaijani critic responsible for a 1939 book on Nizami published in Russian and English presents Nizami as a synthesis of the best traditions of the Christian Byzantine world and the East. The poet’s final work, a two-part treatment of the life of Alexander the Great, presents its hero not as a conqueror but as a liberator and wise ruler who sets himself the task of uniting East and West.

Nizami is thus presented as not only knowledgeable about different cultures and influences but as a synthesizer of them. This capacity was linked to Nizami’s home city, Ganja, and its unique multicultural milieu, which was, in turn, linked to Azerbaijan. Nizami’s genius for synthesis was thus reflective of an Azerbaijani national trait, and as the “progenitor of classical Azerbaijani poetry,” Nizami pioneered this ideal and laid it as the foundation of Azerbaijan’s literary tradition and cultural identity. As a consummate synthesizer and reconciler, Nizami was universal and also embodied Azerbaijani culture; he was simultaneously national and international, demonstrating the cultural synthesis that was a model for the socialist future. For the Nizami Jubilee, efforts were made to maintain both identities. At a meeting of the central Writers’ Union’s Nizami Jubilee Committee in Moscow, one Azerbaijani representative complained that Nizami was not being sufficiently discussed in connection with world literature.

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702 Nizami’s work is notable for combining the mystical and the mundane and for intertwining storytelling content and form. Talattof and Clinton (eds.), The Poetry of Nizami Ganjavi, 37.
703 Bertel’s, Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, 32. Bertels puts Nizami in the company of “the greatest masters of European literature” such as E.T.A. Hoffmann and Pushkin.
705 Bertel’s, Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh liudei, 39-40.
706 Izvestiia, 22 May 1940, 3.
cautioning that the poet should not be limited by a narrowly national frame.\textsuperscript{707} Samad Vurgun had referred to making the Nizami Jubilee a “universal affair” (\textit{vsenarodnoe delo}).\textsuperscript{708} At the same time, it was essential that Nizami be seen as embodying and expressing uniquely Azerbaijani values. An Azerbaijani critic reviewing a manuscript about Nizami by Russian novelist (of Armenian extraction) Marietta Shaginian for the central publishing house Goslitizdat in February 1941, faulted the author for presenting the work of Nizami “not as a national Azerbaijani phenomenon but as an Eastern, generally Muslim one.” The reviewer argued that “Nizami’s humanism and progressive ideas had their roots in Azerbaijan itself.”\textsuperscript{709}

Nizami’s internationalism was not only thematically evident in his outlook and output, but in the influence and reception of his work by others. Nizami was admired by such a European giant as Goethe, who refers to him, among other Eastern classical poets, in his \textit{East-Western Divan}, a work that is an example of cultural exchange and synthesis of Eastern and Western literary traditions.\textsuperscript{710} Material on Nizami in the Soviet press rarely omitted a reference to Goethe’s interest in and praise for the Caucasian poet as evidence of Nizami’s greatness, importance, and universalism. As Goethe’s attention attested, Nizami was indisputably a part of the treasurehouse of world culture, even if he was not widely known in the West. Such neglect

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{707} RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 472, l. 20. The speaker was Mikayil Rafili (Mikael' Rafili).
\textsuperscript{708} RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, ll. 28-9. Here Vurgun was referring to including representatives of all the Soviet creative unions in the All-Union Jubilee Committee, so “universal” in this context had a multidisciplinary dimension. The word “vсенародный” is also used to mean inclusive of all nations, as discussed in Chapter 2, which documents this use of the word in the context of music in both the pre-revolutionary and Soviet periods.
\textsuperscript{709} ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 266, səh. 7-9. After receiving the review, Shaginian revised her manuscript.
\end{footnotes}
was a function of bourgeois Eurocentrism, to which the Soviet Union was the antidote. Russian writer and promoter of Eastern literature Petr Skosyrev said in 1943,

> When the revolution opened to us the treasures of the cultures of the East, when Soviet writers began to examine them carefully and intently, it turned out that we knew only half of the universe of art … You can count on one hand those Eastern folklore images that became a part of our European literary work.\(^{711}\)

The influence of Schiller, Nietzsche, Herder, and other German thinkers on the Bolsheviks is well documented, and Goethe’s particular role as a reference point in Soviet cultural matters derives both from his importance for Marx and from Russian admiration for German thought. Significantly, Goethe himself, “the first advocate of ‘world literature,’ is one of the ‘national poets’ used to define the nation’s identity, though his nation, Germany, did not exist as such when he wrote.”\(^{712}\) For Azerbaijan, Goethe was important as a validating link between Azerbaijani and European culture, and also as a model for Nizami as a national poet *avant la lettre*. Perhaps even more important, Goethe provided an example of a figure who combines two seemingly incompatible roles: constituting national character and identity on the one hand, and demonstrating the cross-cultural interaction that privileges the universal over the national particular, on the other. Like Nizami, Goethe is part of both a national and an international narrative. As described above, Goethe belonged to the German circle of Shakespeare admirers who helped to establish the bard as a universal literary figure and to institutionalize the literary jubilee that ignores national borders.

Shakespeare was an object of great admiration in the Soviet Union, where the “slogan ‘Shakespearization’ was a call to produce a world-historical literature, raising it to the heights of

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\(^{711}\) RGALI f. 962, op. 11, d. 373, ll. 83-8. Skosyrev was speaking about the latest work of Samad Vurgun, a play based on Nizami’s poem *Xosrov və Şirin*. On Skosyrev and his advocacy to expand the literary canon beyond the European, see Chapter 4.

\(^{712}\) Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 9. Clark continues: “This example highlights both the importance of point of view in demarcating what is ‘national’ from what is ‘inter-’ or ‘trans-national,’ and the extent to which the two concepts cannot be seen as absolute binary opposites.”
‘world literature.’” In Soviet society, knowledge of Shakespeare was a sign of kul’turnost’. In the 1930s, the weekly magazine Ogonek presented in each issue a ten-question test under the heading “Are you a cultured person?” The test that appeared in the first issue of 1936 included “Name and characterize five plays by Shakespeare.” For the ethnic republics, translating and performing Shakespeare in the national language, like the appearance of national opera, was considered a marker of cultural development. National theaters were quick to make performances of Shakespeare a fixture in their repertory at home, and a frequent feature of touring engagements. The Orientologist Bertels invoked Shakespeare as the only comparison to Nizami in the level of nuance in his psychological development of character.

The presentation of Nizami as a master whose skill is acknowledged by Goethe and the equal of Shakespeare’s established him in an international literary canon that remained Eurocentric, but his inclusion was a manifestation of the Soviet commitment to the expansion of this canon as a reflection of its belief in the equality of all peoples. Nizami’s particular relevance to the Soviet project resided in his example of internationalism and cultural merger, especially of that most challenging of cultural gaps, between East and West. By characterizing the poet’s outlook and capacity as reflecting an Azerbaijani national trait, the Nizami jubilee framers made both the poet and his ideal of cultural synthesis into Azerbaijan’s gifts to the world. Nizami’s prestige, and, therefore that of Azerbaijan, was metonymically enhanced by his placement in a largely European company. For all these reasons, the Nizami Jubilee became an important

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713 Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 184-5. Clark writes that the meaning of this call was “hotly contested,” especially in 1935, when a conference on Shakespeare was held in Moscow. In April 1939, the bard’s 375th anniversary was marked in the Soviet Union, with many national productions of Shakespeare plays.

714 Vadim Volkov, “The concept of kul’turnost’: notes on the Stalinist civilizing process” in Sheila Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), 210-30, here 224. The Shakespeare question was the second one on the test, right after “Recite by heart at least one poem by Pushkin.”

715 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, ish. 4 tərs tərəf. Bertels was referring specifically to Nizami’s *Xosrov va Şirin*. More superficially, another Nizami poem, *Leili and Mejmun*, is often referred to as the “Eastern Romeo and Juliet.” The poem is a treatment of a legend that many other poets have treated as well, including Füzuli, whose version is the basis of Hajibeyov’s opera.
opportunity for the consolidation of Azerbaijani national identity, in which Nizami’s universal relevance and his Azerbaijaniness were intertwined. Since popularization methods, both inside Azerbaijan and Union-wide, were taken from the Soviet national poet jubilee script, which, in turn, was borrowed from imperial Russian adaptations of Western European precedents, the jubilee for the Eastern classic was itself an example of cultural merger. For many aspects of Soviet jubilee culture, Nizami provided plenty of material to work with. This was not the case, however, for one staple: the ubiquitous image of the national poet. The next section discusses the cultural synthesis theme in the context of Azerbaijan’s performance of this part of the Soviet jubilee script.

PICTURING NIZAMI

The Nizami Jubilee Committee of Azerbaijan’s Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom, often abbreviated SNK) ensured that there was deep Nizami penetration and full Nizami saturation within the republic, monitoring the jubilee plans of every conceivable type of institution, which, in turn, typically had their own jubilee committees. Azerbaijan State University reported that its philology department devoted 60 curricular hours to Nizami study, and from “July 1939 through October 1940 the Radio Committee broadcast 71 programs on the theme of Nizami,” not including music and children’s shows. A brochure was issued to help “mainly regional teachers, agitators, workers of clubs and palaces of culture” give lectures on Nizami, and comrades were sent to regional centers “to organize jubilee commissions in raikoms [regional committees] and to run a three-day seminar on preparation for lecturers.” In June 1940, the Nizami Jubilee Committee held a 16-hour seminar on Nizami for employees of

716 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 1059, səh. 6; f. 1, siy. 235, iş 1059, səh. 5-20; ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 105, səh. 22; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 1060, səh. 34; f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, səh. 47.
Narkompros (People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment) and Komsomol (Communist Youth League) and for schoolteachers. Special editions of abridged works by and about Nizami were designed for children of various ages with color illustrations ordered in Moscow. Exhibits, study circles, evenings, reports, lectures, and other events dedicated to the poet were organized in schools, palaces of culture, clubs, libraries, pioneer camps, oil worker dormitories, parks of culture and rest, and theaters throughout the republic. Any physical site that was associated with Nizami, particularly architectural monuments thought to be contemporary with him, received attention. In 1940, the Azerbaijani Nizami Committee resolved to pursue (with the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs) the possibility of erecting a monument to Nizami in Moscow.

Azerbaijan’s Council of People’s Commissars (SNK) decreed a number of contests to be held to generate works of art connected with Nizami, including an image of the poet in painting, sculpture, and drawing; monuments in Baku and Kirovabad; and a mausoleum at Nizami’s gravesite. The contests to create images of the poet presented a particular opportunity for invention as there were no surviving likenesses or even contemporary verbal descriptions of Nizami. In Muslim Azerbaijan, soaring architectural monuments had been a feature of urban centers for many centuries, but large-scale human likenesses were not. When it came to depicting

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717 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, sah. 34-5, 43-7, 70-1; ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 77, sah. 61.
718 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 14, sah. 54; RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302. l. 11; ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 105, sah. 44; f. 411, siy. 8, iş 14, sah.107a; f. 411, siy. 8, iş 95, sah. 2.
719 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 711, sah. 48. If the issue was ever raised, the monument was not. In addition, there were aspirations to “bring Nizami to the masses” beyond the Soviet Union: At its 23 February 1939 meeting, the All-Union Nizami Jubilee Committee in Moscow resolved to ask the foreign committee of the Writers’ Union to contact the International Association for the Defense of Culture about popularizing the works and life of Nizami abroad. (RGALI f. 631, op. 6, d. 302, l. 2)
720 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 14, passim, esp. 22-22 tars taraf, 35-6. Contests for opera score, monument, and portrait were held on the all-Union level, while those for opera libretto and dramatic work were held on the republican level. (RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 345, l. 3) Later on, contests were introduced for the design of a jubilee lapel pin (znachok), for best scientific-research work on Nizami, best screenplay on Nizami, and for best dastan and nağıl devoted to Nizami. (ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 732, sah. 30; ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 14, sah. 201; f. 411, siy. 8, iş 14, sah. 96; ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 26, iş 711, sah. 52.) Dastan and nağıl are traditional Azeri literary forms that here mean short story or fable; in the archival document about this contest they are referred to in Russian as “skazka.”
the human form, local artistic tradition tended toward miniatures and stylization. Human figures, along with animals and nature, commonly appeared as decoration and as illustrations accompanying narrative but rarely in sculpture or in monumental size. The announcement for the open competition for Nizami’s portrait specified the dimensions of the image should be “not smaller than life-size.” The announcement for the Union-wide competition to design a Nizami monument for Baku stipulated a height of 12-14 meters, with a figure of Nizami as the center of the composition.

When none of the entries “satisfied the requirements” of the open portrait contest, a set of artists were tapped to participate in a second, closed competition. The jury selected the work of two Azerbaijani artists as “coming closest to the image of Nizami,” and the first-place portrait, once revised and approved, was widely distributed as ephemera such as posters and postcards, as well as appearing in various editions of Nizami’s poetry and secondary works about the poet. By August 1941 artist Gazanfar Khalykov’s finalized work (see Figure 5.1) had been sent to the Iskusstvo publishing house in Moscow for reproduction as a color poster in 50,000 copies.

The story of the monument contest was similar. The jury of cultural notables from Azerbaijan as well as Moscow selected a design by a young Russian pair that showed Nizami sitting, eliciting a number of complaints. In early June 1940, Azerbaijan’s Nizami Jubilee
Committee met in Baku to review the submissions and discuss the issue of a standing versus a sitting Nizami. Azerbaijani architect S.A. Dadashev, citing Renaissance practice, argued for a standing figure: “If we look … to the classical era of the Renaissance … we never see monuments in a static form.”

Azerbaijani sculptor Jalal Gariaghdy, too, objected to a seated Nizami, pointing out that nowhere in the world are great people shown in big public squares seated, and rattling off examples of standing monuments to Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Rustaveli, Gorky, Shevchenko, Raphael, Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare. The meeting chair countered that there were people who knew Gorky when he was alive and could therefore accurately capture his mannerisms in sculpture; this was not at all the case with Nizami. Another attendee opined that Nizami should be standing because he was an active, worldly figure. Even if he could not be compared with Gorky, he was still a leader, whom the speaker imagined as “something like [Renaissance friar Girolamo] Savonarola or Galileo,” explaining, “Nizami is the first humanist, who defined European history, who said what Petrarch, Thomas More, and others said two or three centuries later …”

While it was not particularly unusual for such contests to conclude without the adoption of a design for implementation, the discussion in Baku revealed uncertainty about how modern Azerbaijan should present itself. European culture was the reference point. If Nizami was to be accepted as the equal of his neighbors in the international cultural pantheon, he had to be presented as literally having the same stature. There was anxiety that a seated figure of Nizami would reinforce precisely the impression they sought to overturn of the long-dead poet – and, by extension, Eastern culture – as marginal, irrelevant, passive. Rather than distant and cloistered,

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726 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, sah. 9-22. Dadashev is considered the founder of Azerbaijani Soviet architecture. (Pashaev, Pobeda kul'turnoi revoliutsii, 137)

727 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, sah. 9-22.
Nizami had to be active, vital, and engaged with the world. For the same reason, any sculptural element suggesting an interior scene, such as a carpet, was rejected: “for those unfamiliar with the East, [a carpet] will seem original and interesting, but for us it doesn’t work …. we need the figure standing, powerful, expressive…” Interestingly, Azerbaijani Party boss Mir Jafar Bagirov did not object to a sitting figure. In connection with this information, the meeting chair asked, “Why can’t Nizami wear a turban, which is what was historically worn here? We shouldn’t be so afraid of Arabism.” Bagirov’s view notwithstanding, the committee ruled in favor of a standing figure and commissioned a new design from a team of two architects and a sculptor, all Azerbaijanis. In February 1941, Azerbaijan’s Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) submitted the new design to the All-Union Committee on Arts Affairs for approval with a request for support of the republic’s petition to the All-Union Council of People’s Commissars (SNK SSSR) to build it. By late April 1941, all that was needed was the stamp of approval from the Central Committee in Moscow. In May 1941, a maquette of the monument was sent to Moscow for display in Azerbaijan’s pavilion at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition, and the designers still hoped to have it built by the jubilee in November.

The presentation of the new monument design in February 1941 to the Artistic-Technical Council of Azerbaijan’s Main Directorate of Institutions of Visual Art, and this group’s response to it, provide some insight into the decision-making about national self-representation. One

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728 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, səh. 9-22.
729 Ibid.
730 The architects were S.A. Dadashev and M.A. Useinov, both members of the monument contest jury. The sculptor was Fuad Abdurakhimov. The trio was also responsible for the monument to Nizami erected in Kirovabad (formerly, and today again, Ganja), which earned Abdurakhimov the Stalin Prize, second degree, for his sculpture of Nizami. (Sovetskoe iskustvo, 13 June 1947, 1, 2). Dadashev and Useinov were frequent collaborators who had worked on the pavilion of the Azerbaijani SSR for the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow, for which they were awarded the Stalin Prize, second degree, in 1941, and on the Nizami Museum in Baku.
731 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 109, səh. 11. The all-Union committee’s chair, Khrapchenko, obliged.
732 ARDSPİHA f. 1, iş 26, iş 732, səh. 2.
733 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 156, səh. 30.
member of the monument design team, the architect Dadashev, prefaced the presentation with some background to the project, explaining that the monument design competition, in which some of the best sculptors in the Soviet Union had participated, had come to naught because none of the entries “presented an image of the poet.” He attributed this, in part, to the competition organizers’ failure to “consider that at the time of the contest there was not a single portrait of Nizami and the contest participants did not have a chance to study the works of Nizami because they had not yet been translated into Russian.” Familiarity with Nizami’s work is important for the monument designers, Dadashev said, because that is where “Nizami lays out his views and thoughts” that allow us to comprehend “his worldview – as a person, a poet, philosopher, and thinker.” Only after “meetings with comrades who have studied this era did a picture become clear to us of how the poet who lived 800 years ago should look.”

The new design, then, was based on cultural expertise and inspired by deep understanding of the poet, reflecting an Azerbaijani group effort.

Guiding his audience through the design, Dadashev described the general preference for a standing figure as determined by the landscape of the square that would be the monument’s home, across from the new Nizami Museum (discussed below); there was no mention of statues of Pushkin, Gorky, Shakespeare, or other considerations. He also pointed out the design features that referenced Nizami and his era: the eight-sided base and ornamentation characteristic of the architecture of the poet’s day, the bas-reliefs around the pedestal depicting themes from Nizami’s work. About the statue’s garb, he preempted, “There may be the impression that this clothing does not accord with the epoch. We have a very solid description of [the poet] himself and the clothing of the time. Even 20 years ago you could see such garments not only on servants of the

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734 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 156, sah. 32 tərəf tərəf-33.
cult, but also men wore it from age 40 to 45.” The claim about reliable sources describing Nizami and his clothing contradicts a statement made at an earlier meeting about the draft design for the Nizami monument in Baku: “there are no historical documents about a precise correspondence of this portrait with what Nizami really looked like.”

As with the monument contest submissions, discussion of the monument design among the group of visual art specialists in Baku focused on the figure of Nizami, which struck many as lacking realism. Breathing life into the immortal poet was proving difficult: the sculpture did not evince “enough living temperament, national traits, and general human traits”; it needed a more “realistic expression … a more romantic image.” Perhaps the size of the figure did not allow the “individualization of the poet”? Acknowledging the challenge before the designers “to create an image of Nizami, a portrait of whom doesn’t exist,” one artist opined that Nizami is “the embodiment of the national spirit, culture, national traits” and therefore the image should “proceed from living national material.” And yet, the artist continued, the designers seem to have been guided by “academic art of the first half of the 19th century.” Citing the sculpture’s hands, a colleague added that the figure “makes the impression of a person of a spiritual calling … [It] is somewhat cold and actually reminds [me] of Jesus Christ or some sort of apostle.” Another agreed that the poet looked like a “saint” from “the walls of a cathedral.” It was suggested to “make a few studies from nature and give Nizami the sort of look in which the whole nation would recognize itself.” “We can be bolder,” said another. “Why not choose a concrete person and say, ‘Here, this is Nizami. We have to individualize him a bit” and add more “living motion. He’s too calm. Preserving the basic monumentality of the composition, the details should make him more alive, convey a mood.” One comment identified a disconnect between the figure’s

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735 ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 156, sah 33-33 tərəf tərəf.
736 ARDA f. 411, siy. 19, iş 589, sah. 10.
clothing and the style in which it was rendered: “The person is Eastern, but the folds of the clothing are Roman in a nineteenth-century iteration. Something of the Eastern clothing survives, but something is subordinated to the Roman manner of wearing clothes.”\textsuperscript{737} The final consensus recommendation was “to strengthen the national and realistic features” of the depiction of Nizami.\textsuperscript{738}

The ideal of cultural synthesis between East and West, which was seen as a feature of Azerbaijani culture and foregrounded in presentations of Nizami, was apparently unsettling to some, such as those who expressed dissatisfaction with the monument’s “Eastern” figure of Nizami wearing clothing with folds rendered in a Roman Revival style. Instead of synthesis, some saw inconsistency and eclecticism; where some saw historically and culturally accurate attire, others saw the robes of a saint from a cathedral wall. An objection to “polystylism” (raznostilnost’) had been raised in the discussion of the original contest entries as well.\textsuperscript{739} A similar criticism of polystylism had arisen in 1935 discussions of the development of Soviet symphonism.\textsuperscript{740} The design of a monument to Nizami for Baku exemplifies the challenges of transposing the Soviet literary jubilee script into an Azerbaijani key. Cultural synthesis, apparently, was a process that did not necessarily occur organically or proceed smoothly.

Following World War II, work on the sculpture and architectural components of the monument continued through the first part of 1947. Construction began in spring of that year but was not completed until the end of 1948, well after the celebration of Nizami’s 800th Jubilee in September 1947. The official opening of the monument, which rises 15 meters, including the

\textsuperscript{737} ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 156, səh. 34-5.
\textsuperscript{738} Ibid., səh. 31.
\textsuperscript{739} ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 23, iş 698, səh. 9-22.
\textsuperscript{740} Other criticisms made in the 1935 discussion included “‘inorganic’ symphonism, overdependence on formal schemes or ‘workshop mentality’, a ‘shallow, photographic portrayal of reality’, a reluctance to ‘bid farewell to the past’, and – crucially – technical incompetence.” (Pauline Fairclough, \textit{The Soviet Credo: Shostakovich’s Fourth Symphony}, 32)
6.2-meter bronze figure of Nizami, took place in April 1949. A March 1949 press article noted the sculpture’s “forward-looking gaze,” part of the effort to make the poet relevant and alive. Nizami’s immortality had been a conspicuous part of the rhetoric surrounding the poet and his jubilee at least since Azerbaijani delegate Alakbar li’s declaration at the 1934 Writers’ Congress that “Nizami did not die.” Thirteen years later, the rhetoric of immortality remained prominent, as in a comment by Writers’ Union chair Aleksandr Fadeev during the jubilee festivities in Baku: “What a great joy to have in one’s heritage a poet whose grave you don’t have to crawl into … because he comes out of the grave himself to join us in the building of socialist culture.” While immortality is commonly attributed to great writers, it is particularly meaningful in the context of the Nizami narrative in Azerbaijan, an oppressed nation “deprived” of Nizami for so long, as a rejoinder to the Orientalist trope of a lifeless East.

The Nizami monument in Baku was raised opposite the Nizami Museum. A major exhibit about Nizami and his era was envisioned as part of the jubilee from the earliest days of official planning, and the notion quickly developed into a permanent installation. As there was not enough time or money to construct a new building, Bagirov supported the use of a nineteenth-century structure located in the center of Baku. The history and conversion of the edifice that became the museum furnishes an apt physical metaphor for the Nizami Jubilee project and the

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741 A post-war shortage of construction materials caused delays: Ukrainian granite required for the base and pedestal of the Nizami statue in Baku took months to obtain, and work on raising the monument itself was delayed when a lack of wood made it impossible to block off the construction area. (ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, i$ ask 289, səh. 9, 22; f. 411, siy. 8, i$ ask 276, səh. 24; f. 411, siy. 15, i$ ask 149, səh. 50-1, 57; f. 411, siy. 8, i$ ask 289, səh. 27)


743 Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s”ezd sovetskikh pisatelei 1934: stenograficheskii otchet, 114.

744 Bakinskii rabochii, 23 September 1947.

745 Edward Said charges that Marx puts forward “the ideal of regenerating a fundamentally lifeless Asia.” (Said, Orientalism, 155, cited in Anderson, Marx at the Margins, 17)

746 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 74, i$ ask 511, səh. 100. An exhibition or museum was part of the Soviet literary jubilee script. The Armenians had mounted an exhibition (and unveiled a monument) in 1940 for the 1000th anniversary of their national epic, David Sasuni, and the Ukrainians had opened a Shevchenko museum in Kiev for the poet’s jubilee in 1939.

747 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, i$ ask 14, səh. 68.
transformation of Azerbaijani culture in the Soviet period more generally. The original structure was built in 1850 as a caravanserai, with a second story (designed by an Azeri architect) added in 1868 and used as a banquet and gaming hall. The building served as a hotel until the revolution, when it was converted into government offices. In 1939, its small rooms, narrow corridors, and poor light were deemed ill-suited to museum use, and experts were concerned the old structure could not withstand renovation. Even the architects assigned to the museum project, Dadashev and Useinov, objected to the building, but, with Bagirov’s backing, plans to house the museum there moved ahead.

Room dividers were removed, cracks covered over, and artificial lighting installed. Because it was considered “essential to give the Nizami Museum the appropriate architecture, so that it reflects the Nizami epoch,” the exterior was whitewashed and painted “in the Eastern style,” with other Eastern architectural “touches” added. Sculptures of literary “classics of Azerbaijan” were placed in niches of the building’s façade, gazing at the monument to the founder of the national literary tradition they continued. Like the folk instrument orchestra, the Nizami Museum represents a fusion of cultural influences; the building’s appearance, history, and purpose all reflect the cultural layering that supplied the elements of this alloy. Generally speaking, museums are culturally Western in origin, with a large debt to visual depictions of the human form. When they evolved as state-sponsored enterprises for nation-building use,

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748 Nazmin Rustam qizi Dzhafarova, “Muzei imeni Nizami – unikal’noe zdanie, unikal’nye eksponaty,” in Istoricheskie, filosofskie, politicheskie i iuridicheskie nauki, kul’turologiia i iskusstvovedenie. Voprosy teorii i praktiki. No. 6 (12) 2011, chast’ 2: 45-7. The architect who designed the addition was Gasim bey Hajibababayev (Qasim bəy Hacıbababəyov) (1811-1874).
749 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 698, səh. 40.
750 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 698, səh. 40.
751 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 698, səh. 40.
752 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 698, səh. 40.
753 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 235, iş 698, səh. 40.
new museums were almost always housed in palatial buildings. Whether installed in former palaces or in purpose-built structures, their grand halls and galleries were scaled for large public gatherings, processions and ceremonies, and could give visitors a sense of presence in the ‘imagined community’ of the nation …

The Nizami Museum is located steps from the gates of Baku’s Old City, in a building that began its life as a traditional shelter for the peripatetic. Over time, it acquired new stories (of all kinds) reflecting layers of cultural influences that profoundly altered its appearance and left the structure sagging under the weight of these accretions. In the early 1920s, local Soviet authorities, who apparently considered the building unsuited to the needs of modern Baku and obsolete beyond remediation, had for a time even earmarked it for demolition. By the late 1930s, many deemed it incompatible with the demands of the museum project and unable to survive the introduction of more adaptation. When the Nizami Museum opened in May 1945 (the date had been selected in October 1944 to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Sovietization of Azerbaijan), it did so as a repository of national memory and therefore a symbol of national permanence. The building had been shored up to serve as a pillar of the nation’s cultural identity. Transformed into a tribute to the art and architecture of the Nizami era, it was (and still is today) considered an architectural gem. The building, studded with statues and other images of Azerbaijan’s cultural icons, including a statue of Nizami that greeted visitors as they entered the building, was a study in cultural synthesis, inside and out. It was in this respect, too, that it paid tribute to Nizami, who embodied this essential national trait.

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755 Nizami Gənjəvi adına Azərbaycan Ədəbiyyatı Muzeyinin Əsərləri, VI cild (Baku: Elm, 1994), 43.
756 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 202, səh. 21. Additional galleries of the museum were opened for the celebration of the Nizami Jubilee in September 1947.
757 In 1947, Azerbaijan’s Directorate of Arts Affairs nominated the museum building for a Stalin Prize, citing how well it achieves “the task of creating a structure national in form and socialist in content … of combining architectural expression with new socialist content.” (ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 387, səh. 63-4) It did not win.
A national museum is a site of ritual and inculcation. The Louvre, for example, which was decreed as a national museum during the French Revolution, was designed to lead the visitor through the history of art as “progress towards ideal beauty,” proceeding from the thesis that France was “heir to the classical spirit of the great civilizations of the past.” Thus “the progress of art became part of the historical and nationally specific heritage” of France, and the visitor was “invited to savour … his place as a member of” the French nation.\(^{758}\) The Nizami Museum, while different from the Louvre in a multitude of ways, similarly led the visitor through a national narrative, through the lens of Nizami, using the poet as the ostensible organizing principle. Just as the Louvre held up classicism as an ideal to which France was heir, the Nizami Museum posited Nizami as the standard-bearer of progressivism, humanism, democracy, and internationalism. According to Soviet rhetoric, particularly after the rise of fascism in Germany, the Soviet people were the heir to world culture, charged with constructing the new as well as with safeguarding “everything valuable in human culture from fascist barbarism and obscurantism.”\(^{759}\) In this context of a collective Soviet nation as the inheritors and protectors of the fruits of all human endeavor, Azerbaijan had to distinguish itself not only as heir to but originator of these ideals.

Nizami’s outlook, jubilee framers argued, was a product of a cultural environment of tolerance and openness to the different that was unique to Azerbaijan and that encouraged the interaction of various cultural influences, thus yielding synthesis and innovation. This was the native characteristic that essentially defined the Azerbaijani nation. Nizami, who embodied this capacity to the point of genius, was far ahead of his time, exemplifying and preaching ideas that great European thinkers expressed only centuries later. Nizami, then, was evidence that

\(^{759}\) Speech of Ukrainian poet Mykola Bazhan to Kiev intelligentsia, Pravda, 3 April 1939, 3.
Azerbaijan was historically at the cultural forefront, and his example of cultural synthesis, especially across the East-West divide, made his work universal not only because it resonated with and reflected many different cultures but because his model of cultural interaction and merger was the path to the socialist future. What began as an exhibit that “should reflect the era of Nizami, all its grandeur and the world significance of his poetic legacy” became an institution that told a story of Azerbaijan’s entire cultural history. All manner of material – including artists’ renderings of important moments in national cultural and revolutionary history – was assembled into a narrative of Azerbaijan’s leading role in the march toward the realization of the Soviet utopia Nizami had prophetically envisioned. In this way, all of Azerbaijan’s artistic talents were the poet’s heirs. For example, Samad Vurgun was said to “like to call himself a student of Nizami.”

When the Nizami Jubilee was finally celebrated in Baku, 22 to 27 September 1947, it generally hewed to its pre-war plans and comported with the general Soviet jubilee script. Baku was festooned with portraits of Nizami and banners with lines from his poetry in Azerbaijani and Russian. Delegations of writers from the brother republics and the leadership of the central Writers’ Union in Moscow came to the Azerbaijani capital for a special celebratory session of the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers of the USSR and its Azerbaijani branch, which was followed by days of Nizami-related events at the city’s cultural institutions. Meanwhile, in Moscow, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and the Union of Soviet Writers held a gala session dedicated to the Nizami Jubilee at Tchaikovsky Hall, with a program featuring leading

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760 ARDA f. 411, op. 8, is 14, səh. 142.
761 Canvases displayed at the museum included scenes of Stalin doing underground work in Baku after the 1905 revolution; Ordzhonikidze, Kirov, and Mikoyan among the workers of Azerbaijan in 1920; Stalin at the opera Koroglu; Hajibeyov receiving the Order of Lenin; the All-Union Conference on Nizami in Baku; and “Scholars of Azerbaijan work on materials about Nizami.” (Literaturnaia gazeta, 13 September 1947)
762 This according to Petr Skosyrev. (RGALI f. 962, op. 11, d. 373, ll. 83-8)
Azerbaijani performers sent from Baku. Nizami-related events were organized in brother republics, as well. As before, the event was seen as an opportunity to showcase Azerbaijan and its culture on an international stage, but by the post-war moment, that stage had grown larger: in addition to representatives from the brother Soviet republics, foreign guests were also included. Documents reflect plans to invite guests from all over the world (including the US, Western Europe, the Middle East, India, and China as well as Soviet-satellite Eastern Europe).

A stated goal of Azerbaijan’s jubilee was to increase the republic’s cultural capital: the jubilee committee will have done its job if it “uses this grand event to leave behind some capital for our republic, high artistic works [that endure] for many years for our posterity, so people will later say, ‘Look what things appeared both from an artistic and a content point of view.’” The statement encapsulates Bourdieu’s idea of cultural capital, a notion that was alive and well in the Soviet Union, especially among ambitious cultural elites in the periphery. In contrast to the Louvre ritual, which was aimed at members of the nation, the success of the Nizami Jubilee hinged on the participation of an audience external to the nation. Following pre-revolutionary Russian examples such as the Gogol Jubilee in 1909, the event was staged to inspire the desired response – namely, acceptance and admiration – in cultural outsiders. As in imperial Russian examples, securing recognition from outside the nation was meant to engender feelings of national pride. The pages of the comments book kept by the Nizami Museum reflect the positive and grateful impressions of visitors, distinguished and ordinary, from throughout the Soviet

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763 For example, in Tajikistan’s capital, Stalinabad, a concert was given in honor of Nizami. (ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 382, no page number)  
764 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 276, səh. 31. Lists of attendees, however, show that visitors from outside the Soviet Union were limited to delegates from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. (ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 289, səh. 181)  
765 ARDA f. 411, siy. 8, iş 289, səh. 25.  
767 The “principal theme for the ‘Gogol Days’ [was] the staging of an international celebration of Russian letters in Moscow.” (Byford, “The Gogol Jubilee of 1909,” 137)
Union and all over the world, who left a written record of their recognition of Azerbaijan’s cultural accomplishments.\footnote{Selected, undated entries were reprinted in a volume published in connection with the Nizami Museum’s 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary. \textit{Nizami Gənjəvi adına Azərbaycan Ədəbiyyatı Muzeyinin Əsərləri}, VI cild (Baku: Elm, 1994), 243-64.}

During the jubilee, Azerbaijan made itself a cultural destination, at least for a moment, but the years of preparation efforts also yielded longer lasting changes and permanent monuments (literal and figurative), just as the republic’s leadership wanted. Azerbaijan asserted itself as a center of research and scholarship on its own culture and past; it codified information, defined and disseminated a national narrative; it developed a knowledge base and authoritative expertise. No longer would an Azerbaijani be in the position of knowing “less about eighteenth-century Azerbaijan than about thirteenth-century Georgia” like the attendee of the meeting of Azerbaijan’s Rustaveli Jubilee Committee in 1937. If, as Bagirov claimed in June 1940, one did not find Nizami in Azerbaijani libraries before the revolution and even into the 1920s, the cultural production that began in connection with the jubilee and continued long after it kept the republic’s bookshelves well-stocked.\footnote{ARDSPİHA f. 1, op. 23, d. 697, l. 30.} In fact, Azerbaijanis did not even have to enter a library to learn about their country’s literary canon: by 1940 authorities were busy placing monuments to classics of Azerbaijani literature in cities all over the republic.\footnote{RGALI f. 631, op. 15, d. 472, ll. 3-5.} In time, the institutions created in connection with Nizami’s 800\textsuperscript{th} jubilee became the objects of their own anniversary celebrations.

In 1989, the Nizami Museum marked its 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary with a conference in Baku called “Literary museums, work experience, development prospects.”\footnote{\textit{Nizami Gənjəvi adına Azərbaycan Ədəbiyyatı Muzeyinin Əsərləri}, 3-11. The museum’s founding was considered to be the date of the Azerbaijani government’s decree ordering its creation (1 November 1939).} Presentations given at the conference, which was attended by representatives from literary museums all over the Soviet
Union, show the proceedings as a celebration of the Nizami Museum as well as a paean to the genre of the literary museum more generally, as an institution that strengthens “the mutual ties among nations.” In one metaphor-laden speech, these museums resembled a song in their “harmonious combination of sounds … woven into a wonderful carpet.” Among the conference speakers, harmony and interconnection prevailed as a theme, often embodied by the Nizami Museum itself. In 1939, explained one museum official, the concept for the museum’s design was an “artistic conceptual connection, built on the harmony of the small with the big, of the part with the whole, of one coloration with another.” The result, another speaker pronounced, was a “strictly Eastern design” that harmonizes with the general urban look of modern Baku.

CONCLUSION

In the Soviet Union, the jubilee of a national literary figure presented a nation-building opportunity on two levels: for the “host” republic and for the whole Soviet nation. The consolidation and dissemination of a national cultural canon is a key step in the formation of national identity. By supporting the efforts of a given republic, the center could claim implementation of official nationalities policy. At the same time, the all-Union exposure of one group’s cultural icon was part of a project to build a common culture for the entire Soviet Union. The jubilees worked toward both ends through the single mechanism of a broad popularization campaign. On the one hand, the recognition of one group’s national figure by the entire Soviet family of nations boosted the host group’s national identity and pride. At the same time, it was

772 The concept is attributed to Baku artist Rustam Mustafayev (Rüstəm Müstafayev) who was responsible for the set design of many Azerbaijani operas (including Hajibeyov’s Koroglu) and was director of Azerbaijan’s Central Directorate for the Protection of Monuments (AzTsUOP) from 1937 until his death in 1940 at age 30.

773 Nizami Gənjəvi adına Azərbaycan Ədəbiyyatı Muzeyini Əsərləri, 8-10.
an act of assimilation of that cultural icon into a shared international canon that belonged to the entire world (or, at least, the Soviet world).

An example from E.E. Bertels’ article about Nizami Ganjevi that appeared in Pravda of 3 February 1939 – the first informational item on the poet to run in the general central press – illustrates the dynamics of this process. The draft text sent to Pravda declared that the cultural riches previously guarded by the ruling classes “will become accessible [доступным] to all peoples of our motherland,” but in the published piece, the passage was altered to read “must become the property [достоинием] of all peoples of our motherland.” While this small editorial change, one of only two made to the original submitted text, may seem insignificant, it points to an ideological agenda behind the Soviet project of cross-cultural interaction, namely, to make national riches into the communal cultural property of the Soviet nation, to redistribute national cultural wealth to the international masses. In a sense, this framing suited Azerbaijan, where the widely disseminated Nizami narrative explained that the poet had been forced by the ruling elites to write in Persian, denying him to generations of the Turkic-speaking masses of his own people.

The popularization strategies of the national poet jubilee were in many ways well matched to the goals of both Moscow and Baku. The Kremlin’s support helped an Eastern minority nation secure the cooperation of Moscow’s often recalcitrant, generally Russocentric press, publishing, recording, performance, critical, and other cultural institutions in providing Nizami and Azerbaijani culture all-Union exposure. Likewise, international admiration and validation of Nizami, the declarations of his greatness, foresight, and universal relevance, served both agendas, intertwining the development of national and international culture. The Nizami Museum – itself presented as the apotheosis of harmony – was simultaneously the “temple-

774 ARDSPİHA f. 1, siy. 22, iş 356, səh. 5-10; Pravda, 3 February 1939, 4.
museum of Azerbaijani national literature” and a hearth of internationalist spirit. Yet the editing that turned the sharing of a national poet’s work into a shift in its ownership also points to divergence between the endpoints of the respective cultural narratives envisioned by ideologues in Moscow and national entrepreneurs in Azerbaijan. Contributing a national gem to the treasurehouse of world culture to be displayed for the pleasure and admiration of all is different from surrendering the national claim and eventually ceding ownership to the international collective in the name of cultural merger. Azerbaijan wanted Nizami to be international and to remain Azerbaijani.

The interdependence of domestic nation-building and international self-projection of the cultural nation is an interconnection that, this dissertation has argued, is a feature of Soviet culture derived from imperial Russian example. In this way, the Soviet national poet jubilee is a Russifying ritual. This is especially true in the case of Azerbaijan and Nizami, which closely resembles the example of Russia and Pushkin. In his 1880 speech, Dostoevsky not only established Pushkin as the embodiment of Russian culture, but identified the poet’s genius for borrowing the best material from other nations and reworking it in a uniquely Russian process to achieve a uniquely Russian result. The instinct to reconcile differences and contradictions, Dostoevsky said, is fundamental to the Russian character and ultimately makes Russian culture universal. Similarly, Nizami Ganjevi was a great synthesizer, his genius fostered by the unique multiculturalism of Azerbaijan. His integration of disparate elements, native and foreign, into a harmonious and innovative whole was an expression of a distinctively Azerbaijani national trait, of which Nizami was an exemplar and practitioner par excellence. In this way, the jubilee framers nationalized the synthesis theme, inextricably linking internationalism with Azerbaijani national identity. Moreover, not only did Nizami’s pioneering work predate European efforts by

775 Nizami Gənjəvi adına Azərbaycan Ədəbiyyatı Muzeyinin Ösrələri, 3, 8, 14, 42, 54.
centuries, but it was a harbinger of the unity of humanity, transcending an East-West divide that many found so confounding. Nizami’s work, then, was a model for this reconciliation in the present day, making him more international than Dostoevsky’s explicitly Christian and European image of Russian universalism.

In Marxist-Leninist terms, Nizami was an example of the best of the cultural achievements the past had bequeathed to the present, and a model of the cultural path forward to the international socialist future. Nizami was evidence of Azerbaijan’s long history at the forefront of cultural progress. As the father of Azerbaijani literature, he had laid the foundation of this avant-gardist tradition, which was continued by subsequent generations of Azerbaijani creative pioneers. This remained true in the Soviet era, as well, when Azerbaijani music, architecture, visual art, and design were leaders of harmonious cultural synthesis. The most visible and permanent cultural products generated in connection with the Nizami Jubilee – the Nizami monument and Nizami Museum in Baku – were evidence of this.

Its long, distinguished history of masterful and innovative intercultural melding allowed Azerbaijan to claim a leading role in Soviet cultural development. At the same time, the Nizami Jubilee self-presentation through which Azerbaijan nationalized cultural synthesis provided a hedge against the erosion of national identity by the encroachment of a unified, international, Soviet one because acts of cultural absorption and assimilation were seen as expressions of Azerbaijani sensibility.

In this way, rather than an adulteration of native tradition, a statue of Nizami was a cultural fusion that paid tribute to the poet. Likewise, the Nizami Museum fanned the flames of both Azerbaijani national identity and internationalism.

776 Hajibeyov set two Nizami ghazals to music and reportedly wrote a cantata for the Nizami Jubilee that has not been found. In addition, he was working on an opera based on Nizami’s İskandarnama (İsgəndərnamə) when he died. N. Abdullayev, “Ü. Hacıbəyovun adəbi-publisistik faaliyyəti,” in Nizami Gənjəvi adına Azərbaycan Ədəbiyyatı Muzeyinin Əsərləri, 115-20, here 116.
Images of Nizami were projected and circulated in every size, from Nizami figurines, busts, and lapel pins to the monument in Baku and giant portraits that festooned Kirovabad and Baku for the jubilee days in September 1947. *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 27 September 1947; ARDA f. 411, sty. 8, is 276, səh. 26-7

Figure 5.1. Portrait of Nizami by Qəzənfər Xalıqov. *Bol’shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, 2nd ed. (M.: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1954), Vol. 29.

Figure 5.2. Sculpting Nizami. Photo of sculptor F. Abdurakhimov working on the figure of Nizami for the monument in Baku. *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, 30 May 1947
Figure 5.3. Nizami Monument in Baku, 1950s. E.E. Bertel’s, *Nizami. Tvorcheskii put’ poeta.* (M.: Akademiia Nauk SSSR, 1956)
Figure 5.4. Caravanserai at Titsianov Square in Baku, 1887. The second story was completed in the 1860s and a third in 1915. The building later became the Nizami Museum. Archive of Pavel V. Khoroshilov, Moscow, reproduced in Nicolas V. Iljine, Memories of Baku (Seattle: Marquand Books, 2013), 84.

Figure 5.5. Nizami Square. The site slated for the construction of the Nizami monument in Baku. The view is from the former Husi Hajiev Street (Hüsi Hacıyev küçəsi), now Azerbaijan Avenue (Azərbaycan prospekti). The building is the former caravanserai and hotel before it was remodeled as the Nizami Museum. The photo is from the program published in 1939 for the monument design competition. ARDƏİA f. 345, siy. 2, iş 56, səh. 7
Figure 5.6. Nizami Museum letterhead, 1940s. The stationery design clearly shows the building’s façade with niche sculptures of icons of Azerbaijani literature along its exterior. The architectural outlines of the building’s previous iterations (one-story caravanserai, two-story hotel) remain evident.

ARDA f. 411, səh. 146

Figure 5.7. Nizami Museum, Baku, 2000s. Wikipedia
CONCLUSION

In the literature on nation-building and nationalism, encounters with cultural outsiders are often a means of generating group-defining distinctions. For example, through cross-cultural encounter, nationalism theorist Ernest Gellner’s Ruritanians “learned the difference between dealing with a co-national, one understanding and sympathizing with their culture, and someone hostile to it.” Such interactions invite a symbiotic process of self-definition and “othering” that leads to the hardening of difference, group identity, and national consciousness. The drawing of borders on maps is a visual aid to this process of distinguishing insider and outsider. National artistic products also contribute to the building of the national community, albeit through a somewhat different dynamic. Rather than empirics, national art relies on emotion calculated to awaken a sense of group belonging that unifies a national audience.

In the ethnic periphery, the Soviets aimed to develop national consciousness among minority groups. They drew borders, standardized languages, mandated the development of native-language press, literature, and other arts, and fostered an indigenous creative class to generate national cultural products. Alongside its promotion of cultural production among minority nations, the Soviet state also pursued a policy of cross-cultural “exchanges” and interactions among the brother republics. While there was an element of mission civilisatrice in “advanced” Russia’s effort to help “backward” nations, the contacts were also meant to bring brother Soviet nations closer by familiarizing them with one another’s cultures. Instead of highlighting difference to prompt a turning inward to one’s own group, the encounters were intended to promote familiarity with other groups, foster connections based on mutual sharing, and broaden the common cultural field. Writing in Pravda in 1928, Gorky stressed the importance of literature as affording mutual understanding “from the inside.” Following up on

this idea in 1934, he urged attendees of the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers to learn from each other and to read one another’s literature as a means of building bonds and creating a common culture that transformed everyone into an insider.

The concept of *Druzhba narodov* (Friendship of Peoples) that emerged in the 1930s developed infrastructure to expand access to and consumption of ethnic art by the entire Soviet population. As a result, cross-cultural interaction in the Soviet context has been associated with the increasingly ritualized and homogenized culture of the Soviet 1930s. In particular, the ethnic art presented in connection with these efforts has been characterized as essentialized and inauthentic. I have argued that rather than an imposition of 1930s standards, cross-national contact through art occupied a central place in Soviet policy from its framing as a strategy for implementing a multi-tiered cultural agenda of developing individual national communities while assimilating them into a single unified nation. In addition, I have argued that this national cultural development was directed along a particular path marked out by Russia’s cultural development and was therefore mediated through the Russian national experience.

According to its own mythologized narrative, Russia had gone from backwater on the edge of Europe to full-fledged member of the European cultural community in just a few generations by producing geniuses who synthesized borrowings from Europe’s cultural accomplishments into uniquely Russian art. This remarkable evolution was in part a function of state-supported efforts to cultivate artistic expression of the nation as a cornerstone of Russian identity. Another feature of the Russian trajectory was careful attention to the reception of Russian culture by those outside the nation, particularly in Europe, where positive response was regarded as a sign of Russia’s arrival as an important international cultural player. Once so validated, Russian achievement in the arts was a source of national pride and a locus of national
identity. In addition to being the most familiar model at hand, the Russian example fit well with Bolshevik priorities (Westernization, compression of time) and was in many ways well matched to the terms of Soviet nationalities policy. The logic of Bolshevik policy was informed by Russian experience, and Russia’s cultural feats remained the model for emulation from the start of the Soviet project, even at the height of efforts to decenter Russian culture as a means of countering Great Russian chauvinism and repairing relations with non-Russians damaged by tsarist imperialism.

Just as Russian society had fixated on the reception of its cultural production by a Europe it perceived as more advanced, so this dynamic was replicated in the national development of Soviet minority groups, who looked to Russia. In this way, the national and international were always interconnected for Russia. Soviet culture, with an ideological basis for emphasizing the role of the national in the international and vice versa, followed suit. The presentation of national culture to audiences beyond the nation required by the Soviet developmental script was overdetermined. Such presentation was an opportunity for validation and acceptance, which contributed to national consolidation, as it had in the Russian experience. At the same time, the presentation of national art promoted the contact, familiarization and mutual influence imagined as strategies for cultural integration and construction of a universal culture. In addition, Russians were drawn into the process as both influencers and influenced, suppliers and consumers of culture. They, too, were to undergo an assimilation process of absorption into a multinational Soviet culture. Each nation would contribute its best artistic accomplishments to a Soviet cultural canon of human artistic expression that belonged to all members of a united Soviet nation.

In connection with these goals, cross-cultural accessibility was at a premium in the Soviet context, and national art was evaluated for its potential to resonate across cultural borders.
Accordingly, the national elites who planned cross-cultural encounters were highly attentive to the reception of national artistic products by audiences external to the ethnic nation. Each republic presented its national art to an imagined Soviet nation, 170 million strong. Of course, the most important consideration was the Russian audience, which now graduated to the role of the admiring, validating, and more advanced cultural consumer that Western Europe had previously played for Russia. Particular methods were devised to meet the challenges of presenting national art to a diverse audience of non-nationals. For example, the national instrument orchestra, a cultural hybrid that provided audiences with simultaneous infusions of the familiar and the novel, became a requirement of Soviet national culture, though the categories of familiar and novel shifted with the audience. The historiography of Russian music acknowledges a similar audience-specific division with regard to the reception of Glinka, who “is valued in the West for the Russian flavor of [his] operas, which satisfied Western tastes for both the national and the exotic. But he was more important to his countrymen as the first to claim a place for Russia in the international music world.”

This disjunction between internal and external perception likewise attended the sharing of Soviet national art. In the case of Azerbaijan, for example, some observers see the development of Soviet Azerbaijani music, led by Hajibeyov, as a decline from cultural authenticity to mimicry

778 Because Moscow was the center of this Soviet international audience and because Russians comprised the largest national group among that audience, considerations of the Russian viewer dominated decisions about the cross-cultural accessibility of artistic products.

of Russian musical culture, including its Orientalist tropes. The general view in Azerbaijan, however, is that Hajibeyov was a preserver of tradition who, as founder of modern Azerbaijani professional music, enabled his country’s participation in international musical culture. In another example of diverging audience perceptions, Martin asserts that after the emergence of “the friendship campaign” in the 1930s, “the folkloric and exotic were celebrated uncritically.” The Azerbaijanis, however, wanted their high art to be taken seriously, not as exotica but on a par with the greatest accomplishments of world culture. The sense of pride derived from others’ admiration of national culture follows the Russian example of developing national identity, and was a feature of Soviet nation-building. In this outward-gazing perspective, the prestige the national culture commands among outsiders carries significant emotional value that becomes part of the host nation’s experience of its own art. Relatedly, the knowledge that a work of art is the product of the national imagination is evocative for the national audience. As suggested in the discussion of the Nizami monument design in Chapter 5, part of Azerbaijani national identity coalesced around the idea that only Azerbaijan could have produced such an innovative and universally relevant figure as Nizami Ganjevi. Consequently, only an Azerbaijani could understand Nizami’s worldview sufficiently to express it in a monument. In keeping with Soviet aesthetics, the narrative of national cultural production is thus encoded in the finished artistic product and becomes part of the national audience’s experience of it. In this way, self-presentation plays a role in the national audience’s consumption of its own art, reinforcing the interconnection between national and international.


781 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 443. Martin contrasts the climate of cross-cultural interaction in the later 1930s with that of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when “the exoticization of national culture … was one of the chief sins attributed to both nationalists and especially great-power chauvinists.”
As an extension of central nationalities policy, Moscow’s demands for cultural development in Azerbaijan were in many ways typical of those in other Soviet peripheries. Consequently, thematic elements of Azerbaijan’s response find parallels in the efforts of other republics, for example the insistence on the national poet as embodying the national character while evincing supranational talent. Noting Rustaveli’s declaration in the introduction to his epic poem *Knight in the Panther Skin* that the ensuing story is of Iranian origin and he has merely translated it into Georgian, a book published in the Rustaveli jubilee year of 1937 explains that the poem’s plot was so unique and specific, “it could not have arisen anywhere else but Georgia.”

Rustaveli Jubilee rhetoric places the poet alongside Firdousi and Dante: not only did all three suffer exile, but each was “deeply national” in his work while also going beyond national limits to create “works that are included in world literature as the best examples of poetic creativity.” Like Nizami and Rustaveli, Uzbekistan’s Alisher Nava’i, whose 500th jubilee celebration was delayed by World War II and finally held in 1948, was a “humanist” who worked to spread enlightenment and justice and was persecuted for his efforts.

Political undertows made the Soviet rituals developed for the exchange and celebration of national culture difficult for national republics to navigate. As described in chapters 3 through 5, the arbitrariness and brutality of the Stalin era, vague prescriptions and contradictory policy, cultural ignorance and Russian protectionism often stymied republican efforts and worked against Moscow’s own goals. While allies in the center, such as Russian writers Petr Skosyrev and Riurik Ivnev, provided some assistance, a republic’s fate on the “cultural front” depended on

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many factors, including but not limited to the perseverance, jockeying, and shrewdness of its own leadership. In the example of Azerbaijan’s dekada of 1938, what started out as a show for Moscow became an important step in the acquisition of cultural capital and self-confidence under the most perverse of circumstances. Although a chronology of the most important events in Azerbaijani history issued in 2007 does not mention the 1938 dekada in Moscow, it includes the 1937 Baku premiere of Hajibeyov’s opera *Koroglu* as one of only two entries for 1937 – the other is “repressions against party and state leaders, respected poets, writers, and public figures.” The opera is viewed in Azerbaijan as a milestone in national cultural development and remains part of the national repertoire today. The pair of 1937 entries in the chronology, then, is an eloquent comment on the intense contradictions of Azerbaijan’s dekada moment, which is defined by extremes of human capacity for creation and destruction. The years of the Great Terror coincide with the institutionalization of the dekada of national art, a time when the requirement and danger of promoting one’s own national culture were both at their height, and Azerbaijan’s turn came at perhaps the most inhospitable moment. Indeed, while two dekady took place in each of the years 1937 (Georgia, Uzbekistan) and 1939 (Kirgizia, Armenia), just one was held in 1938. In the two-year span of May 1937 to May 1939, only Azerbaijan presented itself on Moscow’s dekada stage.

Thus, while Azerbaijan’s cultural “development” in the Soviet era was, on one hand, representative of a more general experience, I also submit the republic’s leadership distinguished itself in leveraging the available resources in pursuit of a local national agenda while satisfying Moscow’s often unclear and even contradictory requirements for self-presentation and national cultural production. Azerbaijan’s ability to extract value from Soviet cultural activities derived

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785 Əkbər Qocayev, *Azerbaiyan tarixi. Ən mühüm hadisələrin xronoloji xülasəsi* (Baku: Çaşıoğlu, 2007), 108. The volume was issued in accordance with the guidelines of the Education Ministry of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
from circumstances both naturally occurring and man-made. Through savvy framing of its own cultural past and exploitation of the vagueness in Moscow’s policy, Azerbaijani cultural leaders were able to present their republic as a leading example of cultural synthesis, even preempting the center’s determination of what such a model should look like. As a result, Azerbaijan was able to present itself not only as a leader in the East, but, perhaps more significantly, as a leader in the cultural rapprochement between East and West.\textsuperscript{786}

With the underlying idea that interaction leads to cultural transformation and integration, manifestations of cultural isolationism were perilous in the Soviet Union. From the Bolshevik point of view, resistance to sharing national culture and increasing its accessibility, pursuit of a developmental path that diverged from the Russian example, and lack of interest in (or willingness to be influenced by) other national cultures were counterproductive behaviors. Since the road to internationalism ran through mutual interaction with other groups, such cross-cultural engagement distinguished permissible, proletarian nationalism from punishable bourgeois nationalism. While the Bolshevik plan included the development of nations, it did not tolerate separate national communisms such as those imagined by Sultangaliev and others in the Muslim East.\textsuperscript{787} Moreover, in Khalid’s words, “the revolution did not lead to a significant rethinking of Central Asia’s place in the cultural imagination of the European population of the Soviet state,” and few “European intellectuals … could move beyond the binaries that divided ‘Europe’ from ‘Asia,’ West from East, progress from backwardness.”\textsuperscript{788} Perhaps partially in response to this state of affairs, Central Asian modernizing reformers such as Abdurauf Fitrat were less interested

\textsuperscript{786} This is not to say that Soviet Azerbaijan’s formula for cultural rapprochement was the only one possible or realized the goals of earlier generations of Azerbaijani intellectuals. We cannot know what cultural products might have emerged from the human creativity impulse if the costs of experimentation in the Soviet era had been lower.


\textsuperscript{788} Khalid, \textit{Making Uzbekistan}, 208.
in cross-cultural interaction, borrowing, and compatibility than in establishing national cultural traditions that were “separate but equal.” As a result, those seen as subscribing to the isolationism of “bourgeois nationalism” were targeted for persecution already in the mid-1920s.

In contrast, as recent scholarship has pointed out, Azerbaijan’s penchant for cross-cultural interaction and borrowing with an eye to cultural synthesis predated the Soviet period. In addition to the musical theater experiments of Hajibeyov and others in the decades before the revolution, there were analogous developments in the literary sphere. Leah Feldman has traced the cultural synthesis characteristic of literary production in Azerbaijan from the mid-19th century through the 1920s. She identifies a number of literary figures who, she argues, pioneered the formation of what she calls “supranational literary traditions that engaged writers and thinkers across the Eurasian space including the Persian empire, the Ottoman empire, the Russian empire and Europe.” For example, Feldman analyzes how playwright, poet, and reformer Mirza Fatali Akhundov, drawing on Pushkin, “generates supranational texts that incorporate diverse Islamic, Russian and European theological, philosophical, cultural and political discourses.” In the 1910s and 1920s, she sees an “interest in the synergetic and synthetic possibilities of the word through its participation in worldly poetic traditions” as “common to both the Russian and Azeri avant-garde visions of the language.” Yet, she concludes, “[u]nlike their Russian counterparts,” whose “aims to form global, or at least supranational literary traditions … were limited by their reliance on the Russian canon,” the Azeris engaged in poetic experimentation that was “driven by shared ethnic and linguistic ties across the Eurasian space, through the imperial and cultural influence” emanating from a variety of directions. As a result,

the Azeris were well positioned to produce “the very sort of ‘organic’ synthesis and worldly poetic experiment that the Russian Futurists had imagined.” I have made a comparable argument here that in the Soviet era Azerbaijanis were poised to present themselves as a model for East-West cultural synthesis in the arts when Moscow was at a loss.

Music historian Fərəh Əliyeva extends the synthesis and heteroglossia Feldman identifies into Azerbaijan’s musical culture (though she does not refer to a supranational space). In contrast to scholars who present cultural developments in Soviet Azerbaijan as acquiescence to Moscow’s colonialist demands and view figures such as Hajibeyov as complicit in the adoption of Russian music at the expense of traditional culture, Əliyeva posits continuity between the pre-revolutionary and Soviet eras through the figure of Uzeyir Hajibeyov. To counter the pervasive argument that efforts to put “Azerbaijani music on a universal plane” started only in the Soviet period, Əliyeva cites a 1919 article by Hajibeyov in which he discusses the performance of note repertoire (including European music) on the tar (a string instrument prominent in the local musical tradition). She concludes that the article, written during the brief period of Azerbaijan’s independence before the installation of Soviet power, shows that the composer was already at this time contemplating reforms such as the reconstruction and tempering of musical instruments and therefore that these were not solely a Soviet imposition.

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793 The article, “Azərbaycan türklərinin musiqisi haqqında,” appeared in the newspaper İstiqlal (Independence), on 28 May 1919, the first anniversary of the declaration of the democratic republic of Azerbaijan. Əliyeva asserts that the piece has been neglected in the scholarship.
Specifically, Əliyeva interprets Hajibeyov’s article as suggesting fundamental compatibility between Eastern and Western musical (and cultural) systems.  

Relatedly, recent scholarship traces a pre-Soviet Azeri impulse to share its art with the world beyond Azerbaijan. Əliyeva cites Hajibeyov’s 1919 statement that “there will be a new Eastern music that, with progress, the Western music world will admire,” and suggests Koroglu as the fulfillment of this prediction. Even if by the 1930s many of the carriers of the avant-gardist spirit of cross-cultural valence and synthesis were purged or otherwise silenced, their ideals continued to inflect the production of Azerbaijani art. As a pioneer and exemplar of cultural synthesis, Əliyeva asserts, Azerbaijan occupies a unique place in world cultural integration and in the globalization process. While the assertion of one Soviet scholar that “a goal of developing any national culture is the opportunity for contact with other [nations], no matter their language, culture, or literary tastes” might seem strange to those who see the formation of national cultural identity as a process that unfolds internally, the statement is an apt reflection of Soviet theory and Azerbaijani practice.

In a sense, Azerbaijan was better equipped than Russia to pursue and exemplify the ideal of cultural synthesis. Yet even if, as Feldman argues, the Azeri avant-garde of the early 20th century used their capacity for cultural synthesis to experiment with staking out a supranational cultural space, other contemporary forces exerted pressure to define the nation. In the wake of World War I, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic felt the need to demonstrate to the Paris Peace Conference a national flag, anthem, holidays, and other trappings of nationhood in a bid to

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796 Ibid., 188-9.

797 Ibid., 230.

secure for itself “the gift of national self-determination, the promise of peace.” Likewise, the blinkered Russian framers of Soviet policy were unable to imagine a path to socialist internationalism that bypassed the Russian experience. As a result, the policy they devised, though it aimed at socialist internationalism, did not recognize the post- or supranational but instead incentivized the definition of national cultural identity so that it could be shared with others. Failure to manifest a national cultural identity was interpreted as a sign of cultural backwardness. Understanding this, Azerbaijani cultural leaders followed Soviet policy and took a page from the Russian playbook, positing a unique capacity for cultural synthesis as a national trait. Expressions of this Azerbaijani talent for cultural fusion are often presented as eternally modern and universally relevant contributions to world culture, and as such they occupy an important place in modern Azerbaijani national identity. Azerbaijani desire for recognition from outside the nation led to the insistent framing of its culture as national and international at the same time.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the Nizami narrative disseminated in connection with the poet’s 800th jubilee articulated this interrelationship, crystallizing it as a central feature of Azerbaijani national identity. These themes run through many examples of Azerbaijani cultural endeavor and self-presentation in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. In the early 1940s, in connection with the upcoming jubilee, Hajibeyov set two ghazals by Nizami Ganjevi to music, creating the new vocal genre of romance-ghazal (romans-qəzəl). Premiered by Bülbül in the 1940s, the songs became popular among the general Soviet (and Soviet satellite) audience in the

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800 Ghazal is an Eastern poetic form. The two songs are Sansiz (Without you, known in Russian as Bez tebie) and Sevgili canan (Beloved, known in Russian as Vozliublennaiia).
1960s in performances by the singer Muslim Magomayev (Müslüm Maqomayev). The songs underline Azerbaijan’s self-image as bridge between East and West, past and present, ancient and modern, and as a force of innovative synthesis. Leaders in post-Soviet Azerbaijan have preserved this aspect of national identity, seeing in it an opportunity to project Azerbaijan’s modernity and relevance in an age of increasing globalization. In 2012, Azerbaijan enjoyed a moment in the international cultural spotlight when, as a result of its winning entry in the previous year’s competition, the country hosted the Eurovision Song Contest.

In the last two decades, the government of Azerbaijan has worked to place monuments to Nizami Ganjevi in cities around the world, from Beijing to Ljubljana. At the 2002 unveiling of a new Nizami monument in St. Petersburg, Russian President Vladimir Putin returned to the rhetoric of Samad Vurgun at the 1940 Dekada of Azerbaijani Literature in Moscow, declaring that Nizami’s work “belongs to all humanity” and “brings nations together.” He even referred to Nizami’s tale of the Slavic Princess as evidence of the long friendship between the Russian and Azerbaijani peoples. Indeed, the rhetoric and strategies devised in the 1930s and ‘40s to express Azerbaijan’s national identity remain in use today. In connection with Nizami’s 870th jubilee in 2011, the Azerbaijani government established the Nizami Ganjevi International Center (Nizami Gəncəvi Beynəlxalq Mərkəzi), whose mission is “to promote Learning, Tolerance,

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801 Admired for his voice and good looks, Muslim Magomayev (1942-2008), who grew up in Azerbaijan and sang Azerbaijani songs, achieved fame and popularity throughout the Soviet space starting in the 1960s. He still has a small but ardent group of fans in Russia, mostly drawn from the generation that came of age in the 1960s and 70s and consider Magomayev’s songs to be the soundtrack of their youth. In 2011, a statue of Magomayev was unveiled in Moscow, opposite the apartment building where he lived, next door to the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The singer was the grandson of composer Muslim Magomayev (1884-1937), discussed in earlier chapters.

802 Azerbaijan seized the opportunity to showcase itself, outspending previous and subsequent hosts of the annual event.

803 There are Azerbaijan-sponsored Nizami monuments in Rome, Chisinau, and Tashkent, among other cities. Monuments are planned for Cairo and Athens.

804 Putin speech from opening of Nizami monument in St. Petersburg, 9 June 2002. Accessed at www.mid.ru/ru/maps/az/-/asset_publisher/0TeVwfiLGJmg/content/id/554452, 19 July 2017. The monument was designed jointly by a Russian and an Azerbaijani.
Dialogue and Understanding.” The Center organizes gatherings of non-governmental representatives of the world’s nations to discuss universal issues.

The themes of diversity and inclusiveness as traditional features of Azerbaijani life remain prominent in the image the state seeks to project to visitors. Foreign students studying in Baku are given a tour of various religions’ houses of worship. They are taught to refer to the local language as Azerbaijani, rather than Azeri. Longtime Bakuvians (bakılkar, bakıntsı) are known to remark on the city’s signature diversity. Through interviews with locals, Bruce Grant has identified shifts in the vocabulary popularly used to describe Baku’s hallmark atmosphere of pluralism: after Stalin, the propaganda-tainted rhetoric of “internationalism” was displaced by “cosmopolitanism,” which has yielded in the post-Soviet era to “tolerance.” His findings show both the staying power and the changeability of this piece of Azerbaijan’s identity as it has been reimagined at different political-historical moments.

Moving beyond the Caucasus, the analysis in this dissertation has implications for our understanding of Soviet nationalities policy and, by extension, for aspects of the Soviet experiment more generally. Past characterizations of Soviet nationalities policy have invoked Russocentrism and chronic ethnophilia, oppression or promotion of ethnic minorities, a continuation of imperial Russian attitudes or a conscious reversal of them. The present study suggests a path that runs between these extremes, conditioned by all of them – in other words, a path of synthesis. Further, my emphasis on continuities in the underpinnings and implementation of Soviet nationalities policy over time is not imply denial or dismissal of shifts and

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806 The civic designation ‘Azerbaijani’ is more inclusive than ‘Azeri,’ which refers to ethnicity.
807 The late decades of Soviet rule are often presented as the height of this diversity because this period was followed by the departure of large numbers of Armenians and Jews, two of the city’s significant ethnic populations, with the start of tensions over Karabagh and the Soviet collapse. Bruce Grants points out, however, that this perception does not necessarily accord with actuality, as “Baku was arguably just as diverse in 1900, as it was in 1970, as it is today.” (Bruce Grant, “Cosmopolitan Baku,” Ethnos 75/2 (2010): 123-47, here 124)
808 Ibid.
modifications identified in previous periodizations. Rather, it is meant to point out the seeds of this variety that were present from the policy’s inception and that become more apparent when analytical focus is trained on the arts, which invite consideration of culture’s communicability to the audience of nations.
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