Stalin’s Baku Curve: A Detonating Mixture of Crime and Revolution

by

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Leadership Higher and Adult Education, OISE
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Abstract

The Stalin’s Baku Curve, a Detonating Mix of Crime and Revolution presents a brief insight into the early period of activities of one of the most ominous political figures of the 20th century – Joseph Stalin.

The major emphasis of the work is made on Stalin’s period in Baku in 1902-1910. A rapidly growing industrial hub providing almost half of the world’s crude oil, Baku was in the meantime a brewery of revolutionary ideas. Heavily imbued with crime, corruption and ethnic tensions, the whole environment provided an excellent opportunity for Stalin to undergo his “revolutionary universities” through extortion, racketeering, revolutionary propaganda and substantial incarceration in Baku’s famous Bailov prison.

Along with this, the Baku period brought Stalin into close contact with the then Russian secret police, Okhranka. This left an indelible imprint on Stalin’s character and ruling style as an irremovable leader of the Soviet empire for almost three decades.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work became possible due to the tremendous input of several scholars whom I want to hereby recognize.

The first person I owe the paper *Stalin’s Baku Curve, a Detonating Mix of Crime and Revolution* to is Simon Sebag Montefiore, an indefatigable researcher of former Soviet and pre-Soviet history whom I had a pleasure of working with in Baku back in 1995. Twenty years later, I still cherish the sweetest memories of Simon’s enthusiasm and profound knowledge that finally evolved into a fascinating book, *Young Stalin*. It was this very substantial and fascinating work that became a backbone of my thesis.

Special thanks to Professor David Levine who conducted the three most memorable courses I took at OISE and whose advise was second to none in shaping my thesis.

My particular appreciation to the scholars from the Museum of History in Baku, Azerbaijan, its Director Mrs.Nailya Velikhanly in particular, for assisting me in filling up some gaps in the course of researching Stalin’s activities in Baku.

The input of all the persons mentioned above, as well as works by ex-Soviet and Western authors were absolutely instrumental in preparing this humble work.

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INTRODUCTION:

_Soso’s Youth: All Young People Are the Same?_

A study of the subterranean worm and the silent chrysalis before it hatched the steel-winged butterfly

Dmitry Volkogonov¹

The more famous a person is due to the oftentimes self-created myth or cult, the more shadowy and obscure his early life may appear. This obscurity is very often created by the same myth-makers who, while concocting the image of a kind of demigod, thoroughly obliterate anything that could shadow the person to be deified.

This is absolutely true with Stalin. Crowning the Soviet political Olympus for good three decades, ‘the Father of Nations’ was always reluctant to delve into nitty-gritty of his turbulent youth. ‘All young people are the same’, elderly Stalin liked to say puffing away at his pipe, ‘so why write…about young Stalin?’

Yet Uncle Joe was dubious, as always. He was totally different. Different from all of his peer revolutionaries from other parts of the vast Russian Empire. In the meantime he was different from the Caucasians too, particularly Georgians, traditionally known for being romantic and passionate. In fact, not being a surly brute, he could play the chivalrous Georgian suitor. However, he combined the coarse Caucasian virility with Victorian prudery and was obviously neither a sensualist, nor an epicurean, according to S.Sebag Montefiore, one of the most recognized experts on Stalin in general, and young Stalin in particular.

Shadowy as it may seem, Stalin’s early years were truly extraordinary and way more eventful as opposed to those of Lenin or Trotsky. In fact, it was this turbulent youth that both equipped him and poisoned him with the habits so essential for running the Soviet Empire with the scope of power and omnipotence that the Romanov Emperors could not even dream of in their very heyday.

Stalin’s revolutionary accomplishments, as well as his crimes during the period of the Russian Empire (i.e. prior to 1917) were much greater than one may think from the outside. To be frank, they were so much interrelated and intertwined that one may have hard times to discern purely revolutionary activities from the criminal ones. Agitation and propaganda mixed with bank robberies and violent attacks, strikes mixed with protection rackets and extortion, political demonstrations and pamphlets mixed with piracy, arson and murder resulted in a unique and explosive formula of political gangsterism that not only impressed Lenin and other top communist leaders but equipped Stalin with skills that would make him impenetrable in the political jungle of the Soviet Union in later decades.

Contrary to the Mensheviks (a more moderate wing of the Russian social-democrats) or even some fellow-bolsheviks like Zinoviev, Kamenev, Bukharin (all of them later exterminated by Stalin), or even Lenin himself, Koba (one of Stalin’s nicknames) was not afraid to take physical risks when it came to refueling the party’s coffers through expropriations and racketeering.

That being said, Stalin was much more than merely a gangster godfather. He was also a political organizer, a capable enforcer and an intricate master in infiltrating the Imperial security forces. Unlike many of recognized Soviet political leaders denouncing terror (most of them purged by Stalin in later periods), he was never afraid to take physical risks. Meanwhile, he could equally act as an independent and thoughtful politician, journalist and editor, never fearing to confront and even contradict some highly esteemed party leaders including Lenin.

Another important aspect not to be overseen in understanding the young Stalin was a very unusual mix of his education brewed on the religious seminary, street violence, and last but not least, the prison universities. A unique lenience of the Russian Royal Regime with its heavy-handed and corrupt administration turned pre-Revolutionary prisons into true universities and training centers for people like Stalin and his comrades.

It was this unparalleled system of prison and exile education featuring Russian Empire that resulted in a whole brood of ‘intellectual killers’ with Stalin being one the most outstanding, if not the key figure among them.
Interesting enough, in most family photos made either in prison or exile and arranged by young Stalin, he would place himself in the middle of the upper row, in a way vaulting the cohort that would mastermind and execute the violent revolt in 1917. A great number of these comrades will fall the victims of their own product in the 1930-1950’s. A great many, but not Stalin, for he will be the one who will be liquidating them with the same zeal of witch-hunter he displayed while hunting out traitors and spooks in his younger years. This way or another, Stalin became an ideal ‘lieutenant’ for Lenin in his violent October Revolution of 1917.

That being said, the present work will not go beyond 1917, for this is not the biography of one of the most potent and ominous dictators of the 20th century. What I’d like to hereby attempt is shedding some light into Stalin’s younger years, particularly the time he spent in Baku, then one of Russia’s most exuberant and troublesome industrial hubs that left an indelible imprint in Stalin’s biography.

The time span to be covered may seem really short, the decade of the 1900’s. At the first glance, it may not even seem that eventful. The First World War followed by revolutions is several years ahead, and the Russian Empire seems to be mighty and unbeatable. Yet, the tension and unrest are there, mostly tangible in major industrial hubs like Baku, Batum or administrative centers like Tiflis. And that’s where we see young Koba most active virulently provoking future collapse.

As far as the sources for the present work are concerned, they are not that numerous. I will mainly rely upon Simon Sebag Montefiore’s Young Stalin. The matter is not that there are no other sources. On the contrary, figures like Stalin have always nurtured a lot of interest and speculation. I’m far from claiming that S.Sebag Montefiore’s book is the only and the best of its kind. That said, he is among the most recognized experts on Stalin with his other work, Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar, becoming a true bestseller. In the same vein, Young Stalin is a very well-researched and substantiated book shedding light to the formation period of Joseph Djugashvili, also known as Koba, Soso, the Priest, the Milkman, the Mountain Eagle, etc.

Last but not least, the reason for selecting Young Stalin the major source is quite personal. Back in 1997, I happened to cooperate with Simon in Baku where he was collecting information on one of his hero’s most important youth periods, clashes with local oil barons, etc. I wish I could
be more helpful to Simon then, however I’m very thankful to him for kindly mentioning me in his acknowledgements.

The major questions I’ll try to touch upon this way or another, were posed by SSM in the outset of his book, and these are the following:

1. “What missing empathy in Stalin’s upbringing allowed him to kill so easily, but equally what quality equipped him so well for political life?” In other words, what was the path of the cobbler’s son of 1878 (1879 in other sources), the idealistic seminarian of 1898, the brigand, robber, revolutionary and prisoner of the 1900’s in Batum, Tiflis and Baku, and the forgotten exile Siberian hunter in 1914 to the fanatical Marxist mass-murderer of the 1930’s, the conqueror of Berlin in 1945 and the self-made Saint in his country till his very death in 1953?

2. How could a person referred to as a ‘provincial mediocrity’ by Trotsky, a ‘grey slur’ by Sukhanov and ‘The Man Who Missed the Revolution’ by Robert Slusser, outsmart intellectuals like Lenin, Bukharin or Trotsky, and become the super-effective although equally homicidal world leader? How come did he outplay Churchill and Roosevelt during WW2 and defeat Hitler? How did he manage to make millions of people live and die with his name in the war, peacetime and even in Gulag prisons? Of course, this paper won’t provide an in-depth answer to this question, for this is the matter of a separate work of Sebag Montefiore’s scale, however, the question I’ll try to answer based on Stalin’s Baku experience is short and unequivocal:

3. Was Stalin an agent (informant) for the Okranka (the Imperial secret police)? This issue has become a talk of the town for generations of researchers, nurturing substantial speculations. Claims of Stalin’s being a double-agent for the Tsar’s secret service are far from being uncommon. Meanwhile, even the chiefs of Stalin’s own punitive service, the NKVD, like N.Yezhov and L.Beria, secretly sought for such an evidence to use it against Stalin should he turn against them – as he did to Yezhov. Interesting enough, none of them, despite unlimited access to secret service archives, succeeded in finding any trace of that ‘smoking gun’. There is no positive answer to this in S.Sebag Montefiore’s book, however his analysis of Stalin’s interrelations with the Okhranka leads to even deeper conclusions explaining Stalin’s behavior as the Soviet leader.
The youth of Joseph Djugashvili (Stalin) has always been a mystery. If before 1917 he cultivated the mystique of obscurity of a person specialized in ‘black work’ of underground, once in power, “Stalin’s campaign to succeed Lenin required a legitimate heroic career which he did not possess because of his experience in what he called ‘the dirty business’ of politics: this could not be told, either because it was too gangsterish for a great paternalistic statesman or because it was too Georgian for a Russian leader”². Hence the need to ‘launder’ Stalin’s dirty youth through an all-embracing cult of personality. On the other hand, the class-based communist values did not consider criminal offences as felony should they be committed against representatives of so-called “propertied classes”.

Identifying himself as ‘a professional revolutionary’, Stalin was, in fact, one of the first representatives of a whole cohort of later Soviet leaders for whom underground was a natural habitat. Yet they managed to move through it with elusively feline grace and menace. A born extremist and conspirator oftentimes portentously presented as ‘The Man in Grey’, he was in the meantime a true believer and ‘a Marxist fanatic from his youth’. The violent rites of Stalin’s Caucasian conspiracy in later decades developed into a very specific ruling culture extended upon the whole of the Soviet Union.³ Meanwhile, Baku had always been one of the major ground field’s of this Caucasian conspiracy.

What makes the Baku period of young Stalin ever more interesting is that in a very short historic snapshot it presents not only an important part of Stalin’s biography or his milieu, but a pre-history of the whole USSR.

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² SSM
³ Alexandra Svanidze-Monoselidze. Souvarine. Staline
Why Baku?
Undergraduate Classes in Batumi Followed by Baku Graduate Studies

It was through Baku that he made himself known on the scale of Russia, graduating from ‘an apprentice to a craftsman of the Revolution’. It was here where he became the ‘second Lenin’.

Robert W. Tolf

The reason why Baku became one of the major milestones of young Stalin’s biography is quite simple – oil. Oil production in the area of Baku had been known from times immemorial. Some researchers trace the earliest recollections of extracting oil back to the times of Hamurrapi and the Babylonian dynasty. According to Sarah Searight, “Baku located on the sandy south-west shore of the Caspian Sea, has been renowned for its oil some 3,000 years”. Herodotus and Vitruvius reported that crude oil (bitumen) from Baku’s surroundings was used as “mortar in the walls of Babylon” and “as binding agent mixed with the clay”. Back in 700-600 B.C., “oil was both for medicinal purposes and for heating and lighting in homes, whereas so called ‘fuel oil’ was known for being transported from Absheron Peninsula (where Baku is located – A.F.) to Iran, Iraq and India”.

With all this history of oil production, Baku remained a tiny old fortress by the time it was conquered by Russia in 1806. About 5 thousand residents of the Citadel (nowadays inscribed on the UNESCO Cultural Heritage List) were mainly involved in crafts, commerce and navigation. Some hundred hand-dug oil pits were nationalized upon the Gulustan Peace Treaty of 1813 between Russia and Persia to be then farmed out to private persons since 1820. The period of land-farming did not exceed 4 years. Needless to say, the so-called oil farmers were not motivated to invest unless they owned the land. Abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861, followed by a set of reforms triggered the growth of a huge domestic market, and the first thing the new Russian market required badly was oil and kerosene.

4 Robers W. Tolf. The Russian Rockefellers
5 Sarah Searight, Britain in Iran 1790-1980
Meanwhile, the local oil farmers were reluctant to increase the output of crude unless they were guaranteed control over the land. So it was in the general context of Russian reforms of the 1860-70’s that resulted in concessions introduced in Baku’s oil fields in 1872. This had an effect of letting the genie out of the bottle. The oil rush turned an old citadel into one of the most rapidly growing industrial hubs of Russia producing almost 51 per cent of the world’s crude in 1901.6

Some astounding oil gushers in Baku were given names like Wet Nurse, Golden Bazaar, Devil Bazaar.7 Impressive as they looked, the fountains created a true environmental disaster aggravated by frequent fires at the oil fields. In fact, Lumiere Brothers’ film Oil Wells of Baku: Close View may be considered the first environmental production ever made. A 36-second view shot by Kamil Serf with a stationery camera in 1896 depicts a huge flame and black smoke of burning local wells as just a mere if not regular event, concentrating more on a breathtakingly spectacular picture it presents.8

The Baku of the 1890’s could be compared to an American frontier town, with oil instead of gold inviting outsiders to compete for economic gain. The view of the old town changed dramatically. The mediaeval citadel of Icheri Sheher (the Inner Town, now inscribed on UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List), still encircled by the 12th century Rampart, accrued another set of architecture looking more European but expanding in an aggressive style of booming American towns. The old wall, luckily preserved, became a sort of cleavage and border between a dormant Asian Fortress and a rapidly growing Euro-American city. A Baku-born Jewish writer Lev Nussinbaum, author of one of young Stalin’s biographies and a fascinating love story of Ali & Nino, provides the following description of the Oil Boom Baku downtown:

“There were really two towns, one inside the other, like a kernel and a nut. Outside the Old Wall was the Outer Town, with wide streets, high houses, its people noisy and greedy for money. This Outer town was built because of the oil that comes out from our desert and brings riches. There were theatres, schools, hospitals, libraries, policemen and beautiful women with naked shoulders. If there was shooting in the Outer Town, it was always about money. Europe’s geographical border began in the Outer Town... Inside the Old Wall the streets were narrow and

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6 R.Movsumzadeh, V.Samadov, The Role of Baku in the Commercial Fleet of Russian Empire
7 Daniel Yergin, The Prize
curved like oriental daggers. Minarets pierced the mild moon so different from the oil derricks the House of Nobel had erected”.

In fact, Baku’s Outer Town built by the oil barons will be mainly targeted by Stalin. In the meantime, the Citadel with its hidden nooks and ‘minarets piercing the moon’ will be an appropriate place to find shelter from police raids, sometimes in mosques, where no spook would ever imagine him to be.

That being said, there was another facet of that-time Baku that attracted Stalin most of all. The oil fields, surrounded by slums, poverty-stricken, miserable, rife with crime and destitution, with reeking streets and overflowing cesspools beside oozing oil fields and refineries. This would become Stalin’s element where the famous communist slogan ‘Piece to shacks, war to palaces’ will be coined. This stark contrast between lush exuberance and outrageous destitution created very beneficial preconditions for young Soso’s activities from the very outset.

According to Essad Bey, (another penname of Leo Nussimbaum), Baku in the dys of Stalin’s youth was “equal parts Dodge City, mediaeval Baghdad, industrial Pittsburgh and nineteenth-century Paris’. The city was “too Persian to be European but much too European to be Persian”. Its police bosses were notoriously venal; its Azeri and Armenian communities armed and vigilant; its plentiful gangsters, named Gochu and Mauserists either guarded the Azeri and Armenian oil tycoons (respectively) or performed assassinations for several rubles a victim. All in all, Baku was an Oriental version of the Wild West run by a completely corrupt and money-grubbing Russian administration.
Depressed oil prices exacerbated ethnic and political discord in Baku. The population grew almost tenfold within the first three decades of the oil boom, and then was doubling each 8-10 years reaching 215 thousand residents by 1913. Unparalleled ethnic and religious diversity featured the oil boom Baku with Azeris and Russians counting for 34 and 36 per cent of the population respectively, followed by Armenians (19 per cent). These three ethnic groups were dominant among the workers. The city’s overall ethnic composition was way richer though.

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9 Kurban Said (one of L.Nussimbaum’s pen names in emigration), Ali & Nino, p.17
10 Essad-Bey. Blood and Sword in the Caucasus.
11 SSM, p.162
Traditionally tolerant attitude towards the Jews resulted in almost a 10 thousand strong community (4.5 per cent of the population)\textsuperscript{12}, the largest one in the Caucasus and the forth largest in Baku. By the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century the Jewish community, one of the most affluent ethnic groups in Baku, controlled about 11 per cent of the oil production.\textsuperscript{13}

The most influential Jewish-owned oil company that Stalin had a very intricate interrelations with both in Baku and beyond, was Rothschild’s \textit{Caspian Black Sea Oil Company}. Established in 1881 by baron Alphonse Rothschild, it grew into the second largest oil company in Russia after the Nobel Brothers’ due to a very peculiar fact. Rothschild was the first to deliver the oil from land-locked shore of the Caspian Sea to the world markets. The way he did it was building the railroad and then the pipeline linking Baku with Batumi, a tiny easternmost harbour in the Black Sea gained by Russia from Ottoman Empire shortly prior to Rothschild’s arrival, in 1878.

In fact, the idea of delivering Baku’s oil to the other side of the Caucasian isthmus was mulled before when two engineers, Bunge and Palashkovski, drafted what is nowadays known as feasibility studies for the railroad connecting the Caspian with the Black Sea. However the project was not executed due to lack of funds. The Rothschilds provided money, and the railroad was built within a record-breaking period by 1883. This turned Batumi, once a pirate seaside nest, into one of the busiest ports in the area with newly-built refineries featuring Naphtha Harbor and tankers moored nearby.\textsuperscript{14} As S. Sebag Montefiore notes, “suddenly Batumi, also the port for manganese, liquorice and tea, became a ‘door to Europe’, Georgia’s only modern town”.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Baku and Its Environ, Annual Inquiry Book, 1914
\textsuperscript{13} SHVUT Jewish studies of former Soviet Union, 1996
\textsuperscript{14} SSM, p.77
\textsuperscript{15} Ironically, Stalin will use the railroad and pipeline to Batumi to provide Hitler with Baku oil in 1939-1941
The Batumi Adventures

*Ascent of Stalin’s enforcer, Kamo*

*Throughout his life, Stalin’s detached magnetism would attract, and win the devotion of amoral, unbounded psychopaths. His boyhood henchman Kamo and these gangsters were the first in A long line. These young men followed Stalin selflessly...Their admiration for him allowed him to impose on them his iron discipline.*

Simon Sebag Montefiore

A very interesting by-product of Baku’s oil boom, Batumi had an obvious semblance with Baku, although on a smaller scale, due to its stark contrasts and plethora of opportunities. On the one hand, it was a pleasure town with a seaside boulevard, white Cuban-style mansions, sumptuous brothels, a casino, a cricket pitch and an English Yacht Club. On the other hand, its 16,000 workers of Turkish, Persian, Greek, Georgian, Armenian and Russian descent were living in the same miserable conditions as in Baku’s slums.

Stalin’s saga in Baku should be therefore preceded by his Batumi adventures. It was Batumi where Soso Djugashvili, already watched by police in Tiflis, left for in November 1901 to get a job with the Rothschilds at the storage facility of their refinery for a daily salary of 6 abaz (1 ruble 20 kopecks) a day, far not the worst salary for that time, one must admit…

Unbelievably, but the world-wide famous Franco-Jewish dynasty of financial and industrial tycoons who combined huge power with glamour and cosmopolitanism of international capitalism employed the future supreme pontiff of international communism who bragged his comrades laughingly and almost singing: “I am working for the Rothschilds!” “I hope the Rothschilds will start to prosper from this moment onwards!”, replied one of them. Stalin’s response came pat indeed.
On January 4, 1902, Batumi was caught in fire when Soso cheerfully boasted: “You know, man, your words came true! The Rothschilds would indeed prosper with me as an employee. My warehouse caught fire!”

Not only did this stir up all Batumi, turning once a quiet and prosperous seaside place upside down and making it a nest for political unrest, but it also started quite a murky but lucrative relationship of Stalin with the Rothschilds and other oil barons’ management to be furthermore continued in Baku.

The Rothschilds, confident in the case’s being an arson refused to pay bonus for the emergency management. This was exactly the step Stalin expected to call a strike. Authorities and secret police (Okhranka) were on their toes trying to apprehend Batumi’s new agitator, but he was already off for Tiflis by train to procure printing press to broaden the strike. The printing press was obtained through Suren Spandarian, an Armenian revolutionary also known as unrestrained Casanova, whose affluent father was a newspaper editor. One of Stalin’s best friends, Spandarian printed Armenian pamphlets on his father’s presses and reportedly supplied Stalin with a separate printing press.

The printing press was delivered to Batumi by Stalin assisted by another buddy, also of Armenian descent, Simon Ter-Petrossian nicknamed Kamo, a psychopath, childhood friend and cutthroat whose most frequent request to Soso would be like “Let me cut his throat!” An unsurpassed bank-robber, killer and master of disguises – from a washerwoman to a prince – he led Stalin’s heists all over the Caucasus robbing huge sums of money for the communist party.

Known for his outrageous raids and holdups, Kamo was in charge of training special forces during the Civil War in Russia (1918-1920). According to S. Sebag Montefiore, ‘the psychotic former bank-robber was obsessed with tests of loyalty under fire. To this end, he devised a plan to simulate his unit’s capture by enemy Whites. At night he would seize the comrades and lead them out to be shot. If any began to beg for mercy and turn traitor, he would shot them.”That way”, said Kamo “you could be absolutely sure they wouldn’t let you down”’.

Needless to say, these ‘tests’ generated enormous victims among the Red Army officers, as opposed to the hostile Whites, both physically and mentally. The example of the latter one was

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16 SSM, Young Staalin, p.164
Fyodor Alliluyev, Stalin’s brother-in-law, also serving in special forces under Kamo’s command. When one of the ‘tested’ Red Army soldiers revealed himself and was shot on the spot, the ‘ultimate test’ followed whereby Kamo cut open the chest and tore out the heart. “Here is the heart of your officer!” – he told Fyodor.

Fyodor lost his mind, spent a number of years in hospital to become an normal person again. He never worked, but he managed to outlive Stalin by two years and the psychopath Kamo who was ‘accidentally’ killed in peacetime in 1922 when his bicycle was overrun by a truck in Tbilisi (Georgia) when very few bikes and even fewer trucks were found.

Back in early 1902, upon their return to Batumi with printing press, Stalin and Kamo found the city in uproar. The printing press was set up quickly to broadcast Stalin’s messages to the workers. As a result, the Rothschilds gave up consenting to the demands, including 30 per cent pay rise. This was the first impressive victory of ‘comrade Soso’, also known as ‘Soso the Priest’ among local Gendarmes who intensified their surveillance of the enigmatic young trouble-maker.

Meanwhile Stalin found a refuge at the worker’s township of Barskhana in a little house of a 22-year-old peasant beauty Natasha Kirtava. According to Batumi lore, Kirtava’s memories and his own later proposals, Stalin enjoyed a love affair with this young married woman, the first but far not the last in his numerous mistress land-ladies and conspiratorial comrades.17

Meanwhile the Rothschilds managers were determined to retaliate. On February 26, 1902, 389 trouble-making workers were dismissed. The workers went on strike again. This led to a harsh crackdown by General Samyghin, the Governor of Kutaisi Province that included Batumi, whose message was tough: “Back to work or Siberia!” Suppression resulted in arrests of the strike leaders, including Stalin’s bodyguards, on March 7. Demonstrations arranged by Stalin the next day in front of the prison led to a violent attack and attempted prison storm leaving 13 dead and 54 wounded. Stalin’s reaction to this was extremely agitated: “Today we advanced several years!- he exclaimed, - We lost comrades but we won.” Further tension and hostilities resulted in Stalin’s arrest in April, 1902, and his first exposure to the Tsarist prison system.

17 SSM, Young Stalin, p.78
Both in Batumi, as well as in Baku in later years, Stalin became the prison kingpin, dominating his friends, terrorizing the intellectuals, suborning the guards and befriending the criminals.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Trotsky, the prisons, ‘like the country itself, combined barbarism with paternalism’.\textsuperscript{19} However, no matter how barbaric, in majority of cases, the Tsarist prisons kept political prisoners apart from thugs. They would be usually placed in one big cell known as ‘the Church’ where they would select their ‘Elders’. When once in Kutaisi jail, known for its severe regime, the prison Governor refused to comply with Stalin’s demand to place him with political prisoners, Soso launched a noisy protest when hundreds of prisoners started banging doors so loudly that the whole town was alarmed. The governor called for troops but ultimately complied.

In general, revolutionaries, so-called ‘sacred intellectuals’ and self-appointed ‘crusaders’, considered themselves too elevated to deal with mere thugs. Stalin was different in that too. Traditionally despised by some revolutionary leading lights like Trotsky and others, he preferred criminals because, as he admitted, ‘there were too many rats among the politica\textlins’. With his detest to duplicitous chatter of intellectuals, he got ‘rats’ killed even in jail.

Hostile to bumptious intellectuals, Stalin was quite successful in mentoring less elevated worker-revolutionaries, the ones who did not arouse his inferiority complex. He stood for his nickname ‘the Priest’ by organizing the reading of books and magazines and lecturing the prisoners.\textsuperscript{20}

According to S.Sebag Montefiore, the Russian Imperial authorities erred seriously when they allowed revolutionaries to study in prisons. In fact, not only did they allow the studies but they indirectly promoted them by placing the political prisoners separately from mere offenders and creating a very productive milieu for the most advanced ones, like Stalin, to train their peers.

Prison conditions proved to be very beneficial for obsessive autodidacts like Stalin who, according to his cellmates, ‘spent the whole day reading and writing… His prison day had a strict routine: he woke up early in the morning, did morning exercises, then studied German, and read economic literature. He never rested and he liked to recommend comrades what books to read…” Another fellow prisoner noted that Stalin turned ‘prison into a university’ by calling it

\textsuperscript{18} Keke (Stalin’s mother): Mgeladze pp.154-5, \textit{Police reports and Keke’s requests}.  
\textsuperscript{19} L.B.Trotsky, \textit{Recollections and Thoughts}  
\textsuperscript{20} SSM, p.91
his ‘second school’. In fact, for many revolutionaries of low-class origin, the Tsarist prisons were the first and oftentimes the only school they got.

The prison guards easily turned a blind eye on these studies either because they viewed the revolutionaries as a sort of ‘gentlemen’ socially superior to them, or because they were bribed or oftentimes even sympathetic to them. Stalin’s prison records indicate his authority not only over prisoners but officers alike. The Tsarist police, bribable in general, were notoriously venal in the Caucasus.

Interestingly enough, while in power, Stalin eradicated this prison leniency with an iron hand. Political prisoners were be mixed with the most arrant thugs to be oftentimes tortured and humiliated by latter ones. The very concept of ‘political prisoner’ will be outlawed (exactly the case in majority of the newly independent ex-Soviet states today), and political dissent punished through ordinary criminal offences, either concocted or provoked. A brilliant graduate of the Tsarist prison universities, Stalin will create a totally different penitentiary that could only reproduce thugs, the type of prison population he was never alien to himself.

The underground work and prison in Batumi followed by the Siberian exile, escape and further revolts and violence in Tiflis and Western Georgia made Stalin quite ready and willing to try himself on a greater scale, i.e. Baku, the major industrial hub and hotbed for revolutionary ideas in the South Caucasus.
Target Audiences in Baku:  
*Azeri Workers, Local Gangsters, Oil Barons*  

*His plain speaking outflanked the grand oratory of more flamboyant performers whom the workers distrusted.*  

*Simon Sebag Montefiore*

Stalin’s first exposure to Baku occurred in the fall of 1904, when he ‘got in a right place at a right time’. The oil boom town was overtaken by a huge December strike due to the Bolshevik (i.e. communist) propaganda. Stalin immediately found himself in his own element and, once again, was instrumental in an impressive success of the strike when the so called *Collective Agreement (Labor Contract)*, the first of its kind in Russian Empire, was signed between the workers and the employers.

One of the reasons of Stalin’s success in Baku was that he tried to address a brand new audience, i.e. the Azeri and Persian workers, oftentimes illiterate and traditionally not involved in large-scale political activities. This made a great deal of difference, for the more ‘intellectual’ revolutionaries were too snobbish to ‘bother with these illiterates’. Contrary to them, Soso packed meetings with the Muslims whom soon he managed to get a great support of. He was one of the founders of *Hummat*, a Muslim pro-communist group who provided him assistance when he happened to be on the run.

In fact, by trying to get Muslim workers involved Stalin filled up an empty niche. Azeri workers from rural provinces of Russian and Iranian Azerbaijan provided the bulk of workers in labor-intensive oil industry. However, due to lower education and training they were used in the heaviest and most low-paid types of work. Pretty much mistreated as opposed to the Armenian and Russian workers, the Azeris were nonetheless more manageable and less demanding, partially due to a strong influence of clergy and patriarchal community structure. However, it was their involvement in the December strike of 1904 that brought the whole oil industry to a halt. Given the fact that Baku provided around 96 per cent of Russia’s oil, it had a staggering impact on the whole Russian Empire.
This was the second large-scale action of Baku’s workers, this time managed by Stalin personally. It started on December 13, 1904 when workers of Balakhane and Bibi-Heybat, the two major oil producing suburbs, went on strike. The list of demands was pretty broad and, as one would say today, almost indispensable in employment issues, such as one day-off a week, finishing job 2 hours earlier during last day of the week and on the eve of festive days, involvement of representatives of workers in employment and dismissal (sort of prototype of trade unions), fixed minimum salary for all categories of works, salaries paid no less than twice a month, and May 1 recognized as a holiday (the Workers’ Day).

Within five days, the strike spread over majority of Baku’s enterprises followed by rallies and demonstrations notwithstanding the troops brought into the city. Perseverance of the workers forced the employers to concede. This resulted in the labor contract specifying a 9-hour working day for all field workers, an 8-hour working day for night shift and driller teams, minimum daily salaries increased from 80 kopeks to 1 ruble and 4 days of monthly pay leave. The employees also were supposed to improve workers’ living conditions.

As one may see, all the concessions were exclusively economic in nature. Except for the recognition of May 1, none of the demands was of political character. Yet, this was a milestone event setting stage for the whole of Russian empire. No surprise, Stalin was quick to capitalize on this accomplishment. “This was a true victory of poor proletarians over the wealthy capitalists, a victory that initiated ‘a new order’ in the oil industry... through a certain set of rules, a sort of ‘constitution’ that enabled us to express our will through our delegates and to make joint agreements with the oil barons, to establish relations with them.”

The next year of 1905 presented Russia with revolution triggered by a humiliating defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The new wave of strikes in Baku was indispensable, so, having a bad experience of workers acting together irrespective of origin, the Imperial administration decided to divert the revolutionary movement into an inter-ethnic one. That was the rationale behind the bloody clashes between Azeris and Armenians provoked by the authorities in 1905-1907. Stalin denounced the ethnic massacre as an attempt of the Tsar ‘to buttress his despicable throne on the blood of honest citizens, the groans of dying Armenians and Tartars (i.e.-Azeris – A.F.)’

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21 SSM, p.110
Nonetheless, despite the decline in the revolutionary movement, some of the earlier accomplishments were retained in Baku. E.g. in 1908, Stalin wrote: “Since the retreat of revolution in Russia as of 1906, Baku is still far from being quiet, enjoying some practical liberties and each year celebrates the ‘Proletarian May Day’ better than in any other part of Russia, thus causing a sense of thankful envy in other places”\(^{22}\).

In Baku, as one of Stalin’s comrades recollected, Koba (another nickname of Stalin) was on the lookout for criminal types, the “hotheads” as he called them, the cutthroats. In America, such men would be gangsters,’ but Stalin managed to surround them ‘with aura of revolutionary fighters’, forming the so-called *Bolshevik Black Squad*.\(^{23}\)

Baku, according to recollections of Anna Alliluyeva, a sister of Stalin’s second wife, was a melting-pot of pitiful poverty and incredible wealth.\(^{24}\) A mix of its 48,000 workers including Azeris, Persians, Russians and Armenians was called by Stalin ‘a national kaleidoscope’. The workers had to toil and exist in abhorrent conditions of polluted slums like the Black Town and areas adjacent to oil fields. Physical violence, rapes and blood-feuds dominated everyday lives of their inhabitants. Yet for Stalin industrial Baku was ‘irrepressible’, its rootless proletariat ideal for the Bolsheviks (communists). Corruption was unparalleled, its moral ambiguities and duplicitous opportunities suited Stalin’s conspiratorial cynicism as not any other place he happened to be active in.\(^{25}\)

Leo Nussimbaum, under another pen-name of Essad-Bey, described the place as ‘*Equal parts of Dodge City, medieval Baghdad, industrial Pittsburgh and nineteenth-century Paris*. Baku ‘was too Persian to be European and too European to be Persian’. Its police notoriously venal, its Azeris and Armenians armed and vigilant, its plentiful gunmen either performed assassinations for 3 rubles a victim, or guarded oil tycoons or became gangsters. ‘*Our city, not unlike the Wild West, was teeming with bandits and robbers*’ – Essad-Bey concludes.\(^{26}\)

\(^{22}\) *Bakinski Rabochy* paper, February 16, 1908  
\(^{23}\) SSM, p.168  
\(^{24}\) *Alliluyev Memoirs*, p.52-55  
\(^{25}\) SSM, p.162  
\(^{26}\) Essad Bey. *Blood and Sword in the Orient*
No surprise, Stalin found this environment perfectly suitable for his activities. ‘Politics is a dirty business,’ Stalin used to admit later. ‘We all did dirty work for the Revolution’. That was the way Stalin soon became an effective godfather of a small but quite efficient mafia-type ‘fundraising group’ in Baku involved in shakedowns, currency counterfeiting, extortion, bank-robbery, piracy and protection-rackets combined with political agitation and journalism.

Stalin’s next ‘mission’ to Baku was in summer 1907, right after an outrageously violent attack of June 13 in Tbilisi when the royal convoy delivering cash to the bank was exploded and dozens of people, including innocent by-standers killed. Kamo, playacting as the Tsarist officer absconded with 250 thousand rubles. Stalin, the mastermind of the bank-robbery that became a part of the communist lore in later decades, absconded to Baku with his wife Ekaterina Svanidze (Kato) and newborn son Yakov almost the next day. Here he continued in the same vein benefiting from Baku’s other asset, i.e. the largest and busiest port of the Russian Empire.

One of the most outrageous forays masterminded by Stalin was the piracy act on a vessel named the Nicholas I in the Baku Port in early 1908. The ship was reportedly to deliver 4 million rubles for the Turkestan Region (nowadays Central Asia). The bold attack was conducted almost in the twinkling of an eye when a group of people dressed in police uniform boards the ship as if for a regular check. All of a sudden, the guards were disarmed, and the group of burglars, Stalin among them, gets access to the safe-box. It takes one of the best Baku safecrackers, Ahmad, several minutes to break the lock and provides the attackers with a lavish loot of 1,2 million rubles. By the time the real police arrives at the harbor, the attackers managed to abscond the scene by a speed boat that was awaiting just behind the steamer. The whole case reveals an excellent conspiracy Stalin managed to establish with local crime.

Meanwhile, the attitude to Stalin’s forays in the party was far from being unanimous. Ten years after, Stalin was investigated for this case by the Mensheviks, a non-Leninist group of the Russian Social-Democratic Party, for whom this practice was an egregious infringement of Party rules. During the libel trial in 1918, Martov, one of the Menshevik leaders provided sufficient evidence of Stalin’s involvement in the Nicholas I heist. Andrey Vyshinski, later the ominous Soviet General Public Prosecutor under Stalin’s rule, had to admit that ‘Koba was deeply embroiled in the expropriation on the steamer Nicholas I in Baku harbor’.
Interestingly enough, Lenin never publicly denounced violent attacks and hold-ups of this kind even though he abstained from supporting them publicly. In fact, he was the final recipient of the proceeds oftentimes personally delivered by revolutionary combatants like Kamo. The other idea masterminded by Stalin was to raid the Baku naval arsenal. But Soso was also proficient in raising money through ‘contributions from industrialists’. This type of ‘fund-raising’ was two-fold.

According to recollections of Soso’s other gunman, Bokov, Stalin came up with an idea to raid the Baku naval arsenal. As ever, ‘he took the initiative to make us the inside connections with naval people. So we organized a gang of comrades... and raided the arsenal’. Several guards were killed in the course of the raid, however this would never stop Soso who was raising money for the party on a day to day basis through what he used to call ‘contributions from industrialists’.

As Bokov mentioned, Stalin’s goal was ‘to threaten the oil tycoons and Black Hundreds’. The latter ones were the right-wing Russian ultranationalists with armed groups of their own. Stalin’s closest aides were the so-called Mauserists, the name primarily used for the Armenian armed gangs involved in protecting local Armenian oil barons. The Azeri armed groups, also having their name, the Gochu, were mainly involved in safeguarding their respective oil tycoons and oftentimes provided security services to some really large oil companies, like the Nobel brothers.

As the story goes, the Nobels dispatched a group of Gochu to assassinate Stalin. The result was completely contrary to everyone’s expectation. Appearing in front of armed cap-a-pie gangsters, Stalin succeeded in changing their minds other way around after a remarkably short but eloquent conversation. A very strong charisma of this grim and unsociable person and his unique ability to talk to rogues in their language won him a very important support of major ethnic criminal groups in Baku and freed his hands in one of his major areas of concentration in Baku, i.e. extorting money from the oil barons.

One of the key factors of Stalin’s success with very various audiences ranging from gangsters to workers or even sometimes the oil barons, was his very specific speaking manner. According to Khariton Chavichvili, a Georgian Menshevik and Stalin’s frequent opponent, he wasn’t an orator

27 Ibid, p.169
but a ‘master of the art of dissimulation’. His speaking manner was ‘with a light smile, eyes fixed, concisely, clearly and very persuasive. Even when Soso lost the disputes to more eloquent Mensheviks, which was far not infrequent, ‘the workers kissed him with tears in their eyes.’

‘The ultimate tactician’ in his public debates with his political opponents, Stalin was capable of keeping ‘a stupefying sang-froid’, he seemed to see nothing but observed everything. He could surround himself with people much older, educated or cultured, as well as violent and daredevil, however the admiration and affection he managed to produce allowed him to impose his iron discipline on is troops, let it be intellectuals, workers or thugs. Control over the latter ones was instrumental in Stalin’s further ‘accomplishments’ in oil rich Baku.

Kidnapping became one of the most lucrative businesses for Stalin in Baku. The most famous person Stalin’s gang kidnapped was Mussa Naghiyev, the richest Azeri oil baron who was born to a poor peasant family at one of Baku’s suburbs and grew into the owner of one of the top ten oil companies. Meanwhile, Naghiyev was reported as the stingiest magnate by local lore. As the story goes, he could donate 3 rubles to an orphanage while his son was lavishly sparing a hundred saying: “My son is a son of an oil tycoon, so he can afford this, whereas I am a son of a poor peasant and that’s all I can provide”. Nonetheless it was this son of a poor peasant who built one of Baku’s most magnificent palazzos after his son died of tuberculosis and money failed to save him. The Venetian Gothic style palace, originally donated to local charitable society, is now housing the head office of Azerbaijan’s National Academy of Sciences.

Reportedly Mussa Naghiyev was kidnapped twice. Once again, as the story goes, the ransom was 10,000 rubles. “I can only give 950 rubles,” Naghiyev replied. Outraged kidnappers threatened to slice him into pieces. “Of course, you can do that, - he said, - but then you won’t get even that”. So he only paid what he promised. The story became the talk of the town. The second kidnapping occurred in December 1908 and was led again by ‘a Georgian with black hair and unusual pockmarks’ This time the kidnappers succeeded to extort 100,000 rubles.

28 Chavichvili. Parties, Prisons, Exile, p.70
29 SSM, p.111
30 Manaf Souleymanov. The Days Gone. Baku, 1980
31 SSM, p.170
There is a story that ultimately Stalin managed to sort of befriend his victim expressing the latter one his ‘gratitude’ for generous contributions to the Bolsheviks. This way or another, Ms. Dilara Naghiyeva, Mussa Naghiyev’s granddaughter and a good acquaintance of this writer, proudly shows a piano reportedly gifted by Stalin to her great uncle by Uncle Joe. The piano was obviously not purchased in the store either. As for Mussa Naghiyev himself, the experience was obviously traumatic for his, so he preferred never to speak of this case until his very death.

Interestingly enough, the very time period of his second kidnap coincides with Stalin’s first incarceration, however he was used to masterminding his forays from prison, and the murky personal contacts could have taken place after his escape from exile and the new appearance in Baku. That being said, far not all Stalin’s contacts with the local oil barons ended up in such a ‘friendly’ manner.

A really stiff Azeri oil tycoon that Stalin came across with was Murtuza Mukhtarov. Like Naghiyev, he was also born to a poor family, however, being a self-trained wizard in drilling, he managed to become the owner of one of the largest local drilling companies. A tough guy, Mukhtarov reportedly was chasing Stalin being appalled by his influence on the Azeri workers. Reportedly, following Mukhtarov’s order Stalin was once badly beaten by highlanders from North Caucasus hired for the oil fields’ protection. Mukhtarov’s hatred to Bolsheviks resulted in his tragic death in his own chateau built for his spouse who adored a similar construction in Italy. Upon Baku’s takeover in 1920, he reportedly shot Red Army soldiers entering his residence on horsebacks and then turned pistol on himself. His wife ended up in emigration in France. The Mukhtarov Palace has been a public marriage registration hall up until the very recent time.

That being said, far not always money was collected by Stalin in such a violent manner. Many oil tycoons and even middle class professionals were sympathetic to Bolsheviks and made voluntary contributions. Alexander Mancho, director of Shibayev’s company, one of Baku’s largest oil firms, was one of these contributors ready to cough up cash on request, sometimes on the shortest notice.

Berta Nussimbaum, wife of a local oil baron of Jewish descent and mother of Loe Nussimabum better known under his pen names Essad Bey or Kurban Said, was a Bolshevik sympathizer who,
according to her son’s recollections, ‘financed Stalin’s illicit communist press with her diamonds’.  

The most lavish donations though came from David Landau, the Rothschild managing director. One of the Jewish intellectuals brought to Baku by Alphonse Rothschilds, David Landau was the father of Leo Landau, the Nobel Prize winner in physics. Records of funds donated to Bolsheviks were made by Okhranka (the Russian secret police). According to the records, while Stalin was running the communist party in Baku, a Bolshevik clerk in one of the oil companies ‘was not active in operations but concentrated on collecting donations and got money from Landau of the Rothschilds’. Dr. Felix Somary, another high-ranking Rothschild executive and the representative of the family’s Austrian branch, claimed he had been sent to Baku to settle a strike. He paid Stalin the money. The strike settled.

This looks odd bearing in mind the arson at the Rothschild oil storage in Batumi masterminded by Stalin in 1902, however, according to S. Sebag Montefiore, personally related to the Rothschilds family, tête-à-tête meetings of David Landau with Stalin were far not unlikely.

Protection-rackets were another form of Stalin’s relations with oil tycoons. Many of them had to pay if they did not wish their oil fields ‘to catch fire’ or ‘accidents befall their families’. So many years later, it appears hard to differentiate voluntary donations from protection money or the cash obtained through robberies, assaults, extortion of rich families and kidnapping their children on the streets of Baku in daylight. Ransoms and other payments were demanded in the name of ‘revolutionary committee’. According to Simon Sebag Montefiore, majority of Baku’s millionaires “were keen to pay up after a ‘ten minute conversation’ with Stalin”.

The forms delivered to a company would read: “The Bolshevik Committee proposes the your firm should pay ... rubles.”

The forms were delivered to the respective oil companies, and the cash was collected by Soso’s so called technical assistant, ‘a very tall man who was known as ‘Stalin’s bodyguard’, visibly packing a pistol. Nobody refused to pay’.

32 SSM, Young Stalin, p.169
33 Ibid
34 Ibid, p.170
While in Baku as the Bolshevik boss, Stalin successfully befriended local organized crime, their operations oftentimes overlapping with those of his own henchmen. Interestingly enough, Stalin used these links not only against his traditional foes like oil barons or the authorities, but against his party opponents, the Mensheviks (non-Leninist Social Democrats). One of local gangs controlled access to a wasteland in the area of Baku’s oil refineries, the Black Town. Soso managed to make an agreement with the gang to let through the area only the Bolsheviks who were using a special password.

Needless to say, this lifestyle required an enormous secrecy that Stalin was also famous of. According to the recollections of his aide, Bokov, ‘it was sometimes so conspiratorial that we didn’t know where he was for six months! He had no permanent address and we only knew him as “Koba”. If he had an appointment he never turned up on time; he turned up either a day early or a day later. He never changed his clothes, so he looked like an unemployed person’.

Soso’s other comrades noticed his stark difference from a traditional passionate Caucasian. ‘Sentiment was foreign to him,’ recalled one of them. ‘No matter how much he loved the fellow, he’d never forgive him even the tiniest spoiling of the party matter – he’s skin him alive’.

He was quite successful in his efforts to raise money and guns, but it always came at a sizeable human cost. This cause resentment not only among liberal Mensheviks but even among some traditional Bolsheviks like Alexinsky or Zemliachka who were ‘very indignant of these expropriations and killings’. This could barely stop Stalin from being ruthless as he was. When one of the party members was blamed by him in provocation with no definite evidence behind, the person was still forced out of Baku, ‘judged’, sentenced to death and shot.

In fact, Stalin took pride of being what he called praktik (practitioner), an expert on what was known as the ‘black work’, as opposed to the so called ‘chatty intellectuals’. But he had a gift in both. A set of outrageous heists and holdups in Baku were accompanies by a series of political articles he kept publishing both at large an in prison. So while Lenin was getting a storm of complaints about Stalin’s banditry in Baku, according to one of the Menshevik activists, Tatiana Vulikh, ‘Koba was ‘the true boss in the Caucasus’ with ‘a lot of supporters devoted to him who

35 Ibid, p.171
respected him as the second person in the Party after Lenin. Among the intelligentsia, he was less loved, but everybody recognized he was the most energetic and indispensable person’.\textsuperscript{36}

So it was Baku where Stalin managed to prosper by cracking down on oil tycoons, the Mensheviks and even dissident Bolsheviks. Ultimately this small man with paralyzed left hand and pockmarked face became the revolutionary and criminal kingpin of what he called ‘the Oil Kingdom’. It was through Baku that he, belatedly, found a national Russian role by accomplishing the graduate studies from ‘an apprentice to a craftsman of the Revolution’. It was Baku where he became the ‘second Lenin’.\textsuperscript{37}

No surprise, by the fall of 1907 Stalin succeeded in routing the Mensheviks and completely control the local organization thus making Baku a Bolshevik stronghold in the Caucasus. He was capable of benefiting from virtually everything, including murders of some of his fellow communists. Murder of an Azeri worker Khanlar Safaraliyev, a member of pro-communist \textit{Hummet} group on September 19, 1907, on the background of a new wave of ethnic clashes and revolutionary movement was an opportune chance for Koba to call for the strike and furthermore reinforce positions of Bolsheviks vis-à-vis liberal Mensheviks.

This required a tremendous concentration and dedication which Soso was ready and willing to provide. According to one of his comrades, Monoselidze, ‘\textit{when he was involved, he forgot everything}’ – including his family that followed him to Baku. This is not to say he had no love to Keke, his first wife. On the contrary, according to Giorgi Elisabedashvili, his Gori friend who also joined him in Baku, ‘\textit{Soso loved her so much, however ... wife, child fried were only okay if they didn’t hinder his work and saw things his way. You had to know Soso to understand his love}’. It was this strange love that backfired Stalin in quite a horrible way.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid
\textsuperscript{37} Tol. \textit{The Russian Rockefellers.} pp.87-100
Personal Drama
“Last warm feeling to humanity” gone forever
This creature softened my heart of stone.
She died and with her died my last warm feelings for humanity.
Joseph Stalin

A huge personal tragedy befell Stalin during his stay in Baku. In November 1907, his wife Kato passed away from typhus at the age of 22, leaving an eight-month-old infant, Laddie (Yakov). Involved in the whirlpool of his activities in Baku, Stalin paid no attention whatsoever to his wife and baby. Contrary to him, young Kato, a born homemaker, turned a shack they rented amidst the oil fields into a cosy place making a harsh contrast with sordid exterior. Even being sick, she refused the calls of her family to recuperate at home saying: ‘How can I leave Soso?’ Meanwhile Soso could easily leave a sick wife with a child to attend the Congress of Second International in Stuttgart in August 1907.

While Stalin was enjoying his trip to Germany, meeting his brither-in-law Alyosha Svanidze, still studying in Leipzig, going sightseeing, meeting German workers in restaurants and cafes, his wife Kato was really suffering from terrible heat and abhorrent living conditions in Baku at one of the worker slums in Bailov. As one of their friends, Monoselidze, recalled, ‘Soso would go early in the morning and return late at night while Kato sat at home with a tiny baby terrified that he would be arrested... Bad diet, little sleep, the heat and the stress weakened her and she fell ill. Surrounded by strangers, she had no friends around her, Soso was so busy he forgot his family!’.

It would be naïve to think Stalin did not understand the situation. He knew he was a neglectful husband and absolutely horrible father. Nonetheless, as many of the kids grown up in dysfunctional families, he was reluctant to change his behavior. While his wife Kato, strongly attached to home and the family implored Koba to turn away from his ideas and return to ‘a peaceful home life’, he had already made his choice. The choice was the one that let him off the traditional responsibilities of a family man, so typical of the Caucasians. Thus Kato Svanidze

38 SSM, p.163
was deemed to become a sort of martyr as she realized that Soso had ‘sworn to remain forever a true Knight of the Grail’ completely dedicated to Marxism.

This attitude towards family was shared by majority of revolutionaries. Another vivid example of this is Leo Trotsky, a brilliant Jewish intellectual, one of the leaders of the Communist Party hated by Stalin on sight and finally exterminated by him as far as in Mexico. A complete antipode to Stalin in many aspects, Trotsky was too neglectful to his family leaving his wife and two daughters in Siberia, blaming the ‘Fate’. Oddly enough, this neglect never saved the poor ladies from Stalin’s ruthless avenge in the years to come. This way or another professional Bolshevism and family were totally incompatible in the majority of cases.

 Needless to say, the Kato’s family was appalled by Soso’s attitude. They wrote him to bring her back urgently, as she herself was unable ‘to leave Soso’. Meanwhile, as her condition deteriorated dramatically, she started begging him ‘to bring her back’. According to the recollections of those who happened to see her then, almost certainly, Kato suffered intestinal or peritoneal tuberculosis. She was very seriously ill, however Stalin ‘kept postponing the trip until she became weak and suddenly he realized he had to act immediately’.39

In October 1907, Stalin finally escorted his young wife back to Tiflis. Belated attempt to save her was in vain though. The thirteen-hour long journey appeared to be another debilitating torture for Kato. It was still too hot on the way, and reportedly she drank bad water at one of the stations. Back at home, she furthermore deteriorated. Meanwhile, Soso hastened back to Baku leaving her with her family.

The death of Stalin’s first wife seems to be the rear case of sincere grievance. During her funeral in Tbilisi he admitted: “This creature softened my heart of stone. She died and with her died my last warm feelings for humanity”. Meanwhile he did virtually nothing to help her out throughout the time she was getting from bad to worse in Baku. “My personal life is shattered, - sobbed Stalin, - Nothing attaches me to life except socialism. I’m going to dedicate my existence to that”. To Simon Sebag Montefiore this was a sort of rationalization to ever more unspeakable tragedies which he caused to his family and himself in later years.40

39 Ibid, p.164
40 Ibid, p.166
Stalin’s behavior at Kato’s funeral was bizarre at the very least. He threw himself to her open grave and then, having spotted Okhranka agents, he managed to escape and abscond from the funeral. He was apprehended in Baku on March 25, 1908 to be incarcerated in the famous Bailov Prison, also known as Bailovka in the prisoners’ jargon.
The Bailov Prison:
Cutthroats to Revolutionaries

His reign at the Bailovka was a microcosm of his dictatorship in Russia.
Simon Sebag Montefiore

The first arrest of Stalin in Baku was preceded by Gendarmes’ raid of a Party Meeting in the so-called People’s Hall on March 15. Even though Stalin together with Shaumyan and Spandarian (the two local Bolshevik leaders of Armenian descent) managed to escape, the Gendarmes, a semi-military branch of police heavily involved in apprehending ‘political prisoners’, were on the trail of the Mauserists, organized criminal gangs of Armenian origin oftentimes sharing close ties with local Bolsheviks. Once the date for the hold-ups of the state Bank and the gold ship was fixed, the Cossacks and the Gendarmes attacked the Bolshevik ‘safe house’. While several Cossacks were killed in a shootout, the Mauserists lost one of their best triggerman, so the plan was abandoned.

During the night of March 25, the chief of Baku police raided several delinquent dens with a number of suspects detained, one of them identified himself as Gaioz Besoyevich Nizheradze. Due to some ‘criminal papers’ he was found in possession of, he was handed over to the Gendarmes who were fast to figure out the detainee’s real identity, the most prominent Bolshevik in the Caucasus, the ‘second Lenin’, Stalin was finally apprehended after four years of search by the Okhranka.

When he appeared in Baku’s Bailov Prison in his blue-satin smock and a dashing Caucasian hood, the reaction of prisoners was very alerting. “That is Koba!” – they whispered. Many of them feared Stalin more than the police.

The bogeyman did not disappoint indeed. His appearance in the Bailovka scared prisoners, the political ones in particular. Throughout the seven months spent in Baku’s oldest prison set amid the oilfields, Stalin managed to dominate its power structures. Reading, studying Esperanto, he stirred up series of witch-hunts for spooks and traitors that oftentimes ended in death. The sly schemer, he always avoided public responsibility. Like in Batumi jail, he still preferred rogues to revolutionaries, always seen in the company of cutthroats and blackmailers. According to
S.S.Montefiore, “his reign at the Bailovka was a microcosm of his dictatorship in Russia”\(^{41}\), to be more precise, the Soviet Union, in later decades.

While in the Bailov Prison, Soso was placed in Cell Thirty-nine, with dominantly Bolshevik inmates, while majority of the Mensheviks were incarcerated in another cell. Odd as this may seem, the political prisoners were so organized in the Bailovka, that they were even running a Credentials Commission.

Among Stalin’s cellmates there were some prominent figures of the Soviet elite-to-be, like Sergo Ordjonikidze, a recognized Bolshevik praktik of the Georgian descent and one of the closest friends of Stalin. In 1920-1921, Ordjonikidze was instrumental in bringing Soviet troops to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, and then raised to the level of the Chairman of the All-Union Council of the People’s Economy to finally commit suicide in February 1937 after harsh dissent with Stalin and ruthless persecution of his next to kin.

Another cellmate of Stalin in the Bailov Prison was Andrey Vyshinski (1883-1954), in later decades the dreaded General Prosecutor of the USSR widely cited for his rule ‘confession of the accused is the queen of evidence’ as the Soviet interpretation of the presumption of innocence.

Odd as this may seem, back in 1908 in the Bailov Prison Vyshinsky was arrested as a Menshevik. A son of a well-off Polish pharmacist in Odessa who moved to Baku, Andrey Vyshinsky was a brilliant student of the Kiev University where he met his wife-to-be Kapa Mikhailova and got actively involved in revolutionary activities.

Expelled from the Kiev University, Vyshinsky was actively involved in revolutionary activities as a Menshevik, to be arrested and incarcerated in the Bailov jail in the same cell with Stalin. While in custody, Vyshinski got elected the elder in charge for food. This was quite an appointment since he received regular packages with delicacies from his prosperous wife and bourgeois family. He lavishly shared these hampers with Stalin, the fact that S.S.Montefiore views as ‘a prudent generosity that may have contributed to his survival in the Terror’\(^{42}\).

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\(^{41}\) SSM, p.174

\(^{42}\) SSM, p.174
One may argue this for in fact Vyshinsky used to be one of the key figures conducting the Terror when indictments were prepared way before the trials, and the investigators were pressed to get confessions of the accused ones by all means possible. This ominous manner in jurisprudence managed to outlive the Soviet regime and is still oftentimes associated with Vyshinsky.

After his imprisonment, A.Vyshinski returned to the University of Kiev and was quite successful in his studies in law, he was even considered for professorship, but his political past prevailed, so he returned to Baku to get fully immersed in the city’s turbulent events. Determined to practice law, Vysinsky then moved to Moscow where he became a successful lawyer, still remaining an ardent Menshevik, known for his passionate and incendiary speeches and finally becoming a member to the city government.43

Oddly enough, in 1917, in the heyday of the Second Russian Revolution, as a minor official, he undersigned the order to arrest Vladimir Lenin following the decision of the Provisional Government of the day. It was the communist coup in October that year that overruled the case.44

It was not after 1920 when following shattering blows of the Red (Communist) army during the Russian Civil War Vyshinsky joined the Bolsheviks to become one of the most successful survivors of Stalin’s court.

It looks extremely unusual that with all this background Andrey Vyshinsky became one of the key Soviet leaders and scholars. The ominous Prosecutor General eager to expose and exterminate any dissenting view, he was in the meantime the Rector of the Moscow State University, the Director of the Institute of the State and Law at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, the post-WW2 Minister of Foreign Affairs, the first Soviet Ambassador to the UN and the ONLY person to get Stalin’s personal recommendation to join the Communist Party. Bearing in mind the fact that Stalin ruthlessly got rid of any sort of political dissent, let it be among traditional rivals like the Mensheviks, or even among the Bolsheviks, this kind of permissive tolerance towards Vyshinsky looks bizarre at the very least.

44 Chronos. Biographic Index
Partially, the answer to this may be found in the memoirs of the British diplomat Sir Frank Roberts. As the British Chargé d'Affaires in Moscow from February 1945 to October 1947, he provided the following description of Andrey Vyshinsky:

“He spoke good French, was quick, clever and efficient, and always knew his dossier well, but whereas I had a certain unwilling respect for Molotov, I had none at all for Vyshinsky. All Soviet officials at that time had no choice but to carry out Stalin's policies without asking too many questions, but Vyshinsky above all gave me the impression of a cringing toadie only too anxious to obey His Master's Voice even before it had expressed his wishes. ... I always had the feeling with Vyshinsky that his past as a Menshevik together with his Polish and bourgeois background made him particularly servile and obsequious in his dealings with Stalin and to a lesser extent with Molotov”.45

This way or another, close links between Vyshinsky and Stalin started back in Cell 39 of the Bailov prison where the successful Prosecutor General of future USSR was a no less successful Elder of a prison cell. The functions of Elders included dividing days into hours for leisure, cleaning and discussion, assigning bedmates and domestic chores, including washing up dishes and emptying latrines. According to recollections of the inmates, ‘Stalin was often released from such duties’.46

Simon Vereshchak, another cellmate, also a Menshevik, created quite an impressive portrait of Stalin in the Bailovka. While personally he hated Koba for his cunning and cruelty, he nonetheless could not help admiring by Stalin’s confidence, vigilance, intelligence, phenomenal memory and sang-froid. “It was impossible to throw him off balance, nothing could get his goat!” According to his recollections, Stalin was the only person in the cell who could sleep soundly even when someone was being hanged in the courtyard. In fact, he was ordering certain prison killings while incarcerated. To a certain extent, his grim and uninviting prison inmate had a greater power than the prison authorities.

It would be an exaggeration to say that murders of traitors in prison were Soso’s invention. According to his cellmate, ‘in the Bailovka, provocateurs were usually killed’, however any of such killings by prisoners was preceded by a sort of peer investigation and trial by the most

46 SSM, p.174
authoritative inmates. **Stalin sanctioned killings by proxy and stealth.** As a matter of fact, something similar was introduced by Stalin on the scale of the Soviet Union when hundreds of thousands were executed following decisions by so-called *troikas*, groups of three persons, oftentimes with no legal background and nil access to legal defense. This quasi-judicial system was first applied by Stalin in Baku’s Bailov Prison.

Back in 1908, in the Bailovka, according to Vereshchak, someone ‘Mitka the Greek stabbed a young worker for being a spook. Koba ordered the hit’. A bit later, ‘a young Georgian was beaten up in the corridor of the political building. The word was spread, “Provocateur!” Everyone joined in, beating him with whatever they could, until the walls were spattered in blood. The bloody body was taken away on a stretcher. Later we learned that the rumor had started with Koba’.  

Stalin’s approach to political issues was no less harsh although much more overt. Apart from sifting out the spooks, the Bailov prison was an excellent venue for sorting out some ideological dilemmas. And here again, Stalin was second to none. He succeeded in asserting himself as ‘the best authority on Marx’. In fact, Marxist was his element where he was truly unconquerable. He could find a formula from Marx for any situation, however the style he used was ‘unpleasant, coarse, devoid of wit and formal’.

In the Bailovka, Stalin still preferred thugs to revolutionaries. He was ‘always seen in the company of cutthroats, blackmailers, robbers, and gunslingers – the Mauserists’. On some occasions criminal prisoners raided the political, however Stalin managed to arrange their protection through his fellow Georgian thugs. That was probably the only difference between the Soso in Bailov Prison and the omnipotent ruler of the Soviet Union which he succeeded in turning into a mega-Bailovka and where the political opponents were virtually given as a pray to thugs in the country’s multiple prisons.

On the other hand, in power, he shocked his comrades by promoting criminals in the NKVD (the Ministry of Internal Affairs dealing with combating crime), however, according to S.S. Montefiore, ‘he had used criminals all his life’.  

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47 SSR, p.174  
48 Ibid, p.175
As it was the case with other penitentiaries in Russia, in the immediate aftermath of the first Russian Revolution (1905-1907) the Bailov prison was terribly overcrowded. Rough policy of P.A.Stolypin, the Prime Minister of the day, 1,500 were sharing cells built for 400. Stalin with his weak lung suffered terribly from oppressive heat in an overcrowded cell. His authority was so undisputed that a sturdy cellmate Mdivani, nicknamed ‘Barrel’, used to lift Soso on his shoulders to get closer to the only window high up in the cell, while the rest of inmates were laughing and shouting ‘Giddy-up, Barrel, giddy-up!’. The same inmate was later far not an infrequent guest in the Kremlin always greeted Stalin: ‘Giddy-up, Soso!’

‘Sweet’ memories of the Bailovka never left Stalin even through the years of crowning the Soviet political Olympus. Meanwhile, the ominous jail in Baku revealed the toughness of Stalin’s character that made his such a ruthless and charismatic leader. Along with sanctioning murders of ‘spooks’, Koba initiated a violent protest against the conditions of imprisonment. In the years of Stolypin’s crackdown this only led to new repressive sanctions. A company of soldiers was brought to suppress the mutiny, mainly among the political prisoners. As Vereschak recalls, forced to run the gauntlet with a group of fellow-prisoners, ‘Koba walked with his head unbowed, under the blows of the rifle-butts, a book in his hand’. And after this kind of ‘messianic’ act requiring a great deal of courage, ‘he smashed the door of his cell with a slop-bucket, ignoring the threat of the bayonets’.49

The overcrowding remained, and it was virtually impossible to move in the cell ‘without standing on someone’s toe’. Yet Stalin managed to benefit even from this, as the overcrowding presented excellent opportunities for shenanigans. Stalin tried to make an identity swap with another prisoner. In the beginning, everything went according to the plan: the substitute took his place, and Koba kissed his fellow inmates to be then escorted from the cell. Yet, at a certain stage, the swap was unraveled by either a spook or foiled by an under-bribed guard.50

Shortly prior to this, Stalin, equally feared by the prisoners and venal administration, failed to escape the Bailov Prison even though he managed to cut the bars of his cell by a hacksaw smuggled by a bribed warder. Outside the jail walls, a group of Mauserists waited with a

49 SSM, p.175
50 Vereshchak. Stalin in Prison.
phaeton to whisk him away. The plan was foiled at the very last moment when incorruptible Cossacks replaced traditional guards. Both schemes were reportedly unraveled by the same spook.

That being said, the final sentence Stalin got after god eight months in the Bailov jail in 1908 was surprisingly lax: two years of exile in Vologda, European part of Russia, instead of Asiatic Siberia. The *etap* (guarded transportation to the place of exile) took over three month and passed through another infamous prison, the *Butyrki* in Moscow, the place where thousands would perish under Stalin’s terror.

This ended the first period of Stalin’s incarceration in Baku which only hardened Stalin and reinforced his positions both among the revolutionaries and the criminals. In fact, no one else could merge the two groups and benefit from both in his revolutionary business.

Baku’s *Bailovka* was a very important milestone in Stalin’s biography. To a certain extent, places like this were an inalienable part in the biography of majority of revolutionaries in Russia. Meeting his mother, Keke, during his first incarceration Stalin tried to calm an old woman bursting into tears saying *‘the revolutionary cannot do without prisons’*. Soso was in his element, reading a lot, having a broad audience for disputes and discussions, playing backgammon with his Caucasian fellow prisoners, reading a lot and masterminding witch-hunt for traitors that oftentimes ended lethally. Interestingly enough, he even started learning Esperanto considering it the language of future. A noteworthy detail is that being in power, he ruthlessly persecuted and arrested Esperanto speakers. But apart from this petty deviation, the Bailov prison in Baku appeared to be a testing ground for Koba. According to S.S.Montefiore, ‘*his reign at the Bailovka was a microcosm of his dictatorship in Russia*’ .\(^{51}\) The only comment one should add is that Russia in this case means not the Russian Empire, but the Soviet Union.

\(^{51}\) SSM, p.174
Reappearance in Baku and the Second Incarceration:
‘Party ailing’, intrigues, affairs, witch-hunt, arrest

He had graduated from Caucasian activist to Russian Bolshevik leader...Stalin orchestrated a cannibalistic inquisition in Baku to find traitors, real and imagined, just as he would across the entire USSR in the 1930’s. The difference was that in Baku the Party really was infested with police spies.

Simon Sebag Montefiore

In February 1909, Stalin reached the place of his exile with no even winter clothing. Shaumyan, another Bolshevik leader of Armenian origin in Baku, could only send Stalin 5 rubles. With Soso’s temporary disappearance from Baku, and the local regime tightened by Russia’s Prime Minister Pyotr A. Stolypin, local revolutionaries were hungry and weak.

Nonetheless, in early July 1909, Soso re-emerged in Baku, this time under the name of an Armenian merchant Oganez Totomians. His appearance did not pass unnoticed. The Okhranka’s report reads: ‘The Social-Democrat escapee from Siberia has arrived – he is known as “Koba” or “Soso”.’\(^\text{52}\) The report was correct except for one detail: Soso escaped not from Siberia but the place of his exile near Vologda and got to Baku through St.Petersburg. The same informants, ‘Fikus’ and ‘Mikheil’, kept tracking almost each and every step of Koba. Despite Stalin’s frenzied witch-hunt, these two were never apprehended. This time, the codename for Stalin was ‘the Milkman’ due to his affection to milk and the use of a milk bar as a base in Baku.

Stalin returned to Baku’s Oil Kingdom to find the local Bolsheviks in quite a deplorable condition as a result of harsh reprisals by the authorities in the aftermath of the First Russian Revolution. The Milkman tried to reinvigorate shuttered local communists. He tried to get together the remnants of the Outfit (Druzhina) to conduct an attack on the mail ship to support the Bakinski Proletari (The Baku Worker) Bolshevik newspaper published with Stalin’s active

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\(^{52}\) Ibid, p.182
engagement since June 1907 until August 1909 with only seven releases going out of printing press.\textsuperscript{53}

Yet the time was really dark. \textit{“The Party is ailing. There is nothing good to write. We’ve no workers”}, - Stalin complained. He was even thinking of reuniting with the Mensheviks, the very idea was an anathema for Lenin. Nonetheless, Koba’s ideas regarding the Party’s future reached the Central Committee in Paris, so in January 1910 Stalin was appointed to the new Russian Bureau as recognition of his perseverance and organization talents displayed in Baku. This was the way Stalin grew form a Caucasian activist to a revolutionary of the Empire level. Meanwhile, in Baku he was playing his own game against local communist leader Stepan Shaumyan.

What made Stalin particularly averse to Shaumyan was the latter one’s lifestyle . Like many other local Bolsheviks, Shaumyan, married to an oil executive’s daughter, took a regular job working for Shibayev, an local Russian oil baron sympathetic towards the social-democrats. That made Soso crazy. \textit{“Everyone has ’seen sense’ and got private jobs. Everyone except me, that is – I haven’r ‘seen sense’. The police are hunting me!”} – he complained.\textsuperscript{54}

A widower with no family after Kato’s death, Stalin despised Shaumyan’s happy home, just as he will despise the happy marriages of his grandees while in power, after the suicide of his second wife, Nadezhda Alliluyeva. He used to blame Shaumyan’s wife Ekaterina saying: \textit{“Like a doe, she thinks only of nurturing and was often hostile to me because I invoked her Stepan in secret business that smelt of prison”}. Ekaterina Shaumyan, in turned complained that Soso ‘intrigued against Shaumyan and behaved like a termagant’.\textsuperscript{55}

That being said, Shaumyan was a law-abiding angel either. In fact, as the head of the Baku Commune (a short-lived Communist government in early 1918) he will mastermind a horrible massacre of Baku’s indigenous Azeri population in March 1918 by making an alliance between the Bolshevik troops and units of the former Russian Army manned by ethnic Armenians. According to General Anton Denikin, one of the leaders of the White (Royalist) Army, \textit{‘the

\textsuperscript{54} SSM, p.183
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p.184
Bolshevik coup in Baku was accompanied by unprecedented atrocities when the whole Muslim (i.e. Azeri – A.F.) neighborhood was destroyed and the victims numbered thousands.” ⁵⁶

The Communist and Armenian clique was overthrown soon after, and the attitude of the local population towards the Bolsheviks that Stalin tried to his best to gain, was severely undermined. Nonetheless, once the leaders of the Communist government were executed by the British troops in September 1918, Stalin’s ideology turned them into highly revered martyrs, the so called 26 Baku Comissars, a myth that persisted throughout the whole Soviet period, and Shaumyan, of course was the first local Communist ‘Saint’ to worship. This was the way one of Stalin’s rivals and foes in Baku became a ‘hero’, posthumously.

Nonetheless, with his deeply rooted aversion to family life and household comforts, back in Baku, Stalin was accompanied by a new girlfriend from exile, Stefiania Petrovskaya. The Okhranka soon identified her as ‘mistress of well known leader of local RSDWP’ (i.e. the Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party – A.F.). At that time, Stalin gave her his ultimate compliment by using her name as one of his numerous pennames – ‘K.Stefin’. The one he used when his wife, Kto, was alive, was ‘K.Kato’. One of the explanations of his final alias, Stalin, is also bound with one of his reported mistresses, Lyudmila Stal’.

One may think, Stalin was strongly influenced by numerous women in his surrounding wherever he happened to be. Yet, according to Simon Sebag Montefiore, ‘women ranked low on his list of priorities, far below revolution, egotism, intellectual pursuits and hard-drinking dinners with male friends. Combining coarse virility with Victorian prudery, he was certainly no sensualist, no epicurean. He rarely talked about his own sex-life, yet he was promiscuous – which may explain his lifelong tolerance of shameless womanizing in his companions. Spandarian in Baku, and later in power, Yenukidze and Beria were all debauched to the point of priapic degeneracy. Provided they were competent, hardworking and loyal, they were safe. In his own life, he regarded sex less as a moral question than a security hazard... Women (and children if they were inconveniently arrived) were expected to understand when the wandering Marxist crusader chose to vanish into thin air” ⁵⁷

⁵⁷ SSM, pp.178-179
Upon his reappearance in Baku Stalin found out that the Party was riddled with police spies. His response was easy to predict – a hysterical and murderous witch-hunt for traitors. In most of the cases, this resulted in the deaths of the innocent ones. Out of the five persons initially identified by Stalin as ‘traitors’, only one was, found in the secret police dossiers.

Meanwhile, Stalin was extremely mistrustful and vehement. “The betrayal of someone you’ve shared everything is so horrible, no actor or writer can express it – it’s worse that the very bite of Death!” – he claimed. And this is another important feature of Stalin he first manifested in Baku to then apply it in much a greater scale of the Soviet Union. It was in Baku where he unleashed a mediaeval inquisition to expose traitors, exactly as he will do it the whole country until his death. Despite lots of people ‘liquidated’ in the course of this outburst, the two real spies of the Okhranka, Fikus and Mikheil, already mentioned before, were never apprehended by the witchfinder-general.

A noteworthy detail in this regard is that Stalin’s own secret-police contact were providing some jewels of information to Stalin. One of these warnings in September 1909 helped Stalin to move away and secretly re-assemble in a new location a valuable printing press that had been betrayed by an Okhranka double-agent.

Despite such a rapidly deteriorating situation, Soso was still active in his other business – refilling the party coffers. Unlike the previous years though, he was not in a position to arrange bold heists of engage in racketeering, so he referred to an alternative practice of ‘fundraising’ among the oil tycoons sharing sympathies to the revolutionaries. One of then, A.Mancho provided almost a thousand rubles. Needless to say, there could be no comparison with earlier pickings.

Eventually, Stalin’s virtuosic manner of evasion gave the secret police really hard time to trace him. By spring 1910, Baku’s fearsome Gendarme Commander Colonel Martynov reported: “The impossibility of his continued surveillance makes necessary his detention; all the agents have become known to him and even newly-assigned agents failed, while the Milkman managed both
to deceive the surveillance and to expose it to his comrades, thus spoiling the entire operation. The Milkman mainly lives with his concubine Stefania Petrovskaya”. 

On March 23, Colonel Martynov detained the Milkman, this time under the name ‘Zakhar Melikyants’. Meanwhile, Soso was arrested with ‘the noblewoman of Kherson Province, Stefania Petrovskaya’. In the course of interrogation held separately, Koba first denied any relations with the woman, however shortly after he requested the permission to marry her, and soon he was calling her ‘my wife’.

Stalin’s behavior during his second arrest was bizarre, in a way. From the outset, he pretend he had never used the name of Tomoniants. He claimed he could not have been involed in any crimes during the First Russian Revolution (1905-1907). Asked about Stefania, he admitted he had met her in Solvychegodsk but insistently denied any cohabitation. Meanwhile, Stefania questioned several days before told they were living together. Three months later, she was released. However their stance towards Soso was tough. The Gendarme Commander’s report reads: “In view of his tenacious participation in the revolutionary parties and his high position, despite all previous administrative punishments, and his two escapes from exile, I propose the extreme penalty of five years’ Siberian exile”. That was the maximum penalty possible of the new administration replacing their corrupt predecessors.

While Soso’s situation was changing from bad to worse, his comrades procured the phlegm of a TB-infected prisoner and managed to bribe not the police, but a doctor at this time, to get him to the police hospital. Untypically for himself, while in prison hospital, he appealed to the Baku Governor with quite a romantic request: “In view of my diagnosed pulmonary tuberculosis... I humbly request Your Excellency to... examine my health, put me under less restraint and expedite the accomplishment of my case. I ask Your Excellency to allow me to marry Stefania Leandrovnna Petrovskaya, resident of Baku. 29 June 1910. Petitioner Djugashvili.”

Released by that time, Stefania visited him in the prison hospital and received a proposal immediately, as the next very day, Soso came up with a new appeal, now calling her his ‘wife’: “I have learned from my wife who visited the Gendarmes Department that Your Excellency..."
considers it necessary to deport me to Yakutsk. I do not understand such a severe measure and wonder if insufficient knowledge of my case might have led to some misunderstanding."

The very fact of these appeals and their servile language was a clear neglect of the strict party rules and code of conduct which Stalin was so eager to impose on others. However this did not move tough Colonel Martynov. His request remained severe: five years of exile in Siberia. It was the liberal office of the Caucasian Viceroy in Tiflis that watered down the punishment. Stalin was to complete his exile in Solvychegodsk and banned for five years from the Caucasus. The final sentence was pronounced on September 13, 1910.

Meanwhile, just a couple of weeks before the verdict, the Deputy Prosecutor asked the Baku Governor to allow prisoner Djugashvili to marry. Whether it was a heavy-handed bureaucracy of a malice, but the Bailov Prison’s Governor received the permission only on September 23. The paper read: “Prisoner Djugashvili is permitted to marry Stefania Petrovskaya: the prisoner is to be informed. The ceremony will be in the presence of the Governor in the Prison Church.”

That being the case, when the warders brought the ‘great news’ to Koba’s scale, the ‘newly-wed-to-be’ was gone. On the same day, he was deported to Vologda Province to reach his once deserted Solvychegodsk by the end of October. Not only did he not marry Stefania, he never saw her again.60 Probably, to her luck…

This was the end of the next round of Stalin’s 1909-1910 adventures in Baku. Odd as this may seem, it took the secret police over a year to finally apprehend him. The logical question one should ask is why? Was this due to the fact that Stalin was somehow linked to the Okhranks? The next section will try to shed the light on this highly contested issue still raising lots of speculations.

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60 RGASPI 558.1.628 and 635.1-95 office of Baku Governor – J.Djugashvili file including Baku interrogation of Petrovskaya and Stalin.
Phenomenon of the Okhranka

Was Stalin a Secret Police Informant?

The Okhranka may have failed to prevent the Russian Revolution, but they were so successful in poisoning revolutionary minds that, thirty years after the fall of the Tsars, the Bolsheviks were still killing each other in a witch-hunt for non-existing traitors.

Simon Sebag Montefiore

Once Stalin reappeared in Baku in early 1909 under the name of Oganez Totomianz, an Armenian Merchant, he was immediately watched by two Okhranka (Russian Secret Police) informants within the Bolshevik Party. They regularly reported on the Milkman. Despite being permanently watched, Stalin, still wanted, was only arrested on March 23, 1910 to be deported to the place of his exile half a year later. Why? Here is one of the long-lasting mysteries nurturing speculations to this day, i.e. was the omnipotent Soviet dictator an agent, or informant of the Tsar’s secret police? To address this question, a brief review of the Okhranka’s background will be hereby appropriate.

The 1870s, the decade when Stalin was born and the oil boom broke out in Baku, presented Russia with the phenomenon of organized terrorist groups like Land & Freedom and later People’s Will. Their activists believed that the murder of that-time Emperor Alexander II would end up in the long-desired revolution.

Facing intricate terrorist game, the Tsar decided to create a security service as sophisticated as the terrorists themselves. That was the way a plain-clothed secret police was created under the name of the Division for Protection of Order and Social Security, shortened to Security or Okhranka, in Russian. This did not save Alexander II from being murdered in 1881 by the People’s Will activists who had their informant even in the Okhranka. His successor Emperor Alexander III established semi-military Gendarmes service to be ‘the Tsar’s eyes and ears’.
In later decades, a new system of surveillance was developed by the Okhranka whereby detectives employed so-called ‘external agents’ or informants, also known as spooks in revolutionary vernacular. Infiltrated into the revolutionary environment, spooks used provocations as the most effective tactics of exposing people to be arrested. Secret police cherished their agent provocateur as the ball of their eye, for one side’s informant was another side’s traitor facing death.

With further increase of tensions within Russia, the Okhranka had to penetrate not only the Bolsheviks (communists) and Mensheviks (non-Leninists), but nationalist terrorist groups like Armenian Dashnaks, Georgian Socialist-Federalists and Russia’s deadly Socialist-Revolutionaries (the SR-s). For some huge salaries, these double-agents not only penetrated revolutionary organizations but sometimes even managed them. The Okhranka’s ultimate goal, according to S. Sebag Montefiore “was to inspire a cannibalistic frenzy of suspicion and paranoia among the revolutionaries. The craziness of Stalinist terror in the USSR shows how successful they were”.  

Upon Stalin’s return to Baku, he found out the Party not only weakened by royal reprisals, but riddled with spies. His reaction was a hysterical and murderous witch-hunt for traitors that mainly resulted in the elimination of the innocent Party members and drawing suspicion onto himself, the suspicion. This suspicion will nurture numerous speculations among the researchers for decades to come.

The witch-hunt was unleashed in September 1909 when Stalin’s own informants in secret police notified him of the valuable printing-press betrayed by an Okhranka double-agent. Stalin succeeded in swift moving and secretly reassembling the press in another location. On a tip-off from another contact in the local Okhranka, Stalin blamed these betrayals on Leontiev, the Secretary of the Bolshevik Oil Workers Union in Baku. Stalin ruled that there were five Okhranka double-agents in the Party and sentenced Leontiev to death. The latter one resented strongly, called the scheme bluff and demanded a Party trial. This was unacceptable for Stalin since the trial would reveal his own moles in Okhranka. That was the way Leontiev was let off the hook raising counter accusations regarding Stalin’s links to the secret police.

61 SSM, p.72
In fact, ruthless as he was, Stalin was very sensitive and vulnerable to a sheer sign of a treason. According to his confession, ‘the betrayal of someone with whom you’ve shared everything is so horrible, no actor or writer can express it – it’s worse than the very bite of Death!’\(^{62}\).

Another interesting feature of Stalin’s Baku curve later applied all over the Soviet empire was this cannibalistic inquisition he unleashed in Baku in 1909 with a view to finding out traitors, just as he would across the entire Soviet Union in the mid-late 1930’s. According to Simon Sebag Montefiore, the difference was that ‘in Baku the Party was really infested with police spies’\(^{63}\).

That being said, even with quite a substantial number of spooks infiltrated into the Party in Baku, Stalin mad some tragic mistakes he would never regret about. E.g., as a result of the furious witch-hunt in Baku, Stalin came up with the names of five so-called ‘traitors’, however the archives of secret police reveal that only one was in fact a spy, while the others were innocent.

Meanwhile, the witch-hunt of 1909 gathered pace. When someone Chrnomazov, one of the leading Moscow Bolsheviks, visited Baku, Koba shouted disgustedly at him: “You are a traitor!” Odd as this may seem, in that particular instance, he was right. Nonetheless, the real Okhranka spies in Baku nicknamed Fikus and Mikheil were never identified by the witchfinder-general. In cool blood, he was ordering innocent people killed as traitors in Baku, just as he would do it in the years of the Terror.

This leads to another interesting feature of the Soviet jurisprudence and public mentality according to which execution of several innocent persons was justified if there was just one culprit in a bunch. Hence the famous Soviet saying ‘when the forest is chopped, one cannot protect himself from chips’, a sort of equivalent to the English ‘you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs’. The cost of an individual human life was never taken into consideration.

Needless to say, what this led to in Baku with Soso’s reappearance was a real mess. Meanwhile, he liked to fix such messes with ‘quiet killings’. However this did not work this time. Accusation of being spooks were reciprocal and mutual. Stalin was blamed with having secret police

\(^{62}\) Ibid, p.185
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
contacts by both the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. The grounds for these accusations were nurtured by the fact that Stalin certainly cultivated hidden links with the regime. This was necessary for him to receive a stream of mysterious tip-offs from the contacts he cherished in the secret police.

There was a case when while walking in a street in Baku with a comrade, Stalin was approached by an Okhranka officer and given a list of the Bolsheviks to be arrested in the near future. On another occasion, Okhranka’s informant Fikus reported of an unknown Gendarme officer visiting Stalin and Mdivani to warn them of a planned Gendarme raid on the Communist printing-press. In fact, the press was relocated and saved.

All this led to obvious charges against Stalin. For instance, Rozhden Arsenidze, a moderate Marxist, insisted that “Stalin was giving addresses of comrades disagreeable to him to the Gendarmes to get rid of them... His comrades decided to put him on Party trial...but, at the trial meeting, Gendarmes appeared and arrested the judges and Koba”.

Two other Georgian Mensheviks, Uratadze and Jordania, claimed that in 1909, Stalin was accused by the Baku Bolsheviks for ‘denouncing Shaumyan to the police’. Reportedly, Stalin was the only person to know the address of Shaumyan’s safe house. All three accusers were Menshevik exiles whose stories were widely accepted in later years. These allegations were supported by other fact, like the secret police being strangely confused about Stalin when it took Baku’s Gendarme chief Colonel Martynov good six months to ‘discover’ that the Milkman and Soso Djugashvili was in fact the same person. If one adds to this Stalin’s contacts with secret police in other places and his frequent and unpunished escapes from exiles, all together this may create an impression that Stalin was really an informant of the Okhranka.

All this leads Simon Sebag Montefiore to a crucial question: “Was the future supreme pontiff of international Marxism an unprincipled megalomaniac traitor? If Stalin was a phoney, was not the entire Soviet experiment a fraud too? And was everything he did, particularly in the Great

64 SSM, p.186
65 Suny, A Journeyman for the Revolution, pp373-394
Terror, an attempt to cover his guilt? It was a tempting theory – especially during the Cold War”. 66

The answer he comes up with is that despite all these accusations then case against Stalin is in fact a weak one. “Stalin was inflexible and amoral, - Montefiore notes, -His Messiah-complex led him to believe that anyone opposed to him was an enemy of the cause – thus any compact was justified, no matter how Mephistophelian. Yet there is no proof that he betrayed any comrades or that he was tried by a Party court”. 67

Of course, Stalin was too serious a figure to be overlooked by the Okhranka. That being said, the fact of his recruitment by the secret police was never confirmed, at least from what one may see in Simon Sebag Montefiore’s Young Stalin. Neither the inquiries made under Khrushchev, Stalin’s successor known for exposing of his personality cult, nor the attempts of NKVD leaders under Stalin to find anything supporting this claim yielded any serious results.

That being said, the cases of Stalin’s meetings with secret police are numerous. However even the most hostile stories reveal that he was receiving information as opposed to providing it. And here is the explanation to how he was used by the Okhranka. In fact, the secret police was remarkably successful by infiltrating numerous informants into revolutionary organizations. So they might have no need to use Stalin as just another spook. What is much more likely is that the Okhranka was double crossing Soso providing him with the names of innocent Bolsheviks as ‘traitors’. The goal of this was three-fold:

a) to get rid of the most dedicated party members,

b) to protect its own informants,

c) to plant destructive paranoia within the communists.

This could be the reason why most of so-called ‘traitors’ named by Stalin in Baku were innocent, whereas the two real agents watching him, “Fikus’ and ‘Mikheil’ remained intact. In general, this mess of espionage and duplicity helps to explain one of the unique features of the Soviet history, i.e. the origin of the paranoiac Stalin’s mistrust and the bloody frenzy of his terror against his fellow comrades.

66 SSM, p.187
67 Ibid.
The final conclusion of S. Sebag Montefiore sounds quite interesting: “…this cesspit of duplicity and espionage helps explain some of the craziness of Soviet history. Here is the origin of the paranoiac Soviet mindset, the folly of Stalin’s mistrust of the warnings of Hitler’s invasion plans in 1941 and the bloody frenzy of his terror”\(^\text{68}\).

\(^{68}\) SSM, *young Stalin*, p.189
Conclusion

While I live, I’ll enjoy my violets,
when I die the graveyard worms
can rejoice.

Georgian saying

The Baku pages of Stalin’s biography were instrumental in a number of ways. Even though this paper does not aim at tracing biography of one of the most atrocious dictators of the 20th century, an overview of Soso Djugashvili’s younger years in Simon Sebag Montefiore’s book led me to an unusual comparison.

With no chance to complete his formal religious studies at the Gori Seminary, Stalin got his high school revolutionary studies in Tbilisi, undergraduate classes in Batumi and Western Georgia. His graduate education was successfully accomplished in Baku where he had a fascinating possibility to combine education in the Bailov prison (the Bailovka) with hands-on experience of kidnapping, protection-racket, extortion, blackmail and political agitation at large. This was followed by post-graduate education in exile, where isolated from the major industrial and administrative hubs of the Empire, prisoners had no other choice than in-depth theoretical studies. Like many of his comrades, Stalin was a hard-working student indeed, however eager to practice his knowledge, he was interrupting his doctoral studies in exile by escaping to the areas where he could practice more. Baku was among the most attractive destinations.

In other words, having got his Bachelor Degree in Tbilisi and Batumi and accomplishing his Major studies in Baku followed by PhD in exile, Joseph Djugashvili-Stalin became fully prepared to run the world’s largest empire for good three decades, getting rid of majority of his closest associates, turning life of his family members into a nightmare, winning Hitler in WW2 and exterminating good 27 million of his fellow citizens in the Gulag (almost 5 times as much as the victims of Holocaust!).

The question that bothers me most is the following: what application does the story of young Stalin and his Baku period have for the history and historiography of education? Responses may vary a lot, but for me the major issue is bound with crime and revolution dichotomy. Do the

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69 Quoted from Stalin’s letter to his mother, Keke, SSM. p.309
goals of a revolution justify crime as the method of accomplishing them? This is an old philosophical issue of whether the means justify the ends.

Despite the attempts to shade his youth while in power, neither Stalin nor his myth-makers could never completely deny the acts that could be qualified as criminal offences. Their explanation was that these crimes were committed for the sake of revolutionary goals and against the ‘capitalists’. This was the essence of class-based values preached by the communist ideology.

Meanwhile, activities of young Joseph Djugashvili in the Caucasus in general, and Baku in particular, cannot be boiled down to a mere crime. What we see today in a number the former Soviet republics is the replacement of the class-based set of values by the ethnic ones. In this situation, what is viewed as a crime while committed against your own nation or ethnicity is not perceived as a crime once committed against a hostile nation. From this point of view, Stalin’s youth gives some food for thought, and for as long as human values are not given the highest priority, the appearance new Stalins is not excluded, at least in that part of the world.

Another impact of Stalin’s activities in Baku was a paranoiac mistrust to everyone, first and foremost his peers and comrades in the Bolshevik (Communist) Party. To a certain extent, this was a logical outcome of the environment rife with spooks, double-agents and informants masterfully planted by the Tsarist secret police, the Okhranka. The general milieu of an aggressively booming oil-rich city with crazy money, notoriously venal police, corrupt authorities, and even some oil barons supportive of the revolutionaries added a lot to this poisonous cauldron of suspicion and total mistrust.

While accusations of Stalin’s being an informant have no leg to stand on, according to Simon Sebag Montefiore, Stalin’s character shaped through his younger age, with Baku playing a particular role, had an enormous impact while applied to the whole of the Soviet Union in the later years of his Bolshevik Kingdom when millions of innocent people, including Stalin’s immediate surrounding and closest comrades-in-arms were purged, exiled or executed.

Interestingly enough, in the last years of his reign, relaxing on the lush hills of the Black Sea coast in a cliff top mansion of his fortifier aerie, old Stalin, still wearing a grey tunic and baggy trousers, used to recall the days gone with the few of his survivors of his violent youth. Acording
to Kote Charkviani, one of those childhood friends, ‘Stalin recalled the lives of other Old Bolsheviks and told anecdotes about them.’ In the course of this talk, he mentioned the names that made the guests shiver for these were the people murdered wantonly by Stalin himself. Oddly enough, years after, he mused that some of them had been executed wrongly – on his orders. This left to doubt that then ‘Father of Nations’ realized what others would consider a fatal error.

As Charkviani recalled, “I was surprised that when he mentioned people who were unjustly liquidated, he talked with the calm detachment of a historian, showing neither sorrow, nor rage – but speaking without rancor, with just a tone of light humor...” At these moments Soso used to recall the saying: “While I live, I’ll enjoy my violets, when I die the graveyard worms can rejoice”.

This attitude to human life as something so easy to spare, was to a great extent fomented by his Baku period, when he introduced the practice of killings of suspected “spooks” with no peer trial at the Bailov Prison or even more during his frenzied witch-hunt. Meanwhile, Stalin was always walking a tightrope operating in the environment that was generally quite neglectful towards human life. On a number of occasions, he could be killed himself, particularly in Baku where he was looked after by oil barons and local gangsters, the Tsarist police and even some of his comrades he charged with treason.

The question that inevitably pops in mind is: what if some of Stalin’s numerous foes or rivals succeeded in just murdering him, like he did it with many? Would the whole history of Russian Empire or whatever followed it take a different turn?.. To answer this question, there is a famous Russian saying I’d like to quote verbatim: ‘History accepts no subjunctive mood’. We may assume what could have happened, however as it did not happen, it just did not...

Meanwhile, just as bold speculation or simulation, if we imagine that Stalin was killed in Baku, where this could happen any moment, or elsewhere, would this change the course of history? Would this prevent the revolution in Russia? Would this keep the Empire from falling apart? My personal stance on this matter is NO.

70 SSM, p.309
Murky, treacherous, paranoiac and meanwhile enormously viable and capable as he was, Joseph Stalin was a product of the Russian Empire, with its screaming antagonisms, internal strife, flamboyant corruption, lack of reforms, enormous ethnic and cultural hostilities and, the worst, heavy-handed administration and strong reluctance to change. Such a situation tearing apart the world’s largest Empire could not help nurturing phenomena like Stalin, and places like Baku where all the factors mentioned above came to their climax provided and excellent nurturing ground for “subterranean worm and the silent chrysalis” to hatch ‘the steel-winged butterfly’.

Interesting enough, the Russian Empire, with its caste society and strong segregation between various social groups, in a way, trained and fostered people like Stalin through a very specific system of imprisonment. The Russian prisons made a clear segregation between criminal offenders, or thugs, and the so-called political prisoners. This implied very lenient attitude towards the latter ones resulting in very enabling conditions to socialize, polemicize, benefit from each other’s experience, and study. For a number of key figures of the Soviet regime, Stalin among them, the Tsarist prisons were almost the only ‘academic institution’ to graduate.

A noteworthy detail in this respect is that this system of imprisonment will be dismantled completely by Stalin while in power. Back in Baku’s Bailov Prison, he was standing out in a sense that he was absolutely in his element both among the thugs and the political prisoners. He knew both these environments like no one else, so he was second to none in destroying one milieu by mixing with another. In the Soviet time, the very concept of ‘political prisoner’ was completely abrogated due to ideological postulates (there could be no political prisoners in the USSR!), and that was the way dissidents were thrown at the mercy of thugs and cut-throats. Needless to say, many of them never survived.

On the other hand, throughout his whole life, Stalin was introducing thugs and cut-throats into politics, which made some of his party comrades really appalled. In this respect, Baku was an excellent feeding ground for these practices. Sadly, this element of Stalin’s legacy succeeded to outlive not only him personally, but the country he was running with a rod of iron for almost three decades.

Attitude towards Stalin and its legacy has always been a sort of litmus paper, i.e. an indicator of either reformist of conservationist trends in former Soviet Union, first and foremost Russia.
While Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin’s immediate successor and former associate, found courage to unmask and denounce Stalin’s personality cult in 1956 during the famous 20th Communist party Congress, the following Soviet leader, Leonid Brezhnev, whose reign is oftentimes referred to as ‘stagnation’ (nostalgically revered to this day by some ex-Soviet citizens) curbed criticism towards Stalin and kept a low profile on the issue.

In recent decades, the new wave of harsh denunciation of the Stalin era was launched at the time of Mikhail Gorbachev’s perestroika to slightly slow down during Boris Yeltsin’s corrupt and drunken Presidency and then give a strong ebb under Vladimir Putin whose attitude towards Russia’s immediate neighbors like Ukraine clearly bear the influence of Stalin’s ‘no man – no problem’ approach.

Meanwhile, looking back into his murky past an old dictator used to admit: “Historians are the sort of people who’ll discover not only the facts that are buried underground but even those at the very bottom of the ocean. Can you keep a secret?” Yet, some facts of Stalin’s personal life, and his family in particular, were clear and evident. In fact, the lives of his family members, closest friends and acquaintances form a microcosm of the enormous tragedy of his reign.71

According to Stalin’s daughter, Svetlana Alliluyeva, “Stalin was a bad and neglectful son, as he was father and husband. He devoted his whole being to something else, to politics and struggle. And so people who weren’t personally close were always more important to him that those who were.”72 What was even worse, Simon Sebag Montefiore adds, was that “he permitted, indeed encouraged, his politics to destroy and consume his loved ones”.73

That being said, until his last days, Stalin never gave up the attempts to glorify his past and conceal his mistakes. The personality cult he was so successful to impose served this purpose perfectly, yet in his elder age Stalin liked to assume a becoming modesty vis-à-vis his comrades-in-arms. At least, he was smart enough to realize that many paeans to his younger years were merely ridiculous.

71 Charkviani, Memoirs.
72 Zhores Medvedev and Roy Medvedev, Unknown Stalin, p.297
73 SSM, p.310
When someone Samoilova, an old Bolshevik acquaintance from Baku days, asked permission to display Stalin’s earlier books and articles in her museum, the handwritten note she got from him read: “I never thought you’d be that stupid in your old age! If the book is published in millions, why’d you need the manuscript? I burned all the manuscripts!” So when the compilation of memoirs of 1905 was ready to publish, the omnipotent Soviet leader’s verdict was: “Don’t Publish! Stalin”.  

The was S.Sebag Monetiore concludes his history of young Stalin is: “…until his death aged seventy-four, on March 5, 1953, the ageing choirboy remained the peerless politician, paranoid megalomaniac and aberrant master of human misery on a scale only paralleled by Hitlerite Germany. Responsible for deaths of around 20-25 million people, Stalin imagined he was a political, military, scientific and literary genius, a people’s monarch, a red Tsar.”

The city of Baku with its flamboyance, oil, social and ethnic contrasts, was an important milestone in Stalin’s ascent to the throne of the Soviet Empire. Baku’s old grim Bailov Prison was a microcosm for Stalin’s further accomplishments. Oddly enough, the prison was recently leveled to give place to the world’s largest flag. Lest we forget?

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74 Stalin stops publication. RGASPI (National Archives of the Republic of Georgia)
75 SSM, p.322
Timeline: Stalin in Baku 1904-1912

The two years of revolutionary activities among the oil industry workers hardened me as a practical fighter and one of real leaders... that was the way I got to know for the first time what managing large masses really means.

Joseph Stalin

1904, December 13-31
The second wave of large-scale strikes in Baku. Stalin is actively involved. A broader list of demands, most of them purely economic in nature (e.g. one day of a week, short days before holidays, fixed minimal salaries, etc.). The only political demand was bound with celebrating May 1 (the day of workers’ solidarity) as official holiday.
The strike resulted in the first Labor Contract (Collective Agreement) in Russian Empire.
Majority of demands granted (9-hour-long working day, increase of minimum salary from 80 kopecks to 1 ruble a day, 4 days off a month, etc.).

1907
Stalin moves to Baku after an outrageous bank robbery in Tiflis on June 13, led by Stalin’s henchman Kamo (Simon Ter-Petrosuan), with a staggering effect in media. The real effect of the robbery for the party was much lower as the authorities prudently communicated the numbers of banknotes stolen to the major European countries. This led to a number of arrests of the Party activists abroad.

June 20
The first issue of Bakinski Proletary (The Baku Proletarian) underground Bolshevik (Communist) newspaper issued, edited by Stalin. Baku was the first place where Stalin’s works in Russian were published. Russian became the major language of his published works.

August 12
The first issue of Gudok (Hooter) newspaper, an official Bolshevik media outlet of Baku’s oilfield workers, initiated by Joseph Stalin.
Early June
Upon return from the 5th Congress of the Russian Social Decocratic Workers Party (RSDWP) in London, Stalin leads the Bolshevik (Communist) campaign against the Mensheviks (moderate Social-Democrats) and the ESERs (Social Revolutionaries) and other factions in Baku, Tbilisi and Western Georgia.

Early Fall
Stalin attacks the Mensheviks and ESERs during the meetings in Baku’s industrial outskirts. Local Bolsheviks led by Stalin call the workers to strike and boycott negotiations with oil barons.

August 24
Five district Social-Democratic outlets and Hummet the Azerbaijani Social-Democratic group elect Stalin to the Commission to call the Municipal Party Conference.

September-October
Stalin running elections campaign to the 3rd State Duma.

September 29
Stalin speaking at the funeral of Khanlar Safaraliyev a murdered Hummetist worker. The funerary procession evolved into a massive protest rally.

October 25
Stalin elected to the Baku Committee of the RSDWP at the municipal Bolshevik conference.

Early November
The meeting of the Baku RSDWP Committee with Stalin’s involvement convenes at the hospital in Sabunchu, one of Baku’s oil rich suburbs.

November 22
Stalin-led Baku Committee of the RSDWP arranges a day-long strike as protest against the trial of the Social-Democratic fraction at the 2nd Russian Duma.
1908

January-February

A new set of strikes arranged in Baku by the Bolsheviks under Stalin’s leadership. Meanwhile, Koba’s criminal activities reach their climax with the hold-up of the Nicholas I steamer at the port of Baku.

January 13

Stalin’s leading article *Prior to the Elections* published in *Gudok (Hooter)* newspaper.

February

The Stalin-led Baku Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Party forms the *Self-Defense Headquarters* to repel the attacks by the Black Hundreds.

February 8

Stalin’s leading article *Once Again on the Meeting with Guarantees* published in the *Gudok* paper.

March 2

Stalin’s article *What Do Our Recent Strikes Show?* published in the *Gudok* paper.

March 9

Stalin’s leading article *Turn in the Oil Barons’ Tactics* published in the *Gudok* paper.

March 16

Stalin’s leading article *We Should Get Ready* published in the *Gudok* paper.

March 25

Stalin Arrested under the alias Gayoz Nizheradze. However, the police immediately figured out Stalin’s true identity and incarcerated him in the Bailov Prison. While being searched, Stalin was found in possession of numerous notes and articles on a variety of political issues. Nonetheless, while in prison, Stalin continued political journalism by writing articles for the worker newspapers. He was actively engaged in discussions with incarcerated ESER’s (representatives of the Social Revolutionary Party), maintained close ties with the Baku
Bolshevik unit, managed the Baku Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Party and effectively continued his ‘political studies’.

March 30
*The Economic Terror and the Worker Movement* leading article by J.Stalin published in *Gudok* newspaper.

April 21 – May 18
Stalin’s large article *The Oil Barons on the Economic Terror* published in three issues of *Gudok* paper.

June 30
Stalin’s unmasking articles *Kowtowing ‘Socialists’* and *The Pharisee Zubatovians* published in *Bakinski Proletary (The Baku Proletarian)* paper.

December 26
Audacious kidnapping of Mussa Naghiyev, the richest Azeri oil baron. The operation masterminded by Stalin in prison.

1909
January 27
Stalin exiled to Solvychegodsk, Vologda Province, inner Russia.

February 27
Stalin arrives at Solvychegodsk to escape several months after.

Early June
Stalin’s short trip to St.Petersburg prior to the return to Baku.

June 24
Successful hold-up of one of the Nobel Brothers’ Company’s offices masterminded by Stalin results in additional 50 thousand rubles delivered to the Party coffers.
Stalin succeeded in winning over a group of Gochis (Azerbaijani gangsters frequently used as security guards and the oil fields). The gang was reportedly hired by the Nobels to do away with Stalin. Stalin managed to get his assassins-to-be on his side.

_August 1_
Publication of _Bakinski Proletary_ newspaper resumes after a year-long interruption with Stalin’s leading article _The Crisis within the Party and Our Duties_

_Late September_
Stalin takes steps to re-launch activities of the Baku Committee’s underground printing house.

_November-December_
Stalin’s series of articles entitled _Letters from the Caucasus_ published in the Bolshevik Party’s central media outlet.

_December 18_
The Baku Committee of the RSDWP published Stalin’s leaflet _The December Strike and the December Accord_ dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the December Strike of 1904.

1910
Stalin became an authorized person of the Communist Party’s Central Committee (CC agent).

_January 9_
The first issue of the _Tiflisski Proletary (The Tbilisi Proletarian)_ newspaper published with Stalin’s direct involvement.

_March 23_
Stalin arrested in Baku under the name of Zakhar Melikyantz.

_March 26_
Stalin’s leaflet entitled _August Bebel, the Leader of German Workers_, published.
The same day Stalin imprisoned and incarcerated in Baku’s Bailov Prison. His second imprisonment lasted till September when he was exiled to Solvychegodsk, Vologda Province, inner Russia.

**September 7**
Following Decree by the Caucasian Vice-Roy, Stalin is prohibited to reside in the Caucasus for 5 next years.

**September 23**
Stalin’s guarded transportation to Solvychegodsk.

**1912**

**February 29**
Stalin flees the exile.

**March 29**
Stalin reappeared in Baku to hold the meeting of leaders of the local Bolshevik units. The meeting supported the decisions of the Prague Conference.

**March 30**
Stalin published a report regarding the meeting in Baku in the *Social Democrat* newspaper.

**April 1**
Stalin left Baku for St.Petersbourg.

**1920, autumn**
Stalin’s visit to Baku in his capacity of the People’s Commissar in charge for Ethnicities. Stalin’s personal train stops in the vicinity of the city. One of his orders was to release Mammadamin Rasulzadeh, one of the key figures in the first Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920) and leader of *Mussavat* Party, then arrested and subject to inevitable execution by the communists. In previous years, on a number of occasions, Rasulzadeh supported Stalin in Baku hiding him from both local oil barons and Russian Gendarmes, sometimes even in mosques. In response to this, Stalin
took M. Rasulzadeh to Petrograd (Leningrad) and provided a chance to emigrate. One of rare cases true gratitude.

In early November, Stalin’s train left Baku for Moscow via Dagestan.
Stalin’s Nicknames and Alliases

Real name: Iosif Vissarionovich (Joseph son of Bessarion) Djugashvili

Aliases:
Beso
Besoshvili
David
Father Koba
Gaios Besovich Nizheradze
Galiashvili
Giorgi Berdzenoshvili
Ivan Inanovich Vissarionovich
Ivanov
Koba
Koba Ivanovich
Koba Stalin
K.Kato
K.Safin
K.Stefin
K.Solin
Osip Koba
Oganez Totomiants
Petr Chizhikov
Soso
Soselo
Zakhar Totomiants

Nicknames: Joe Pox (Ioska Koryavy)
Oddball Osip
Pockmarked (Chopura)
Pockmarked Oska
The Caucasian

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76 Simon Sebag Montefiore. *Young Stalin*, p.323
The Milkman
The Loper (Geza)
The Priest
The Staggerer (Kunkula)