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**HISTORY OF THE CHURCH  
OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA  
ACCORDING TO MOVSES  
KALANKATUATSI**

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**Archimandrite Alexy (Nikonorov)**

History of the Church of Caucasian Albania according to Movses Kalankatuatsi /

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Moses Kalankatuatsi's work "The History of the Country of Albania," the first and only work on the history of Caucasian Albania, is of pivotal importance for studying the history of this state during the period of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. This monograph by Doctor of Church History and Archimandrite Alexy (Nikonorov Andrey) is the first serious attempt to highlight the issues of Albanian church history based on this Albanian source in comparison with accounts by Caucasian, Persian, Syrian, Byzantine and Arabic historians. This work analyzes information contained in Moses Kalankatuatsi's "The History of the Country of Albania" and associated with the life of the local Christian community.

Relying on historical records, the book reconstructs the canonical structure of the Albanian national church and its institutions and traces the penetration and development of Christianity within the confederation of Albanian tribes.

By leveraging a wide range of sources, employing current scholarly literature and applying a complex comparative method, the author paints a compelling picture of Christian history in Caucasian Albania from the 1st to the 9th centuries is presented.

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## **A New Look at Caucasian Albania by Archimandrite Alexy (Nikonorov): The History of the Church of Caucasian Albania According to Movses Kalankatuatsi**

A classic statement on modern medieval scholarship, made by French historian Marc Bloch, serves as a benchmark for all historical studies: “A historical phenomenon can never be explained outside of its time. This applies to all stages of evolution, including the one we are experiencing, and all others. An ancient Arabic proverb states that people are more like their times than they are like their fathers. The science of studying the past has frequently discredited itself by ignoring this Eastern knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

Archimandrite Alexy (Nikonorov), the author of this monograph on the history of the early medieval Albanian Church in the Caucasus, is in his main vocation not a historian but a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church. Nonetheless, his work has earned a prominent place in the research literature on the history of the relationship between the Christian Church and the state, political processes, and evolution of religious consciousness in Caucasian Albania during the period preceding the dominance of Islam there at the end of the 10th century. This book successfully combines the responsible and methodologically mature approach of a professional researcher of medieval Eastern communities with a priest’s insight and participatory perspective on the religious atmosphere and evolution of the Albanian Christian community during a time of major political, economic, and cultural changes in the Caucasus. These shifts were the result of both the long confrontations between two pairs of world powers in the Early Middle Ages (first between Rome and the Sasanian Empire, and then between Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate) and the rivalry between three world religions — Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam — striving for dominance in the South Caucasus.<sup>2</sup>

Marc Bloch. *Apologiya istorii ili remeslo istorika* [the Apology of History or the Craft of a Historian]. Translated by E.M. Lysenko, edited by A. Y. Gurevich. Moscow, 1973. P. 23.

We did not include Judaism among the competing religions, despite the fact that Jewish communities appeared in the South Caucasus quite early —; according to some reports, after the First (Assyrian) Captivity, but in any case, before the Muslim Arab conquest and the spread of Islam. The conversion of the Khazar elite to Judaism secured the presence of Judaism in the Caucasus. However, Judaism is not characterized by active proselytism and missionary effort, and nomadic empires are not known for religious zeal and the desire to impose their faith on the local population. Therefore, the emergence and growth of Jewish communities in the Caucasus were associated with the resettlement of Jews from other countries, who found here a tolerant environment and physical safety, as well as opportunities for Jewish merchants to participate in international trade.

The title of the book and the first pages of the introduction, which explain the researcher's qualifications and the relationship between church history and political development in Caucasian Albania, make clear the subject of the study and sources it leverages. Thus the author of the monograph upholds the fundamental criterion of scholarly objectivity with which we began our review.

The *History of Albania* is the only piece of medieval literature entirely devoted to the history of Caucasian Albania and Albanian Christianity. According to its author, Caucasian Albania is the historical cradle of several Caucasian peoples. It is difficult to argue with that premise when we consider that, according to numerous sources, the country's population at the time of the Arab conquest was multi-ethnic and included Indo-Iranian, Caucasian, and Turkic peoples. The early penetrations of the Indo-Iranian and Turkic (arriving later, at the start of the 2nd century AD) tribes, the diversity of the tribal composition of the Albanian population, and the resettlement policy of the Sassanids were all factors that contributed to the development of a uniquely multi-ethnic situation.<sup>3</sup>

After discussing the ethnic diversity of the population of Albania, the author emphasizes the fact that the territorial boundaries of Caucasian Albania included lands now part of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Dagestan. The historical ethnic ties that connect the peoples of the modern Caucasian states with the population of Albania, along with the current state borders in the Caucasus, link today's regional political problems to issues of Albanian identity, the political borders of Albania, and the fate of Albanian heritage. And this link, which goes against the principle of historicism bequeathed by the great French historian, is the reason why modern political ambitions are projected onto the past, i.e. onto reality, which should be approached through objective study that hews as close as possible to how people at the time perceived and assessed events, not to how today's researchers feel about them.<sup>12</sup>

While we can agree that it would be arrogant to claim complete independence from the realities of today while studying the realities of the past, a healthy awareness of the pitfalls involved undoubtedly helps in formulating research questions with accuracy, selecting sources and methods for their study, and painstakingly establishing the reliability of available evidence. Archimandrite Alexy's brief but detailed introduction to the research chapters of his monograph gives a full picture of how challenging it is to study the history of Caucasian Albania and the Albanian

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Strabon. Geografiya v 17 knigakh [Geography in 17 books]. Translation, article and commentaries by G.A. Stratanovsky. Edited by S.L. Utchenko. Moscow, 1964. Book XI, Chapter 2 p. 503; Ibn al-Athir, Izz ad-Din Abi al-Hasan Ali b. Muhammad al-Jazari. *Al-Kamilfi al-Tarikh* (Abbdallah al-Qadi & Muhammad al-Daqqaq Ed. 4th ed.). Beirut, 2006. Vol. 1, p. 337-338; Yuzbashian K.N. *Armianskaya epopeya V veka. Ot Avarayskoy bitoy k soglash- eniyu v Nuarsake. Elishe. Slovo o voyne Armianskoy* [The 5th Century Armenian Epic. From the Battle of Avarayr to the Treaty of Nvarsak. Elishe. A Few Words on the Armenian War]. Moscow, 2001. P. 327; Asadov F. *Turkskiye naseleniye Kavkazskoy Albanii v sasanidsky period (V-VII w.)* [The Turkic Population of Caucasian Albania in the Sasanian Period (5th – 7th centuries)]. *Transcaucasica*. Vol. 3. Moscow, 2016. P. 36-38.

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## Church.

The subject of the study is precisely stated in the monograph's title and elaborated in two sections of the introduction. The author is, if anything, more liable to a charge of excessive caution in establishing research objectives than of claiming to have established ironclad historical realities. The following statement demonstrates his healthy skepticism of the profession of historian: "[T]he scientific fact is a rather rare occurrence in historical scholarship. History consists mainly of theories put forward by historians ... shaped by their personal scholarly and ideological positions, often with a certain degree of logical assumption." Such a demanding attitude toward historians and historical research is not only understandable but also delineates the boundaries of research, which in the present case strives to rise above personal interpretations on the issues of Caucasian Albanian borders, Albanian ethnicity, and Albanian cultural identification.

If we try to summarize the overall goal of this investigation, it is to reconstruct the history of the Albanian Christian Church based on the accounts and interpretations given by the author of the *History of Albania*. This is, indeed, how the research objective is stated in the book's abstract. And any serious student of history can only be gladdened that the monograph draws on medieval Syrian, Byzantine, Armenian, and Muslim sources to illuminate the interpretation of the history of the Albanian Church in this rich chronicle and to accurately reconstruct the perspective of its 8th and/or 10th century authorship,<sup>4</sup> in other words, to reconstruct the historical realities of the Albanian Church as perceived and explained by the Albanian clergyman and author of the *History of Albania*.

Archimandrite Alexy structures his work in full accordance with the research objectives he has set. The introduction contains two important sections that define and formulate the objectives of the next three chapters:<sup>3</sup> one about the authorship of the treatise and its manuscript tradition, and the other about how much is known of the history of the Albanian Church, or in the words of the monograph's author, of the different versions of history concerning Albania, the Albanian people, and the Albanian Church that have been proposed by various researchers. Accordingly, the next three chapters, one devoted to each of the three books of the *History of Albania* (though presented in reverse order), consist of two sections each: first, the historical context for the events of Albanian church life is described, and then the events are examined and interpreted. Each chapter starts with an overview that shows how much of the content is historical news, church canonical documents, and information on the religious life of Albania. And, based on the author's methodological approaches, the historical part of the study limits itself to a description of the history of Albania and Albanians, while chapter parts dealing with church history include

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<sup>3</sup> Most scholars believe that the text of the *History of Albania* was created with the active participation of an 8th-century author known as Movses Kaghankatvatsi and a 10th-century author known as Movses Daskhurantsi. This version of authorship is also accepted in the book under review.

the author's original ideas summarizing debatable issues in the history of the Albanian Church. The work has a special value in that it raises issues and, in many cases, offers reasonable solutions to questions about how religious life and reforms in neighboring countries affect the timeline, self-identification, scope, and influence of the Albanian Church.

Before moving on to other research issues, it is worth pausing to examine the particular vantage point of the author of this monograph. If the purpose of an objective study is to explain events in the context of contemporaneous realities, then a historical study of the early Christian Church in Albania by an Orthodox Church minister and erudite historian aligns the author as closely as possible to the position of the author of the treatise. This is due to the fact that church life, religious doctrines, and consequent attitudes toward historical realities and the origins of Christianity, similar to those which existed during the formulation of the text of the *History of Albania*, partly determine the content of reflections, polemics, arguments, positions, and judgments in the present-day life of the Orthodox and Eastern Churches.

As a native of the city of Baku, Archimandrite Alexy, an Orthodox Christian and priest in the Russian Orthodox Church, is especially sensitive to the positions of diverse interest groups on contested issues pertaining to this history. His own perspective is defined by a particular awareness of the politically charged issues of Albanian historiography, as well as by a high degree of responsibility in gathering and commenting on the perspectives of various sources. Despite the author's personal connection to Azerbaijan, the references to Azerbaijani historiography in the polemical section of the work are briefer and certainly less subjective than, for instance, his opponents' arguments. Particularly notable is the examination of the question of the treatise's original language and of its hypothetical first author's ethnicity. The monograph's author presents accurate evidence regarding the origin of Movses Kalankatuatsi as from the Utik region, assuming that he could have been an Utian, i.e. an Albanian, but adding parenthetically, "who wrote in Armenian." And only then does the author indicate that some believe the book, or parts of it, to have been written initially in the Albanian language.

It would also be appropriate to discuss the opinion of British scholar C. J. F. Dowsett, the author of the English translation and researcher in his own right of the *History of Albania*, who supported the idea that, in the treatise's text, the narrator's mention of the village of Kalankatuk in the province of Utik and reference to it as his homeland (while reporting the Khazar invasion) could be evidence for the authorship of this particular passage rather than of the entire treatise.<sup>4</sup> The British scholar would seem to attribute authorship of the treatise as a whole to Movses Daskhurantsi. Father Alexy judiciously chooses not to enter the difficult debate about authorship here.

At the same time, he does not overlook the topic of medieval Albanian-

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Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*. Translated by C. J. F. Dowsett. London, 1961. P. xviii-xix.

language literature but places it in the broader context of the problem concerning the language of the Albanian Church. In a corresponding section, he explains thoroughly the position of a number of Armenian historians on Albanian literature, namely that the Albanian state and Church could not have used any of the languages of the Albanian tribes as a unifying language for the Albanian population. Only Armenian, according to the authors of this concept, could have served as such a language. The concept of the Armenian language in Albanian literature is critiqued throughout the book in a meaningful, consistent, and convincing manner. The argument is founded on the undeniable evidence for the existence of an Albanian alphabet, recent discoveries of Albanian-language religious texts in St. Catherine's Orthodox Monastery on Mount Sinai, and the most recent work of the Russian scholar of Eastern Studies A.K. Alikberov.<sup>5</sup>

One of the ongoing discussions in the monograph regarding the *History of Albania* is the question of the work's archeography. On pages 6-14, the author reviews the history of the manuscript's discovery, publications of the text, and translations. He gives credit to the author of the most recent Armenian-to-Russian translation, S.V. Smbatian, who used all the available manuscripts of the *History of Albania* to produce his Russian text in 1984. When faced with passages of uncertain meaning, Smbatian chose between different manuscripts, and while he explains and defends these choices, the case is simply not strong enough to justify his declaration that "a reconstruction of the hypothetical original text" had been achieved.<sup>6</sup>

In concluding this subject, I would like to emphasize that producing a critical text and apparatus for this historical treatise should be a goal of modern Albanian studies. Moreover, both the preparation of such a text and its subsequent study will require specialized linguistic and literary expertise, and given the treatise's significance beyond the scope of routine source studies, such a demanding endeavor deserves serious international scholarly cooperation and support.

Another issue in modern studies of Caucasian Albania that the author addresses is the meaning and use of the term "Albanian." Regarding the etymology of the word, he follows the argumentation of his predecessors — most notably the renowned researcher of Albanian history and culture K. V. Trever — although he refers to an indirect source (a 2007 publication by A. Azimov) by suggesting that the Latin word "albus" (white) may indicate "mountainous country," a meaning supposedly supported by the use of the choronym Albania in the toponymy of Scotland and Italy. Trever, on the other hand, mentions this etymology but doubts whether it is reasonable to look for the meaning of the word in Latin or Greek,

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Alikberov A.K. Kavkazskaya Albaniya i lezginские народы: актуальные проблемы, новые дискурсы [Caucasian Albania and the Lezghin Peoples: Current Problems, New Discourses]. *Albania Caucasica*, No. 1, Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 16-27.

Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Country of Aluank]. Translated by S.V. Smbatian. Yerevan, 1984.

arguing that the Romans may have given a Latin pronunciation to a local name.<sup>7</sup> In addition, she draws attention to the opinion of the 19th-century Azerbaijani historian Abbasgulu Bakikhanov, who believed that “*albus*” (white) was frequently used in the sense of “free, unconquered” — i.e. the Romans may have been referring to the country they failed to conquer.<sup>8</sup>

There is another difficulty with defining the meaning and use of the term “Albanian”; this time, in relation to the population of the country. Researchers of Albania’s history are of the opinion that there was a tribe called the Albanians *per se* and that the population of Albania, the Albanians, was made up of different tribes that merged into the Albanian state and got their name from the leading tribe, the Albanians. This view was shared by Trever<sup>9</sup> and Alikberov, who summed up the issue by stating that the term “Albanians” was both a designation of a specific ethnic group and a collective name for a large number of people who inhabited Caucasian Albania.<sup>10</sup> Whether the use of the collective name Albanians reflected the consolidation of the tribes in the territory of Albania into an Albanian people with a distinctive culture, church, and political consciousness, or whether the term “Albanians” remained only a politonym in a broad sense, is a matter of discussion between proponents of the first concept<sup>11</sup> and their opponents, representatives of the modern Armenian historiography of Albania who see the formation of Albanian self-consciousness as an unfinished process that shifted in its final stage to the Armenian-speaking environment of the right bank of the Kura,<sup>12</sup> or in other words, who assert that the mature forms of Albanian self-consciousness originated in the Armenian-speaking cultural milieu.

The work devotes considerable attention to this delicate issue. Both concepts of Albanian identity are described with reference to their respective authors’ major studies. Related to the topic of Albanian identity and the narrow ethnic and broad collective meaning of the term “Albanians” is the question of the country or province

Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Aihanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE]. Moscow-Leningrad, 1959. P. 4.

Bakhikhanov Abbasgulu Agha. *Gulistan-I Iran*. Edited by Z.M. Buniyatov. Baku, 1991. P. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Trever K.V. Op. Cit., p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Alikberov A.K. Op. Cit., p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii (III v. do n. e. — VIII v. n. e.)* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania (3rd Century BCE — 8th Century CE)]. Baku, 1986. P. 41-42; Mamedova F.D. *Ka-vkazskaya Albaniya i albanii* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians]. Baku, 2005. P. 379-380.

<sup>12</sup> Akopian A. A., Muradian M.M., Yuzbashian K.N. *K izucheniyu istorii Kavkazskoy Albanii (Po povodu knigi F. Mamedovoy “Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii (III v. do n. e. — VIII v. n. e.)” [On the Study of the History of Caucasian Albania (Regarding F. Mamedova’s Book “Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania” (3rd Century BCE — 8th Century CE)]]. K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia]. Yerevan, 1991. P. 329-331.



of Lpinia and its indigenous tribe, the Lpins. This issue is addressed by the author not in the section where the definitions of the term “Albanians” are discussed but in the second chapter, where the history of the Albanian Church is examined by bringing to bear materials from Book Two of the *History of Albania*. It is in this section that the title of the Albanian Catholicos is indicated as archbishop of “Albania, Lpinia, and Chola.” The author, citing B. A. Arutyunian’s study, revisits assumptions about the linguistic connection between the terms “Lpinia” and “Albania.” Several early researchers of Albanian history support this view. After noting this fact, the author moves on to the topic of the location of Lpinia and the Lpins, who Pliny the Elder, the earliest source, refers to as Lupenii.<sup>13</sup> After devoting more than five pages of the book to the topic of Lpinia and Lpins, the author only focuses on establishing the title of the Albanian Catholicos and does not go into detail regarding the connection between the terms Lpinia and Albania, instead referring to Trever’s remark that the inclusion of Lpinia, along with Albania, in the Catholicos’ title disproves the idea that these terms are connected.

The author of the monograph clarifies the use of the terms “Eastern land” and “Eastern country” in the *History of Albania* in reference to the territory of Albania without diving into the debate surrounding the meaning of the term “Albanians.”<sup>14</sup> The concern is that, according to some Armenian researchers, the usage of these terms indicates that the author of the *History of Albania* acknowledged that the area of Albania belonged to the sphere of Armenia’s political influence and even acknowledged it as a part of Armenia. These assertions were challenged by Farida Mamedova, a well-known Azerbaijani Albanist, according to whom the use of the expressions “Eastern land” and “Eastern people” in relation to Albania and Albanians (together with the names Albania and Albanians) did not in any way suggest that the country and its people were part of Armenia, which was inhabited mainly by Armenians and Armenianized locals.<sup>15</sup> Her argument to support this point of view is that Movses Kalankatuatsi’s use of the name “Eastern land” meant that Albania was considered “the Eastern edge of the Christian world in relation to Jerusalem.”<sup>16</sup> Archimandrite Alexy also contributes to this discussion. He correctly points out the first use of the term “Eastern” in reference to Albania (Aluank) in the story of Japheth’s descendants settling on Earth, which included both Armenians and Albanians. However, it should also be noted that in another part of his work, the author refers to Farida Mamedova’s opinion on the use of the term “East” instead of Albania to mean the Eastern edge of the Christian world.

Alongside the problem of Albanian identity, one of the most debatable issues

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<sup>13</sup> Pliny. *Natural History*. In 10 volumes. With an English translation by H. Rackham. Cambridge-London, 1961. Book VI, Chapter 11 (10).

<sup>14</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Country of Aluank]. Translated by S.V. Smbatian. Yerevan, 1984. P. 26,30,35.

<sup>15</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi, Op. Cit., p. 25, Note 23; Akopian et al., Op. Cit., p. 322,325, Note 12.

<sup>16</sup> Mamedova E, 1986, Op. Cit., p. 76-77.

in the history of Albania is the issue of the country's political borders, which, in my opinion, is unjustifiably brought up by some contemporary pol-

iticians and political scientists in the context of current territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus. Obviously, the topic at hand is territorial claims to the former autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Curiously, almost no one disputes the fact that the lands on the right bank of the Kura, which are primarily Artsakh of Armenian sources (Orchis- tene) and Utik or Uti (Otene, Sakasena, with the principal city of Partaw, or Barda), became part of Albania as a result of the treaty between Byzantium and Sasanian Iran in the year 387 CE. Was it the recovery of Albanian territory that Armenia had previously seized, or did Albania annex Armenian lands? Who inhabited these lands prior to the division of 387? These events are proposed as arguments for territorial claims. Farida Mamedova's fundamental work contains a detailed presentation of this discussion with references to relevant publications by opponents and sources.<sup>17</sup>

The author of the work under review first tries to get into this debate, realizing that the political geography of the country is inextricably linked to the geography of its official Church, the Albanian Catholicosate. However, no one has yet accomplished the task of understanding the contradictory statements of ancient authors without examining the original texts and numerous other sources of information from related fields of knowledge. Therefore, the author's stance is clear, rational, and extremely well-balanced. First, he raises the question of the originality and reliability of the information of ancient authors, making a quite reasonable assumption that the ancient authors of the 1st-2nd centuries AD, who wrote from afar about the realities of distant lands, could have received contradictory information from Armenian authors who painted a picture from their memory of the Armenian Artaxiad dynasty's brief conquests. Moreover, he emphasizes that empires with vast territories could not have been entirely populated by the people and tribesmen of the ruling dynasties that established these empires. In other words, the entire large territory of the state of Tigranes II (140-55 BC)<sup>18</sup> could not have been inhabited exclusively by Armenians or an Armenianized populace. We can only add that today's political borders are not defined by realities and agreements left over from Tigranes II or Vachagan III (487-510),<sup>19</sup> but by modern international relations and modern states that are subject to international law, or, going back to the Arabic proverb cited by Marc Bloch and rephrasing it a bit, they are defined by the laws of their time, not by the stories of their distant predecessors.

The study of the *History of Albania* begins with disagreements over the interpretation of the chronicle's name: is it the history of Albania, the Albanian

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<sup>17</sup> Mamedova F., 2005, Op. Cit., p. 273-307.

King of Armenia from the Artaxiad dynasty.

<sup>20</sup> King of Albania from the Arsacid dynasty.

people, or the flock of the Albanian Church? One thing that comes from this choice of title is the need to figure out the precise meaning of the term Albanian (Aluanian/Aghuanian) in the title of the work. It is also inconsistent in the chronicle's surviving manuscripts, making it unclear if it should be translated as the history of the country or people of Aluank. Smbatian, the author of the most recent Russian translation of the chronicle, translates the name as the *History of the Country of Aluank*, and prefers to interpret the words that are frequently found in the text in relation to the inhabitants of the country as a vague reference to the country's inhabitants, Albanians, regardless of their ethnicity, even when the Albanians are named among other ethnic communities, along with Armenians and other descendants of the biblical Japheth.<sup>20</sup>

The word "Albanian" (or "Aluanians" according to Smbatian's translation) is also used to refer to the parishioners of the Albanian Church in the parts of the chronicle's text concerning the dogmatic disputes and hierarchy of churches in the South Caucasus. This can be seen, for example, in the story of the schism that followed the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, the author of the *History of Albania* set out to present both the country's history and geography and the history of its people and the Church, all denoted by the term "Albanian" in its three interrelated meanings. Hence the discrepancies in the interpretation of the term's use.

The chronicle's complicated narrative structure means the researcher must be selective, and Father Alexy chooses to focus on the history of Albania's spiritual life and Christian Church. But, as we have seen, the convergence of the three narrative lines in the chronicle makes it imperative that space be given to related story lines, and here the historian does not devote as much effort as he did to examining the intentions of the author of the *History of Albania* and the meaning of his accounts regarding the history of Christianity and the Christian Church in Albania. In the research focal point selected by the author, however, we find an in-depth examination of a number of significant topics in the history of the Albanian Church.

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<sup>20</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi, Op. Cit., p. 23, Note 1,8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 138-139.

Firstly, we highlight the author's well-defined research objective, which is to present the Albanian Church in interaction with religious movements and religious reforms throughout the region that witnessed the spread of early Christianity. To this end, the book includes reviews of religious reforms and stages of development of Zoroastrianism and early Christianity, describes changes in the religious situation associated with the arrival of Islam and the Arab conquests. These essays, which are organized into sections of the book that correspond to the stages of the development of the Albanian Church, are written in an engaging and convincing manner, and they recreate the cultural and political environment in which Albanian Christianity was formed in tandem with the development of Albanian statehood. The study of a number of events and phases in the region's religious history yields interesting facts and findings.

The work provides us with an objective study of the driving factors and conditions that led the people of the South Caucasus to become Christians. In this context, the author rightly highlights the fact that the main direction of the expansion of Christianity throughout the early apostolic period was into the Jewish communities that existed in the 1st century. The author shores up evidence and presents the opinions of other researchers regarding the early migrations of Jews to the Caucasus and concludes that there could have been a significant Jewish population in the Caucasus already by the time of the apostolic preaching, where they settled during several waves of migration from the earliest time of the Babylonian captivity (598-539 BC) under King Nebuchadnezzar until the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD. A significant portion of the book is devoted to the study of the educational mission of the apostolic father Eliseus, a holy martyr, whom the *History of Albania* describes as the first Christian preacher in Albania, ordained by the Jerusalem bishop James, brother of the Lord. Again, we see a detailed analysis of conflicting reports of St. Eliseus' activities, as well as a meticulous description of opponents to the opinion regarding his apostolic enlightenment mission. The collection of evidence and the author's arguments suggest the likelihood of this early episode in the spread of Christianity in Albania, but skepticism is also voiced regarding the historicity of Eliseus' personality and the possibility to pinpoint the exact year of his mission.

The great merit of this monograph is its constant search for and study of the historical circumstances and political conditions that helped the teachings spread and develop. The interpretation of the events that led to the conversion of the rulers of Armenia and Albania to Christianity in the early 4th century thanks to St. Gregory the Illuminator is of primary importance in this respect. The reign of religiously tolerant Shahanshah Shapur I (240/241- 271/272), the actual builder of the Sasanian state, was followed by the gradual consolidation of Zoroastrianism as the official

ideology of Iran, which was also used to exert pressure and subjugate the South Caucasian countries. The adoption of Christianity in Albania, which like Armenia, was still ruled by representatives of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty, was a response to these attempts. Gregory the Illuminator's Christian religious center in Ashtishat was not originally an Armenian Catholicosate, but rather a regional center for spreading Christianity, where services were conducted in Greek and Syriac. The rewriting of the narrative of St. Gregory as the founder of the Armenian Church, from which Christianity spread to Iberia and Albania, occurs later, in the 8th century. St. Gregory's center was under the jurisdiction of the See of Caesarea; hence, it lacked the authority to set up new church structures or establish their canonical status, but was responsible for educating and training ministers for Christian communities. The Caucasian Christian communities of this time were spiritually united, rather than being in church subordination to the Ashtishat center.

At the same time, the Albanian king Urnayr was baptized not only due to religious commitment, but to create a stronghold against the political and religious expansion of the Persians, which was especially strong during the long reign of Shapur II (309-379). During this time, the local Christian churches, including the Church of Caucasian Albania, were united with the universal Christian Church and were "non-national." Naturally, Urnayr saw nothing wrong with St. Gregory, the head of the center for Christian education, appointing the first Albanian bishop. And he himself went to him to be baptized because he did not consider this to be a belittlement of his state dignity. "The Armenian Church still did not have a political nature and could not impose its will, but it was able to provide a foundation for the rising new Church in which the Albanian state was so interested".

The point about the non-national status of the Eastern Churches during the early period of the spread of Christianity in the Caucasus is elaborated in later sections of the book. The central notion of the author's study of the dynamics of relations between national self-consciousness and the religious feeling of the Christian clergy was the constancy of the idea of the Christian world's solidarity and its role in the motivation of Church leaders. According to the author, the Eastern Churches' desire for independence from the Patriarch of Constantinople was not because of theological disputes; instead, it was because, amid the political pressure from Byzantium's rival Iran and later the Arab Caliphate, they did not want to be thought of as agents of the

Byzantine emperor who promoted the Chalcedonian Christological doctrine. When looking at how the religious situation in the South Caucasus evolved over time, the author also takes into account the internal political factor of how the Christian clergy was tied to the interests of the local political elite.

The dynamics of the influence of these factors on the evolution of the South

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Caucasian Churches and their interaction during the early Christian period are examined in greater depth in Section II.3. The actions of the leaders of Christian communities and churches are explained through the lens of the conflict between Iran and Byzantium, as well as the Byzantine emperors' efforts to centralize power. Furthermore, this section of the book reveals the ideological logic of the leaders of the Christian Church in the development of Christological dogmas intended to restore the Church's unity. Revealing the inner logic of dogmatic disputes sheds light on the motivations behind many actions and intentions of clergy endowed with ecclesiastical authority. Also described is the nature of the relationship between the senior clergy in Caucasian Churches (Albanian and Armenian Catholicoi), who often carried out the will of the reigning individuals and local bishops, who were strongly related to the local nobility and communities. The appearance of historical writings describing the political history and dynastic interests in the canonical territory of the Albanian and Armenian Churches makes sense as well.

The book considers the history of the creation of local alphabets and the beginning of religious services in local languages — as described by the author of the *History of Albania* in the story about the invention of three Caucasian alphabets by the monk Mesrop Mashtots — against the backdrop of a complex picture of the interaction of religious, political, and ethno-cultural factors in the region's development. As Zoroastrianism grew in power as a religious doctrine of the Sassanids, it clashed with Hellenism in the lands that Iran fought over with Byzantium. Churches in the South Caucasus ran the risk of being labeled as Byzantine sympathizers and supporters for using Greek and Syriac in their religious ceremonies and distributing Christian literature in these languages. This could be the explanation for the nearly simultaneous introduction of local alphabets in all three South Caucasian Churches, which the monk Mesrop is credited with. In his study of the legend about the invention of alphabets, the author of the monograph gives different opinions about how true the details of the legend are. However, he emphasizes the most important cultural and political significance of this event, which is that it shows the formation of an Albanian-Christian identity along with other South Caucasian peoples, which, in the author's opinion, is evidenced by the presence and constant activity of local Albanian assistants to the monk Mesrop during his mission to Albania.

As we can see, the formation and relationships of Caucasian Churches and states occurred in the context of constant threat from and struggle against Zoroastrianism and Iran. During periods of confrontation, when the relative tolerance of Iranian rulers was replaced by persecution of non-believers and coercion to adopt the official religion of Iran, the Christian rulers of the South Caucasus coordinated their efforts to oppose Zoroastrianism, as was the case during the period of forcible imposition of Zoroastrianism in the middle of the 5th century under Shahanshah Yazdegerd II (439-457). However, as the Armenian Church “nationalized,” as did the Albanian and Iberian Churches (especially after the introduction of national alphabets), it fell away from the centers of the Orthodox East. As a result, the Albanian Church distanced itself from the Armenian Church. This trend was dictated by the interests of the Albanian state and the Albanian clergy. According to the author, in response to the encroachments of the Armenian Church by attempts to exploit the presence of Gregory the Illuminator’s single center of Christian education in Vagharshapat, the Albanian historian wrote the story of St. Eliseus in order to deflect the Armenian Church’s claims, affirm the direct connection of the Albanian Church’s establishment with Jerusalem, and protect the Albanian Church’s independence. The same intentions may be observed in the way the author of the *History of Albania* interprets the story about Mesrop Mashtots’ activities: he travels to Jerusalem and returns with his disciples and a piece of the Lord’s Cross to bless the Albanian Church. And after the departure of Mashtots, his disciples return to Jerusalem and request a new pastor, “for the true illumination of the lands of the East began in Jerusalem with St. Eliseus”.<sup>22</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi’s understanding of the formation and development of the Albanian Church is also illustrated by a study of Caucasian Christian monasteries in Palestine. Kalankatuatsi is known to have preserved a list of Albanian monasteries in the Holy Land, using a longer list of Armenian monasteries compiled by the monk Anastas, presumably his older contemporary. And Kalankatuatsi may have picked from this list the monasteries he believed were founded by the Albanians. Originally, the early monasteries of the Caucasians in Palestine were not built with any one ethnic group in mind. For example, the Iberian monastery, which was built by Peter the Iberian, was a sanctuary for pilgrims of various ethnicities. Among these monasteries were monasteries founded by Albanian Christians and Albanian nobility. Their selection from the list of Armenian monk Anastas attests

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<sup>23</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi, Op. Cit., Book I, Chapter 28, p. 61.



to the time of separation of the churches. Albanian monasteries in the Holy Land suffered the same fate as the Albanian Church in the Caucasus. By the time of the Arab conquest, donations from the homeland had become scarce, and after the re-subordination of the Albanian Church in the early 8th century, the Albanian monasteries either fell into disrepair or came under the control of the Armenian and Georgian Churches that were close in terms of Chalcedonian teachings. It is no coincidence that the only chronicle of Albanian bibliography discovered so far, an Albanian-Georgian palimpsest, was found in an Orthodox monastery on Mount Sinai.

The monograph's author attempts to identify Albanian Churches with the latest archaeological discoveries of early Christian architecture in Israel. He makes extensive use of the publications of Yana Tchekhanovets, a modern Israeli archaeologist and religious scholar who recently published a significant portion of the results of her excavations and research in a monograph.<sup>23</sup> Archimandrite Alexy tried to identify some Albanian monasteries with ancient Christian architectural monuments and archaeological sites in the Holy Land.

However, the author did not look at an article by Tchekhanovets that was very representative in terms of the Albanian Church's presence in Palestine, in which the Israeli scholar examines Anastas' list of Armenian monasteries and questions the reliability of his reports. The same article mentions the discovery of a tomb in the small Georgian monastery Umm Leisun, which presumably belongs to the monastery's founder. The tombstone bears the name Iohane, Bishop of Purtavi from Kartli. The grave is dated to the 6th century by archaeologists. According to the researcher, this is a memorial to a person who came from Kartli, eastern Georgia, to serve as a bishop in Partaw (Barda, the last capital of Caucasian Albania). This inscription could have been left by the monastery's Albanian community at the time of its establishment.<sup>24</sup>

In Father Alexy's book, nearly all the major occurrences of the known early history of the Albanian Church are explored, and the relevant reports of the *History of Albania* are examined critically: legends about the formation of the Armenian and Albanian states, as well as information about the enthronement of the Mihranid dynasty and the historical mission of the Albanian Church to spread Christianity among the northern nomads. The or

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Tchekhanovets Y. *The Caucasian Archaeology of the Holy Land: Armenian, Georgian and Albanian Communities between the Fourth and Eleventh centuries*. Boston, 2018.

Tchekhanovets Y. Iohane, Bishop of Purtavi, and Caucasian Albanians in the Holy Land. *Knowledge and Wisdom: Archaeological and Historical Essays in Honor of Leah Di Segni*. Milano, 2014. P. 304-306.

ganizational structure of the Albanian Church is examined, as are the news and documents from the Councils of Aluen (Aghuen) and Partaw, as well as some councils of the Armenian Church; and the manifestations of the Albanian state's inclination towards Chalcedonism are considered.

While recognizing the methodical study of the chronicle and the erudition and insight of its researcher, it should be noted that there were some mistakes and inaccuracies in the first 2021 edition of the monograph, which have been corrected in this English version.

The author of the *History of Albania* uses a variety of dating methods when recounting the events: references to key events in the histories of Iran, Armenia, Albania, and Byzantium, and the Armenian and Muslim chronologies. This makes establishing a chronology of reported events difficult, especially those that are not mentioned in other sources. Difficulties with dating prompted Farida Mamedova to dedicate a special section of her fundamental research to the chronology of the *History of Albania*.<sup>25</sup> Every time researchers deal with reports and references to events in the *History of Albania*, they must address the issue of chronology regarding what is being reported. For this reason, the chronology of reported events is a constant topic and source of discussion in the study of the chronicle and questions regarding the history of Albania. Unfortunately, the author of the reviewed book avoids these questions, opting instead to reference the dates of other researchers without conducting his own critical analysis.

Any modern study of Caucasian Albanian history is associated with complex issues of Albanian source studies and the main chronicle on Caucasian Albanian history, *History of Albania*, attributed to Movses Kalankatuatsi and Movses Daskhurantsi. Source study experts have put in a lot of work so far to examine the controversial issues concerning the original sources of the work, the problems of archeography and textual criticism, and to compare the chronicle's information with parallel Armenian, Muslim, Byzantine, and Georgian sources, finds of Albanian archeology, and chronicles of Albanian architecture.

In evaluating the *History of Albania*, however, not enough attention was paid to clarifying its significance as a chronicle of Albanian church history. The study of this particular aspect — these features of the *History of Albania* — is the merit of Archimandrite Alexy's work. As we have already discussed, the author takes a highly responsible approach to determining the scope of his research and, one can say, refrains from judging historical facts of the history of the Albanian statehood and society. Yet, the most significant aspects of our conceptions of Albanian society and culture are the state of religious spirituality, the order and motivations of the

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<sup>25</sup> Mamedova F., 2005, Op. Cit., p. 42-52.

events of church life, and the religious consciousness and mentality of Albania's Christian population and the ministers of the Albanian Church. In this regard, the new book on Albania is an original study that sheds light on these questions of religious consciousness and church life in Christian Albania.

The book adheres strictly to the logic of studying the church history of Albania in the context of and in relation to the general religious climate and historical events in the Middle Eastern sub-regions adjacent to the South Caucasus. The approach, structure, and content of the book provide an opportunity to become acquainted with the complex issues of Caucasian Albanian history and to comprehend the stages of development and transformation of the Christian Church of Albania.

Thus, the book can serve as a good guide to the history of the early medieval Albanian Church (4th-10th centuries), while also making a substantial contribution to resolving controversial issues of Albanian Christian identity and the status and characteristics of the Albanian Church. Some of the provisions and conclusions of Archimandrite Alexy (Nikonorov)'s study have found a place in the debate surrounding the political history of the South Caucasus. Combining a balanced and cautious approach to the problems of the history of Albania with an incisive analysis of the patterns of development of Christian doctrine and Christian churches in the South Caucasus, Father Alexy's book can serve as a useful resource for a broad range of readers interested in the history of the Albanian state and Church.

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## INTRODUCTION

History happens to hold a special, privileged place in human society. Without history as we know it, there can exist neither the concept of culture nor the phenomenon of religion. Consequently, without religion or culture there can be nothing that we refer to as civilization.

Since the emergence of historical science, i.e. since the time of Herodotus of Halicarnassus (5th century BCE), history has been typically understood as a reliable account of the past, in which the author responsibly addresses each fact mentioned. However, the history of peoples and states is a special science. The older the event being studied, the fewer data or artefacts about it generally survive through time. In addition, since the beginning of time, history has been and still is a field of not only scholarly, but also ideological and even political battles. Therefore, the scientific fact is a rather rare occurrence in historical science. History consists mainly of scholarly theories that are put forward by historians based on the study and interpretation of written, archaeological, and other sources, taking into account their personal scholarly and ideological positions, often with a certain degree of logical assumption.

In this regard, the history of such an ancient state as Caucasian Albania and its Church is no exception.

Caucasian Albania is a historical cradle of several Caucasian peoples; a state that existed in the territory of the South Caucasus from the 4th century BCE to the 8th century CE; a country noted by ancient historians and marked by a variety of historical processes and events that deserve careful examination. But before proceeding to the study of our topic, it should be explained what kind of a political entity will be discussed, when and within what boundaries it existed.

Caucasian Albania (Ancient Greek: *AX<sup>α</sup>α*, Middle Persian: *Arran*, Azerbaijani: *Qafqaz Albaniyast*, Lezghin: *Alpan*, Armenian: *Ujit*<sup>26</sup>/*wbp/Alu-ank/Aghuank*)<sup>26</sup> was an ancient state in Eastern Transcaucasia that occupied part of the territory of present-day Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Dagestan. The capitals of Caucasian Albania at various times were the cities of Kabala (Qabala), Chola (Derbent), and Partaw (Barda).

The population of Caucasian Albania, the Albanians (not to be confused with the Balkan Albanians), is thought to have initially represented a union of 26 tribes that spoke different languages of the Lezgian branch of the Nakh-Dagestan family. They included the Albanians, Gelae, Legae (Lezgins), Utians (Udis), Gargareans

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<sup>26</sup> For name versions and their genealogy see Alikberov A.K., Mudrak O.A. Istoricheskiye nazvaniya Albaniya, Aluank i Alan v prostranstve krosskulturnoy kommunikatsii [The Historical Names Albania, Aluank, and Alan in the Space of Cross-Cultural Communication]. *Voprosy onomastiki* [Problems of Onomastics], No. 2, 2019. P. 213-231.

(Rutulians), Chilbs, Silvi, Lpins, and others. The numerous tribes of the Albanian tribal union inhabited the territories between Iberia and the Caspian Sea, from the Caucasian Ridge to the Kura River, although the territory of the Albanian-speaking tribes spread further south, to the Aras.

When ancient geographers and historians discuss the population of Albania, they primarily refer to the Albanians. Experts believe that only one of 26 tribes living on the left bank of the Kura was originally called the Albanians. It may have spearheaded the unification of the tribes into a union, and the name *Albanians* spread to the other tribes. The ancient Greco-Roman sources locate the Albanians on the left bank of the Kura, from Iberia to the Caspian Sea.<sup>27</sup> Thus, according to Strabo,<sup>28</sup> the Albanian tribe lived between the Iberians and the Caspian Sea,<sup>29</sup> Pliny the Elder<sup>30</sup> places them along the Caucasian chain (*montibus Caucasus*) as far as the river Cyrus (*ad Cyrum amnem*),<sup>31</sup> while Dio Cassius<sup>32</sup> reports that the Albanians dwelled “beyond (*vnepe*) the Cyrrnus.”<sup>33</sup> In the opinion of Trever,<sup>34</sup> the indigenous territory of the Albanians, the largest Albanian tribe in the union, was the middle and lower reaches of the Kura, mainly the left bank.<sup>35</sup> V.F. Minorsky,<sup>36</sup> one of the foremost

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- <sup>27</sup> Muravyev S.N. *Zametki po istoricheskoy geografii Zakavkazya*. Pliny o naselenii Kavkaza [Notes on the Historical Geography of Transcaucasia. Pliny on the Population of the Caucasus]. *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], No. 1. Moscow, 1988. P. 157.
- <sup>28</sup> Strabo (Greek: *Ερπαιγιω*; c. 64/63 BCE — c. 23/24 CE) was a Greek historian and geographer. He was the author of *History* (this work is lost) and *Geography* in 17 books that has survived almost intact and serves as the best source for studying the geography of the ancient world.
- <sup>29</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*. With an English translation by H.L. Jones. Cambridge-London, 1961. Book XI, Chapter IV, §1. P. 223.
- <sup>30</sup> Pliny the Elder, also known as Gaius Plinius Secundus (Latin: *Gaius Plinius Secundus*; 23- 79), was a Roman erudite writer and author of the *Natural History*. He was called the Elder in contrast to his nephew, Pliny the Younger.
- <sup>31</sup> C. Plini Secundi. *Naturalis Historiae*. Leipzig, 1854. Book VI, Chapter 15, §39. P. 224.
- <sup>32</sup> Dio Cassius Cocceianus (Greek: *Α'υον Καομοc*, Latin: *Lucius Claudius Cassius Dion Cocceianus*; 155-235) was a Roman consul and historian of Greek origin, who wrote the frequently cited *Roman History* (*Popancrli*, Latin: *Historia Romana*) in 80 books, covering the history from the city's foundation to the time of Emperor Alexander Severus.
- <sup>33</sup> Dio Cassius. *Roman History*. With an English translation by E. Cary. London-New York, 1914. Book XXXVI, Chapter 54, §1. P. 93.
- <sup>34</sup> Trever Kamilla Vasilyevna (1892-1974) was a Soviet historian, art expert, and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR since 1943. She was the author of studies on the history, culture, and art of Central Asia, Transcaucasia and Iran.
- <sup>35</sup> Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Aihanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE]. Moscow-Leningrad, 1959.
- <sup>36</sup> Minorsky Vladimir Fedorovich (1877-1966) was a prominent Russian orientalist and researcher of history, historical geography, literature, and culture of Persia, who also made a significant contribution to the development of Turkish, Mongolian, Caucasian, Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Byzantine historical studies.

experts on the history of Transcaucasia, locates the Albanians in the open plain.<sup>37</sup> Following V. V. Bartold,<sup>38</sup> the Albanians lived in the Caspian plains.<sup>39</sup> Based on the Encyclopedia Britannica,<sup>40</sup> the Albanians inhabited the mountain valleys of the Greater Caucasus and the land to the north towards Sarmatia, the modern Dagestan.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, we refer to the geographical territory between the Greater Caucasus and the Kura as *Inner Albania*, an area in which the Albanian ethnic group was initially formed and consolidated.

The Caucasus has long drawn the attention of researchers as one of the oldest centers of civilization and a unique historic, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious region of geopolitical importance. Since the late 18th century to the first half of the 19th century, Caucasian studies have become an independent, complex discipline, giving rise to the creation of fundamental works on various aspects of human knowledge. The historical Caucasian studies have addressed the issues of ethnogenesis and ethnic history; social system and everyday life; and traditional material and spiritual culture of individual peoples of the Caucasus. The study of an ancient state entity called Caucasian Albania holds a special place in this historiographic field.

And yet, many questions remain unanswered in a series of Caucasian studies. Of particular interest among them is the question of what cultural and historical role Caucasian Albania and its ancient Church played in the region at the beginning of the new era and during the early Middle Ages.

A comprehensive analysis of fragmented written sources, linguistic studies, and interpretations of archaeological material demonstrates the relevance and freshness of the topic as formulated in our work. This approach to research has gained currency in Caucasian and Albanian studies only in recent years.

The history of the Albanian Church, as it appears to us from the pages of the work by the Albanian author Movses Kalankatuatsi, is a new line of scholarly inquiry that differs from previous studies in its problem-formulation, and most importantly, in the range of issues under scrutiny. Along with traditional topics, the work highlights the problems related to the influence of religious reforms and innovations of neighboring states on Albania's religious self-determination, the spread of the halo of the Albanian Church's canonical territory, the importance of the invented

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<sup>37</sup> Minorsky V. F. *Istoriya Shirovana i Derbenta X-XI vekov* [A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th centuries]. Moscow, 1963. P. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Bartold Vasily Vladimirovich (1869-1930) was a Russian orientalist, Arabist, Islamic scholar, historian, philologist, and academician of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences.

<sup>39</sup> Bartold V.V. *Sochineniya* [Works]. Vol. II, Part 1. Moscow, 1963. P. 661-662.

<sup>40</sup> The Encyclopedia Britannica is a universal encyclopedia that has been published since 1768, first in Edinburgh and later in London. It is considered the most complete and oldest work of this kind in English. The encyclopedia is currently published in the USA.

<sup>41</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Vol.1. Cambridge, 1910. P. 481.



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Albanian script for Caucasian Albania in the early Middle Ages, etc.

## A. ON THE SOURCE OF THE HISTORY OF ALBANIA AND ITS AUTHOR MOVSES KALANKATUATSI

The *History of Albania* by Movses Kalankatuatsi — the first and only work on the history of this state — is critical to any study of the history of Caucasian Albania during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This work has come down to us in several copies and consists of three parts. It is also mentioned by the Armenian writers of the 12th and 13th centuries. The author, a native of the village of Kalankatuk in the province of Utik, was most likely an ethnic Utian (Albanian) who wrote in Armenian.<sup>42</sup> The *History of Albania* or certain chapters of it are considered by some to have been originally written in Albanian.<sup>43</sup>

The different versions of the *Albanian Chronicle* have been studied and compared by Trever,<sup>44</sup> A. A. Akopian,<sup>45</sup> and F.D. Mamedova<sup>46</sup> at various times.

Archbishop Hovhannes Shahatuniants first reported in a book describing Etchmiadzin and the monuments of Armenia in 1841 that two texts of the *History of Albania* by Movses Kalankatuatsi were kept in the Etchmiadzin library.<sup>47</sup> The French Armenologist and traveler E. Bor  made a copy of one of the Etchmiadzin manuscripts in 1838 and released the first translation in 1847 or 1848.<sup>48</sup> The Russian academician M. Brosset<sup>49</sup> also examined the manuscript and published excerpts from

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We know that Movses Kalankatuatsi was a native of the province of Utik (Uti) from the words of the historian himself: "When the enemy became aware of what had happened, they pursued them and overtook a group of them at the foot of the mountain opposite the large village of Katankatuk which is in the same province of Uti whence I too am from." (Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*. Translated by C.J. F. Dowsett. London, 1961. Book 2, Chapter 11. P. 84).

Shanidze A.G. Yazyk i pismo kavkazskikh albansev [The Language and Writing of the Caucasian Albanians]. *Vestnik otdeleniya obshchestvennykh nauk AN GruzSSR* [Bulletin of the Department of Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR], No. 1. Tbilisi, 1960. P. 169; Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], Baku, 2005. P. 11, 17.

Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE]. Akopian A.A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources]. Yerevan, 1987. P. 150-177. Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 17-69.

Shahatuniants Hovhannes, bishop. *The Description of the Etchmiadzin Cathedral and Five Ararat Provinces* (in Armenian). Etchmiadzin, 1841-1842. P. 330.

<sup>48</sup> Bor  E. Histoire des Aghovanes par Moese Calkantouni, extraite et traduite du manuscrit arm nien. *Nouvelles annales de voyages*. Vol. II. Paris, 1848.

<sup>49</sup> Brosset Marie-F licit  (1802-1880) was an orientalist, linguist, and historian of French origin. Brosset occupied a prominent place in the Georgian and Armenian historiography as an editor, translator, and commentator of rare Georgian and Armenian writings, mainly from the Middle

this work in French during the same period.<sup>50</sup>

According to Archbishop Hovhannes Shakhhatunians, the earliest version is a manuscript that, judging by the postscript at the end of the text, dates back to between 1279 and 1311. The second one is no older than the end of the 17th century, because it contains the list of Albanian catholicoi up to the year of 1675. The copy made by Archbishop Hovhannes was sent to St. Petersburg at the request of the Russian Academy of Sciences and used by I. Nazarov in 1841 to make another copy, based on which K.P. Patkanov<sup>51</sup> translated the text of the *History of Albania* into Russian. The latter is kept in the Manuscripts Sector of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.<sup>52</sup>

Patkanov<sup>53</sup> gave all these details in the preface of his translation of Movses Kalankatuatsi's *History*, the first complete translation of the text into Russian. For some reason, this preface included no mention of the idea that the *History of Albania* was purported to be published for the first time back in the 18th century, when the Albanian catholicos Nerses sent one copy of the manuscript for publication to the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople.

Since such publication was not carried out, the Armenian catholicos Simeon requested in 1766 that the manuscript be returned to Etchmiadzin.<sup>55</sup>

In 1860, N.O. Emin<sup>55</sup> released in Moscow the Armenian text of the *History of Albania*, which the editor had corrected and cleared of later insertions and distortions by the scribes.

In the same year of 1860, K. Shakhnazarian published another version of the Armenian text in Paris and provided it with an introduction and notes.

These two editions of the text, published at the time when Patkanov's translation was already in print, prompted the latter to place Additions at the end of

Ages. He published materials on the history of Georgia and Armenia in French such as the *Georgian Chronicles (Kartlis Tskhovreba)*, *Geography of Georgia*, *Reports on Archaeological Travel across Georgia and Armenia*, etc. Brosset's scholarly activity contributed to promoting the history of Georgia and Armenia and expanding its source base.

<sup>50</sup> Brosset M. Extraits de l'histoire des Aghovans. *Additions et éclaircissements à l'histoire de la Géorgie*. St-Petersburg, 1851. P. 468-494.

<sup>51</sup> Movses Kaghankatvatsi. *Istoriya agoan* [History of the Aghuans], Translated by K.P. Patkanov. St. Petersburg, 1861.

<sup>52</sup> Inv.No. V 56 (Orbeli R.R. Sobraniye armyanskikh rukopisey IV AN SSSR [A Collection of Armenian Manuscripts in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR]. *Uchenye Zapiski IV AN SSSR* [Proceedings of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR]. Vol. VI. Moscow, 1954. P. 110). The 1678 copy of the manuscript by Movses Kalankatuatsi is also stored in the Institute of Oriental Studies (Inv.No. S 59; see *ibid.*, p. 111).

<sup>53</sup> Patkanov Kerope Petrovich (1833-1889) was an orientalist and expert in Armenian historical sources, Armenian philology, and literature.

the book (i.e. explanations of obscure and ambiguous passages in the text highlighted by the publications of N.O. Emin and K. Shakhnazarian).<sup>57</sup>

In his doctoral thesis<sup>58</sup> written in German and defended in the University of Vienna, H.H. Manandian<sup>59</sup> cited excerpts from the *History of Albania* related to the history of the spread of Christianity in Albania, the invasion of the Huns, and the religion of the Huns.

T.I. Ter-Grigorian presented a review of literature on Movses Kalankat- uatsi and his *History of Albania*. He examined and compared all eight versions of the *History of Albania* stored in the Matenadaran<sup>60</sup> in Yerevan. It was

Ter-Grigorian T.I. K voprosu ob "Istorii Alvanskoy strany" Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo [On the History of the Aluanian Country by Movses Kalankatuatsi] (manuscript). *Nauchnyy arkhiv Instituta istorii AN AzSSR* [The Scientific Archive of the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences], No. 991. Baku, 1939. P. 2 (reference to the book: Agani- an G.K. *Arkhiv armianskoy istorii* [The Archive of Armenian History], Book III. Tiflis, 1894. P. 376).

Emin Nikita Osipovich (1815-1890) was an Armenologist, philologist, historian, translator, and professor of the Lazarev Institute of Oriental Languages.

Patkanov K.P. *Vvedeniye k perevodu "Istorii Albanii"* [Introduction to the Translation of the History of Albania]. St. Petersburg, 1861. Additions to Chapters V and XIII. P. 284 and further. Manandian H.H. *Beitrdge zur albanischen Geschichte*. Leipzig, 1897.

Manandian Hakob Hamazaspi (1873-1952) was an Armenian historian and member of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR. H.H. Manandian's main works described the history of ancient and medieval Armenia, philology, and culture.

The Matenadaran, or the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, is a research center situated in Yerevan that has one of the largest repositories of manuscripts in the world. It was established on the basis of the nationalized collection of manuscripts from the Etchmiadzin Monastery in 1920. This collection dates back to the 5th century and is associated with Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor (or reformer) of the Armenian script. The Matenadaran funds contain more than 17,000 ancient manuscripts and over 100,000 old archive documents. They include 13,000 Armenian manuscripts and more than 2,000 manuscripts in Russian, Hebrew, Latin, Arabic, Syriac, Greek, Japanese, Persian, and other languages. The Matenadaran collection provides a valuable academic and historic basis for studying the history and culture of Armenia, as well as the neighboring peoples of the Caucasus,

said that the earliest copy dated back to 1279, another three copies to the 17th century (1664 and 1676), one copy to the 18th century (1761), and the remaining three copies to the 19th century (1839, 1848, and 1855).

The comparison of these manuscripts led Ter-Grigorian to some interesting observations. The Elegy on the Death of Juansher (who ruled in the 7th century) compiled by his court poet and rhetorician Dawtak turned out to omit all the material found in both Armenian editions of the text and in the Russian translation, missing also the last 16 lines available in Manuscript No. 3043 (the 1839 copy prepared by Archbishop Bahamian in Tabriz).

Book Three also appeared to have no description of the 835-840 events in the

print editions of the text and manuscripts. Two pages appear to have fallen out of the ancient manuscript, unnoticed by the scribe. These two pages, however, were discovered in the Matenadaran and published by Vardapet Khachik Dadian;<sup>54 55</sup> they are part of Chapter 20 in Book Three (translated by Patkanov) and of Chapter 21 in the Armenian edition.<sup>56</sup>

Ter-Grigorian conducted a survey of the scarce details on — or rather references to — Movses Kalankatuatsi that can be found in the 13th-century written sources (by Mkhitar Anetsi,<sup>57</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi,<sup>58</sup> Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi,<sup>59</sup> and the Albanian catholicos Esayi)<sup>60</sup> and believes the author of the *History of Albania* to have been a monk, judging by the postscript in Manuscript No. 667 (1855 copy).<sup>61</sup>

From all of the above, it can be readily seen that, apart from his place of birth, biographical information about Movses is questionable. As for when he lived, this issue has long been the subject of discussion. Given that Movses repeatedly talks about 7th-century events as an eyewitness, a number of researchers have dated the time of his life to the 7th century (Shakhnazarian, Borè, Somal, Emin, and others). Patkanov holds that Movses Kalankatuatsi lived at the end of the 10th century and independently wrote Book Three of the *History of Albania*, which refers to 10th-century events, while in Books Two and Three, he repeats material from 7th-century

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Near and Middle East, the Institute holds manuscripts from the 5th-18th centuries, as well as a unique collection of first and early printed books from the 16th-18th centuries, works of ancient and medieval historians, writers, philosophers, mathematicians, geographers, doctors, and translations of works of Ancient Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and Latin scholars, including a number of works that have not survived in the original language.

<sup>55</sup> Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 12; K. Dadian's article was published in the Ararat magazine (April). Vagharshapat, 1897. P. 161.

<sup>56</sup> The text of two lost pages was translated into Russian by T.I. Ter-Grigorian (Manuscript No. 822 is stored in the archive of the Institute of History of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences). See Altman M.M. *Istoricheskyy ocherkgoroda Gyandzhi* [The Historical Sketch of the City of Ganja]. Baku, 1949. P. 15, Note 1.

<sup>57</sup> Mkhitar Gosh (1120/1130-1213) was a thinker, literary and public figure, theologian, and priest. He is known as the writer of a code of laws, including civil and ecclesiastical law.

<sup>58</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi (c. 1200-1271) was an Albanian historian. His major work is *History* (covering the period from the early 4th century to 1265).

<sup>59</sup> Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi was a 13th century Armenian historian, scribe, poet, and educator. He wrote the *New History*, or the *History of Armenia*, describing the history of Armenia up to 1289. This work is of great scholarly value and contains a lot of unique evidence, whose original sources have not survived to date. It begins with details on the history of the Georgians, Caucasian Albanians, Greeks, Persians, Seljuks, and Tatars.

<sup>60</sup> Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 18.

This story is written from a copy called the *Albanian History*, which was compiled by Vardapet Movses Kalankatuatsi in 74 of the Armenian calendar (625) (Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 18).

sources<sup>62</sup> and, presumably, does not change the form of the first-person narrative describing Bishop Virov's trip to the Khazars, a visit to the residence of Juansher, and so on. The latter fact should have undermined Patkanov's view, were it not for other arguments in favor of the 7th century as the time of Movses' life and against the assessment of the *History of Albania* as a collection of different records and legends from various times. But this is exactly how the Albanian historian's work is treated in the *History of Ancient Armenian Literature* by M.K. Abeghian,<sup>63</sup> who attributes this work to the 10th century and characterizes it as "a compilation in which the material is arranged in chronological order," with information being taken from Movses Khorenatsi,<sup>64</sup> Elishe,<sup>65</sup> hagiographic literature, letters, and canons.<sup>66</sup>

The main argument for attributing Kalankatuatsi and his work to the 10th century is that Book Three mentions the capture of Partaw by Rus in 943/944, an event described by the Arab writer Ibn Miskawayh<sup>67</sup> (10th-11th centuries), on whom A.Y. Yakubovsky<sup>68</sup> has conducted a special study.<sup>69</sup>

Ter-Grigorian has identified all quotations or evidence added to the *History of*

Patkanov K.P. *Vvedeniye k perevodu "Istorii Albanii"* [Introduction to the Translation of the History of Albania], p. X.

Abeghian Manuk Khachaturi (1865-1944) was a Soviet literary scholar, linguist, and member of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR.

<sup>64</sup> There is very little biographical information available about Movses Khorenatsi. He is thought to have been born in the province of Syunik, in the village of Khoren, therefore he is called Khorenatsi. According to the predominant view, the approximate date of his birth is 410. At the same time, a number of well-known historians such as Robert Hewsen, Kirill Tumanov, and Robert Thomson believe Khorenatsi to have lived in the 8th-9th centuries CE.

<sup>65</sup> Elishe (Egishe) was a 5th century Armenian historian, who described one of the most dramatic periods in the history of Armenia, that is, the war of the Armenians against the Persians. Tradition has it that Elishe was a warrior and secretary of the legendary commander Vardan Mamikonian. He took part in the famous Battle of Avarayr in 451. After the end of the war, Elishe retired to the monastery and then became a hermit in the province of Mokk, where he wrote several historical pieces. Elishe's main work is the *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, covering the 35-year history of Armenia from the fall of the Arsacid dynasty to 464-465.

<sup>66</sup> Abeghian M.K. *Istoriya drevnearmyanskoy literatury* [The History of Ancient Armenian Literature], Vol. I. Yerevan, 1948. P. 390-391.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Miskawayh Abu Ah Ahmad ibn Muhammad (c. 932/936-1030) was a historian, poet, and philosopher, who lived in the territory of present-day Iran and Iraq. Ibn Miskawayh is frequently called the "third teacher" in the history of the Islamic philosophical thought and "the first Muslim to approach the study of the ethical philosophy from the scholarly point of view."

<sup>68</sup> Yakubovsky Alexander Yuryevich (1886-1953) was an orientalist historian and corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. He was an expert in the history of Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Golden Horde, and Western Asia countries.

<sup>69</sup> Yakubovsky A. Y. *Ibn Miskawayh o pokhode rusov v Berda v 332 g. = 943/944* [Ibn Miskawayh on the Campaign of the Rus in Berda in 332 = 943/944]. *Vizantiysky vremennik* [The Byzantine Chronicle], Vol. XXIV. Moscow, 1926.

*Albania* from other historical works, mainly by Movses Khorenatsi and Elishe, singled out the chapters written by the author himself (13 chapters out of 30 in Book One, 34 out of 52 in Book Two, 17 out of 23 in Book Three), and analyzed the author's language, tone, and style. This has led him to conclude that Book Three was generally written not by Movses of Kalankatuk but by another person, who included in Book Three some chapters from the work of the 7th-century author. One of Ter-Grigorian's most intriguing findings is that the first two books have a number of words and terms that are "apparently of local origin, while we do not find such words in Book Three."<sup>70</sup> Ter-Grigori- an also argues that the *History of Albania* contains absolutely no information about the struggle of the Albanians against the Arabs in the mid-9th century, the invasion of Bugha, or the events reflected in the text of the historian Thomas Artsruni<sup>71</sup> and the Armenian epic *David of Sassoun*; likewise, there is not a single allusion to the large uprising led by Babak in the 9th century.<sup>72</sup>

Another fact points to the 10th century as a potential period for the life of Movses Kalankatuatsi: he refers to the 4th-6th-century authors Faustus of Byzantium,<sup>73</sup> Agathangelos,<sup>74</sup> Elishe, Movses Khorenatsi, Abraham Mamikonian,<sup>75</sup> and Petros Syunetsi<sup>76</sup> and never cites any author who wrote in the 7th-10th centuries

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<sup>70</sup> Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas (Tovma) Artsruni was a 9th-10th century Armenian historian. Unfortunately, there is no biographical information about him. His *History of the House of Artsrunik*, which he began writing in 880 and finished in 910, has been preserved.

<sup>72</sup> Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 30-31.

<sup>73</sup> Pawstos Buzand (Faustus of Byzantium) was a late 4th-5th century Armenian historian, who wrote the *History of Armenia*. His work is called *Buzandaran (Book of Epic Histories)* in the manuscripts.

<sup>74</sup> Agathangelos (Agafangel) claimed to be a secretary of King Tiridates (285-330) and cousin of Saint Gregory the Illuminator (c. 252-326) and was one of the first historical writers of Armenia, who lived in the late 3rd century — early 4th century and left the description of the Armenians' conversion from paganism to Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century in his book *History of Conversion of Armenians to the Christian Faith*.

<sup>75</sup> Abraham Mamikonetsi was a 6th century Armenian church figure, author, and spiritual leader of Taron. He wrote the *Epistle to the Aghuank King Vachagan* and the *Canons of Bishop Abraham Mamikonetsi* at the request of the Albanian king Vachagan III. The *History of the Council of Ephesus* that is recited in his name has been preserved as well.

<sup>76</sup> Petros Syunetsi (Petros Kertog) (died c. 558) was an Armenian church figure, scribe, and translator. He was the bishop of Syunik (547-556) and participated in the Council of Dvin in 554. According to Stepanos Orbelian, he wrote many works (histories, speeches, etc.) and did translations. Only some fragments of Petros Syunetsi's *History* have survived in the *History of Albania* by Movses Kalankatuatsi and the *History of the Province of Sisakan* by Stepanos Orbelian.

(such as John Mamikonian,<sup>77</sup> Shapuh Bagratuni,<sup>78</sup> John Katholikos,<sup>79</sup> or Thomas Artsruni).<sup>80</sup> This is a weighty argument, especially when coupled with another important observation: Kalankatuatsi writes of the Albanian prince Juansher as his patron or rather his contemporary.

M. I. Artamonov<sup>81</sup> supports Patkanov's point of view and also considers Kalankatuatsi's work to be a collection, but admits that some parts "could have been written only by a contemporary" (for example, the account of the Khazars' campaign in Transcaucasia).<sup>82</sup> Assuming the author of the *History of Albania* may have used different sources, it is, however, difficult to agree that he would have copied unaltered from an earlier history such phrases as "in the thirty-first year of the worldwide wars of the Hagarites and the fifteenth year of my lord Juansher."<sup>83</sup>

Comparing the date of Catholicos Viroy's return from exile with the date of Juansher's reign (642-680), Ter-Grigorian comes to the conclusion that Kalankatuatsi lived at the end of the 7th century and could have been between 62 and 67 years old in 670.<sup>84</sup>

Kalankatuatsi's sources for information about the events of past centuries were as follows:

1. folk tales and legends (for example, about the Albanian king Vachagan III);
2. official letters and correspondence of clergy and laymen kept in the palace and monastery archives;
3. works by 4th-6th century Armenian historians mentioned above;

<sup>77</sup> Hovhannes Mamikonian was a 7th century Armenian writer and abbot of the Surb Karapet Monastery. He wrote the *History of Taron* at the request of Catholicos Nerses III.

<sup>78</sup> Shapuh Bagratuni was a 9th-10th century Armenian historian. He was a grandson of Ashot Bagratuni Msaker, brother of the Armenian prince Shapuh. According to historians, Shapuh Bagratuni wrote his work by order of David, son of the Armenian king Ashot I Bagratuni. It covered the description of historical events from the Bagratid era and particularly Ashot I.

<sup>79</sup> Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi (*Hovhannes V* or VI, *John VI Katholikos*, 845/850-929) was a Catholicos of Armenia (898-929), historian, and writer. He is mainly known as a historian. Two of his works have been preserved: a small list of Armenian catholicoi, called the *Succession of Armenian Catholicoi*, with short biographic notes on each of them and his magnum opus, the *History of Armenia*, one of the most important works in Armenian historiography.

<sup>80</sup> Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 32-33.

<sup>81</sup> Artamonov Mikhail Illarionovich (1898-1972) was a prominent Russian archaeologist and historian. He founded the Soviet school of Khazar studies and directed the Hermitage Museum (1951-1964). His main studies cover the history and culture of the Khazars, Scythians, and early Slavs.

<sup>82</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Ocherki drevneyshey istorii khazar* [Essays on the Ancient History of the Khazars], Leningrad, 1936. P. 50.

<sup>83</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 19, p. 115.

<sup>84</sup> Ter-Grigorian T.I. Op. Cit., p. 36.



#### 4. eyewitness and contemporary reports.<sup>85</sup>

N. G. Adontz,<sup>86</sup> who believed the compilatory nature of the *History of Albania* to be undeniable, also attributed the main part of this work to the 7th century: "... the core and the most ancient elements are those pages dedicated to the trip of Catholicos Viroy to the Khazar prince in 628 and written by an eyewitness of the events described."<sup>87</sup>

The first two books contain an account of events from the earliest times (legendary tales) to the late 7th century. Book Three depicts the historical events that took place from the early 8th century to the late 10th century.

All the arguments given by Ter-Grigorian are very convincing, especially where he speaks of the sources used by Kalankatuatsi, who did not employ the works of post-6th-century Albanian writers. Also of vital importance are Ter-Grigorian's observations about the vocabulary and style of the first two books, which differ in this respect from Book Three. Furthermore, we cannot overlook his reference to those pages where Movses writes in his own person about the events that took place during his lifetime, about the people and things that he saw himself.

Yet, Ter-Grigorian does not present another strong argument, although he has collected sufficient evidence to substantiate it. Though the scholar mentions data available from Vanakan<sup>88</sup> and Mkhitar Gosh that attribute the authorship of the *History of Albania* to Movses Daskhurantsi in the 10th century, he disregards the fact that Movses Daskhurantsi did not find it possible to call himself the compiler of this work. It would have been natural if he had been the compiler of this "collection"; in fact, the *History of Albania* bears the name of Movses Kalankatuatsi in all copies.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 43-45.

<sup>86</sup> Adontz Nikolay Georgiyevich (1871-1942) was a Soviet public figure and historian specializing in Armenian studies.

<sup>87</sup> Adontz N.G. *Armeniya v epokhu Yustiniana. Politicheskoye sostoyaniye na osnove nakha-rarskogo stroya* [Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions based on the Nakharar System], St. Petersburg, 1908. P. 291-292.

Hovhannes (Yovhannes) Tavushetsi (1181-1251), also known as Vardapet Vanakan, was a 13th century Armenian historian, saint, and prominent figure of the Armenian Church, who became famous for his fruitful literary and educational activities, wrote a lot of works, and founded the Tavush Academy. Vanakan, as evidenced by the mentions of his disciples, left to posterity a historical work on the Tatar-Mongol invasion, called the *History of the Mongols*, which is currently considered lost and quoted only in fragments by his disciples Kirakos, Vardan, and Magakia. Hovhannes Tavushetsi was a disciple of Mkhitar Gosh.

Z.I. Yampolsky also tried to reconsider Movses Kalankatuatsi's authorship (Yampol-sky Z.I. K izucheniyu letopisi Kavkazskoy Albanii [On Studying the Chronicle of Caucasian Albania]. *Izvestiya AN Azerbaydzhana* [Proceedings of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences], No. 9. Baku, 1957. P. 149 and further), but, unfortunately, without textological analysis based on the extant

The last Russian translation of Movses Kalankatuatsi's work was carried out by Smbatian<sup>90</sup> in 1984 and published by the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan. The new text differs significantly from the first Russian translation by Patkanov.

Here is what the author writes about his translation:

**This translation was made from a critical scholarly text prepared for publication by V. Arakelian on the basis of eleven manuscripts stored at the Matenadaran, the Mesrop Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, that were indicated in the critical text by Latin letters: A = No. 1531, the date of 1289; B = No. 1725, the date of 1675; C = No. 2561, the date of 1664; D = No. 3043; E = No. 8035, the date of 1848; F = No. 4197, the date of 1822; G = No. 2646, the date of 1761; M = No. 6520, the date of 1835; N = No. 6547, the date of 1847; S = No. 8057, the date of 1855; T = No. 2866, the date of 1829. He also used three other manuscripts: R – a microfilm of the manuscript currently stored in the British Museum and described by Frederick Conybeare (A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the British Museum, London, 1913, 117), L – the photographs of the manuscript stored in Leningrad under No. 19, and H – a microfilm of the manuscript stored in Ante-lias under No. 180 (the dates of 1730-1737). In addition to the listed manuscripts, the critical text reflects the editions of N.O. Emin and Shakhnazarian, as well as the translations of Patkanov and Dowsett.**

**With all variations in the manuscripts provided by the critical scholarly text, we were able to make a more correct choice from our perspective.<sup>91</sup>**

Therefore, what we have here is not one of the versions of Movses Kalankatuatsi's Chronicle that do exist in copies today, but a reconstruction of the supposed original text. This very translation was used in the monograph at hand to reconstruct the history of the Church of Caucasian Albania.<sup>92</sup>

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copies of the Armenian original.

Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Country of Aluank]. Translated by S.V. Smbatian. Yerevan, 1984.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> At the same time, F. Asadov, who has reviewed the first (2021) edition of this monograph, notes that "the selection of one or another handwritten version or controversial passages remained part of the workflow and was made by the translation author S. V. Smbatian. However, the translator's comments, albeit not always certain, justify the choice, but this hardly makes it possible to assert that, with the publication of the 1984 translation, we have received "the reconstruction of the initial original text" (Asadov Farda. Novaya kniga o Kavkazskoy Albanii: Nikonorov, igumen Alexy. Istoriya Tserkvi Kavkazskoy Albanii po Moiseyu Kalarikatuyskomu

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[A New Book about Caucasian Albania: Nikonorov, Hegumen Alexy. History of the Church of Caucasian Albania according to Movses Kalankatuatsi], *Etnokultumoye naslediye Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Ethnocultural Heritage of Caucasian Albania], No. 3. Baku, 2022. P. 93).

## B. BACKGROUND AND SCOPE OF THIS STUDY

Certain questions in the history of Caucasian Albania are powder kegs for scholarly polemics, subject to a wide variety of interpretations, and often distorted to suit political ends. This state of affairs has been addressed by Alikberov."

The ethnicity of the Albanians is the most sociopolitically charged issue, primarily because it is key to our understanding of the ethnocultural heritage of Caucasian Albania. In Azerbaijan, this topic is still relevant not only because of ongoing discussions about the historical rights to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also due to objective difficulties in forming the ethnic and civil identity of the complex Azerbaijani people.

The second important, topical, and highly politicized issue involves determining the boundaries of Caucasian Albania, especially the southern confines of this political entity. It may be conventionally called a problem of the right bank, since Nagorno-Karabakh, whose indigenous inhabitants were unequivocally attributed by Movses Khorenatsi to the Albanian tribes, was located on the right bank of the Kura. Most Armenian researchers insist that the territory of Albania did not extend south of the Kura (excluding the period after the division of 387, the time of marzbanate and the Mihranids), focusing not only on the political but also on the ethnic border specifically. They believe the Kura River to have served as the border between two different ethnic communities, thereby denying, in particular, the Caucasian Albanian origin of the indigenous people of some historical provinces on the right bank.<sup>93 94</sup>

Z.V. Kananchev, who studies the geopolitical problems of the Caucasus, also states that the history of Caucasian Albania is often subject to various political speculations, mythologies, falsifications, and manipulations. Such interest in the history of this region directly boils down to the fundamental problems of the history of Karabakh. For this reason, the history of Caucasian Albania is one of the most difficult and controversial issues in the history of the entire South Caucasus.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Alikberov Alikber Kalabekovich (born 1964) is the elected Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences and head of the Center for Central Asian, Caucasian, and Ural-Volga Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>94</sup> Alikberov A.K. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i lezginskiye narody: aktualnye problemy, novye diskursy* [Caucasian Albania and the Lezghin Peoples: Current Problems, New Discourses]. *Albania Caucasica*, No. I, Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 21-22.

<sup>95</sup> Kananchev Z.V., Timokhin D.M. *Politizatsiya istorii Yuzhnogo Kavkaza antichnogo i srednevekovogo perioda: podkhody k interpretatsii istorii Kavkazskoy Albanii (Albaniya, Agvank, Arran)* [Politicization of the History of the South Caucasus in the Ancient and Medieval Period: Approaches to the Interpretation of the History of Caucasian Albania (Albania,

The first serious attempt to study Caucasian Albania dates back to the second half of the 19th century, by specialists including such commonly cited names as Bishop Makar Barkhudarian<sup>96</sup> and H.H. Manandian.<sup>97</sup> The most significant studies in the 20th century were done, inter alia, by A.G. Abramian,<sup>98</sup> N.A. Akinian,<sup>99</sup> Z.M. Buniyatov,<sup>100</sup> V.L. Gukasian,<sup>101</sup> G. Dumézil,<sup>102</sup> S.T. Yeremian,<sup>103</sup> A.E. Krymsky,<sup>104</sup> H. Kurdian,<sup>105</sup> Minorsky,<sup>106</sup> A.S. Mnatsakanian,<sup>107</sup>

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Aghuank, Arran)]. *Istoriya — pole srazheny* [History Is a Battlefield]. Edited by A.B. Davidson. Moscow, 2015. P. 175-177.

- <sup>96</sup> Barkhudarian M. *The Aghuank Region and Its Neighbors*. Tiflis, 1893; idem. *Artsakh. The Historical Review*. Baku, 1895; idem. *The History of Albania*. Vagharshapat, 1900-1902. Tiflis, 1907.
- <sup>97</sup> Manandian H.H. Op. Cit.
- <sup>98</sup> Abramian A.G. *Deshifrovka nadpisey kavkazskikh agvan* [The Decryption of Writings of the Caucasian Aghuans]. Yerevan, 1964.
- <sup>99</sup> Akinian N.A. *Movses Daskhurantsi, Named Kalankatuatsi, and His History of Aluank*. Vienna, 1970.
- <sup>100</sup> Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX vv.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], Baku, 1965.
- <sup>101</sup> Gukasian V.L. O nekotorykh voprosakh istorii albanskoy pismennosti i literatury [On Some Issues of History of the Albanian Script and Literature]. *Izvestiya AN AzSSR* [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR], No. 2. Baku, 1968.
- <sup>102</sup> Dumézil G. Une chrétienté disparue. Les Albaniens du Caucase. *Journal Asiatique*, No. 41 (1). Paris, 1940.
- <sup>103</sup> Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuysky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarskomu khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Moses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer]. *Zapiski IV AN SSSR* [Notes of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR]. Vol. VII. Moscow, 1939. P. 129-155; idem. Syuniya i oborona Sasanidami kavkazskikh prokhodov [Syunia and the Defense of Caucasian Passes by the Sassanids]. *Izvestiya Arm. filiala AN SSSR* [Proceedings of the Armenian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR], No. 7. Yerevan, 1941. P. 33-40.
- <sup>104</sup> Krymsky A.E. Stranitsi iz istorii severnogo ili kavkazskogo Azerbaydzhana (klassicheskoy Albanii) [Chapters from the History of Northern or Caucasian Azerbaijan (Classical Albania)]. *Sbomik statey v chest Sergeya Fedorovicha Oldenburga* [A Collection of Articles in Honor of Sergey Fedorovich Oldenburg], Leningrad, 1934.
- <sup>105</sup> Kurdian H. *The Newly Discovered Alphabet of the Caucasian Albanians*. London, 1956.
- <sup>106</sup> Minorsky V.F. *A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th centuries*. Cambridge, 1958.
- <sup>107</sup> Mnatsakanian A.S. *Some Issues of the History of Literature of Aghuania*. Yerevan, 1966.

G.S. Svazian,<sup>108</sup> Trever,<sup>109</sup> K.L. Tumanov,<sup>110</sup> A.G. Shanidze,<sup>111</sup> S.V. Yushkov,<sup>112</sup> and Z.I. Yampolsky,<sup>113</sup> all of whom approached the problems of Albanian studies from different perspectives.

Among the notable researchers of the Albanian topic in modern times are

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- <sup>108</sup> Svazian G.S. *Agvank v VII-VIII vekakh* [Aghuank in the 7th-8th centuries] (Abstract, Thesis for PhD in History). Yerevan, 1975; idem. *Rod Mikhranidov v Albanii* [The Mikhranid Dynasty in Albania]. *K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia], Yerevan, 1991.
- <sup>109</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. – VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE]; idem. *K voprosu o kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii* [On the Culture of Caucasian Albania]. Moscow, 1960.
- <sup>110</sup> Toumanoff C. *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*. Washington, D. C., 1963.
- <sup>111</sup> Shanidze A.G. *Novootkrytyy alfavit kavkazskikh albansev i yego znachenie dlya nauki* [The Newly Discovered Alphabet of the Caucasian Albanians and Its Meaning for Science]. Tbilisi, 1938; idem. *Yazyk i pismo kavkazskikh albansev* [The Language and Writing of the Caucasian Albanians]. *Vestnik Otdeleniya obshchestvennykh nauk AN GruzSSR* [Bulletin of the Department of Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR], No. 1. Tbilisi, 1960. P. 168-189; idem. *Kriptograficheskaya zapis v odnoy armyanskoy rukopisi iz myunkhenskoy biblioteki* [A Cryptographic Record in One Armenian Manuscript from the Munich Library]. *Izvestiya AN ArmSSR* [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR], No. 9. Yerevan, 1960.
- <sup>112</sup> Yushkov S.V. *K voprosu o granitsakh drevney Albanii* [On the Borders of Ancient Albania]. *Istoricheskiye zapiski AN SSSR* [The Historical Notes of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR], Part I. Moscow, 1937.
- <sup>113</sup> Yampolsky Z.I. *Drevniye religii v Azerbaydzhane* [Ancient Religions in Azerbaijan]. Baku, 1958; idem. *Drevnyaya Albaniya v III-I w. do n. e.* [Ancient Albania in the 3rd-1st Centuries BCE], Baku, 1962; idem. *K izucheniuyu letopisi Kavkazskoy Albanii* [On Studying the Chronicle of Caucasian Albania]. *Izvestiya AN Azerbaydzhana* [Proceedings of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences], No. 9. Baku, 1957; idem. *Dve zametki k traktovke Strabonova teksta ob azerbaydzhanskoy Albanii* [Two Notes to the Interpretation of Strabo's Text on Azerbaijani Albania]. *Izvestiya Azerbaydzhanskogo FAN SSSR* [Proceedings of the Azerbaijan Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR], No. 7. Baku, 1942.

Akopian,<sup>114</sup> Z.N. Alexidze,<sup>115</sup> Alikberov,<sup>116</sup> M.S. Gadzhiev,<sup>117</sup> U.S. Gadzhieva,<sup>124</sup> J. Gippert,<sup>125</sup> G.O. Goshgarly,<sup>126</sup> Y.R. Dzhaferov,<sup>127</sup> Kananchev,<sup>128</sup>

- <sup>124</sup> Gadzhieva U.S. *Deetnizatsiya kavkazskikh alban v XIX veke* [The De-ethnicization of the Caucasian Albanians in the 19th Century], Baku, 2004; idem. "Artsakh" Makara Barkhudariant- sa kak albansky istochnik po rekonstruktsii istoricheskoy geografii Karabakha kontsa XIX v. [Makar Barkhudariants' Artsakh as an Albanian Source for the Reconstruction of Historical Geography of Karabakh at the End of the 19th Century]. *Tarix və onun problemləri*, No. 4. Baku, 2009. P. 386-396; idem. Kritika na knigu Roberta Khevsena "Armenia. A historical atlas" [The Criticism of Robert Hewsen's Book "Armenia: A Historical Atlas"]. *Tarix və onun problemləri*, No. 1-2. Baku, 2009. P. 213-229; idem. Relikvii albanskogo khristianskogo naseleniya Karabakha v V-XIX w. [The Relics of the Albanian Christian Population of Karabakh in the 5th-19th Century], *Revista de Istorie a Moldovei*, No. 2-3. Chisinau, 2009. P. 191-205; idem. Pamyatnye zapisi albanskikh evangely kak istochnik po istorii alban XI-XVIII w. [The Memory Records of Albanian Gospels as a Source on the History of the Albanians in the 11th-18th centuries], *Materialy nauchno-prakticheskikh konferentsy po teme "Karabakh vchera, segodnya i zavtra"* [Proceedings of the Research and Practice Conferences on the topic "Karabakh: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow"]. Baku, 2009. Part II, p. 191-202; idem. Etnichesky sostav pastvy Albanskoy
- <sup>114</sup> Akopian A.A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources], Yerevan, 1987; idem. K khronologii zaversheniya etnokonsolidatsii udinov i lezgin (period oslableniya Arabsko- go khalifata) [On the Chronology of Completion of Ethnic Consolidation of the Udis and Lezgins (the Period of Weakening of the Arab Caliphate)]. *Albania Caucasica*, No.1. Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 129-147.
- <sup>115</sup> Alexidze Z.N. *Caucasian Albanian Script, Language and Literature*. Tbilisi, 2003; idem. Predvaritelnoye soobshcheniye ob identifikatsii i deshifrovke albanskogo teksta, obnaryzhenogo na Sinayskoy gore [A Preliminary Report on the Identification and Decryption of the Albanian Text Discovered on Mount Sinai], *Comptes-rendue de l'Academie des Inscription*, Vol. XXX. Paris, 2002.
- <sup>116</sup> Alikberov A.K. Kavkazskaya Albaniya i lezginskiye narody: aktualnye problemy, novye diskursy [Caucasian Albania and the Lezghin Peoples; Current Problems, New Discourses], p. 81-116; Alikberov A.K., Mudrak O.A. Istoricheskiye nazvaniya Albaniya, Aluanki Alan v prostranstve krosskulturnoy kommunikatsii [The Historical Names Albania, Aluank, and Alan in the Space of Cross-Cultural Communication], p. 213-231.
- <sup>117</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. *Mezhdru Evropoy i Aziyey. Iz istorii trgovykh svyazey Dagestana i albano-sarmatskoy period* [Between Europe and Asia: From the History of Trade Relations of Dagestan and the Albano-Sarmatian Period]. Makhachkala, 1997; idem. Lpiniya (istoricheskiye fakty, lokalizatsiya, etnicheskaya primadlezhnost) [Lpiniya (Historical Facts, Location, Ethnicity)]. *Dagestan v epokhu velikogo pereseleniya narodov* [Dagestan during the Migration Period]. Makhachkala, 1998. P. 7-42; idem. Iz istorii sozdaniya kavkazsko-albanskoy pismennosti: nekotorye spornye momenty [From the History of Creation of the Caucasian Albanian Script; Some Controversial Aspects]. *Vestnik Instituta istorii, arkheologii i etnografii* [Bulletin of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography], No. 2. Makhachkala, 2005. P. 49-58; idem. *Gosudarstvo i pravo Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The State and Law of Caucasian Albania], Makhachkala, 2006; idem. Gemma-pechat tsarya Albanii Asvageny [The Gem Seal of the Albanian King Asvagen]. *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], No. 1. Moscow, 2003.

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- 125 Gippert Jost, Schulze Wolfgang, Alexidze Zaza, Mahe’Jean-Pierre. *The Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of Mount Sinai*. 3 vols. Turnhout, 2008-2010.
- 126 Goshgarly G.O. Albany i Akhemenidsky Iran [The Albanians and Achaemenid Iran], *Trudy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii “Mesto i rol Kavkazskoy Albanii v istorii Azerbaydzhana i Kavkaza”* [Proceedings of the International Conference “Place and Role of Caucasian Albania in the History of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus”]. Baku, 2012. P. 225-230; idem. Antichnaya Kavkazskaya Albaniya v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy v V-I w. do n. e. [Ancient Caucasian Albania in the System of International Relations in the 5th-1st Centuries BCE]. *Etnotkulturnoye nasledstvo Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Ethnocultural Heritage of Caucasian Albania]. Baku, 2001. P. 25-30.
- 127 Dzhafarov Y.R. Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost. K voprosu vozniknoveniya etnoyazyko- voy obshchnosti [The Gargareans and the Albanian Script: On the Occurrence of the Ethnolinguistic Unity]. *Materialy mezhdunarodnoy nauchnoy konferentsii “Ukraina-Azerbaydzhan: dialog kultur i tsivilizatsiy”* [Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference “Ukraine-Azerbaijan: Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations”]. Kiev, 2021. P. 38-50; idem. Gorod Tsri i strana chilbov v “Istorii alban” Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo [The City of Tsri and the Land of the Chilbs in the History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi]. *Drevny i srednevekovy Vostok* [The Ancient and Medieval East], Part 1. Moscow, 1985. P. 65-80; idem. *Gunny i Azerbaydzhan* [The Huns and Azerbaijan], Baku, 1993.
- 128 Kananchev Z.V. K voprosu o datirovke khristianizatsii narodov Kavkazskoy Albanii i Armenii [On the Dating of Christianization of the Peoples of Caucasian Albania and Armenia]. *The History of Caucasus. The Scientific Public Almanac*, No. 1. Baku, 2001. P. 41-46; Kananchev Z.V., Timokhin D.M. Politizatsiya istorii Yuzhnogo Kavkaza antichnogo i srednevekovogo perioda: podkhody k interpretatsii istorii Kavkazskoy Albanii (Albaniya,



R.T. Lolua,<sup>118 119</sup> Mamedova,<sup>120</sup> I.G. Semenov,<sup>121</sup> and B. Outtier.<sup>122</sup>

What meaning should be given to the ethnonym *Albanians*, where to locate the country inhabited by them, who their successors are, where to find the literature created by them — these are the questions that are covered in extensive literature and still need proper answers. All of the above issues were addressed and highlighted from different and sometimes mutually exclusive positions.

In recent decades, there has been a prevailing view that the Albanians are considered one of the three major peoples of the Caucasus with a culture as ancient and rich as that of the Armenians and Georgians. The proponents of this theory locate Albania on the territory between Georgia and the Caspian Sea, from the Caucasus

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Agvank, Arran) [Politicization of the History of the South Caucasus in the Ancient and Medieval Period: Approaches to the Interpretation of the History of Caucasian Albania (Albania, Aghuank, Arran)].

<sup>119</sup> Lolua R. T. From the History of the Caucasian Alphabet World. On the Genesis of Erkatagir. *Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium of Linguists*. Tbilisi, 2008. P. 23-239 (in Georgian); idem. *Voprosy struktury kavkazsko-albanskogo yazyka* (Dissertatsiya doktora filologii) [The Issues of Structure of the Caucasian Albanian Language (Doctoral Thesis in Philology)]. Tbilisi, 2010; idem. Mesrop Mashtots i voprosy genezisayerkatagira i kavkazsko-albanskogo pisma [Mesrop Mashtots and the Issues of Genesis of Erkatagir and Caucasian Albanian Script]. *Albania Caucasica*, No.1. Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 189-216.

<sup>120</sup> Mamedova F.D. *"Istoriya alban" Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo kak istochnik po obshchestven- nomu stroyu rannesrednevekovoy Albanii* [The History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi as a Source on the Social System of Early Medieval Albania]. Baku, 1977; idem. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], Baku, 1986; idem. *Khristianstvo Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Christianity of Caucasian Albania], Baku, 2003; idem. *Kavkazskaya Al- baniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians]. Baku, 2005.

<sup>121</sup> Semenov I.G. *Etnopoliticheskaya istoriya Vostochnogo Kavkaza v III-VI vv.* [The Ethnopolitical History of the East Caucasus in the 3rd-6th centuries]. Makhachkala, 2002; idem. O vremeni votsareniya v Kavkazskoy Albanii Arshakidskoy dinastii [On the Time of Enthronement of the Arsacid Dynasty in Caucasian Albania]. *Albania Caucasica*, No.1. Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 57-67.

<sup>122</sup> Bernard Outtier. Les emprunts turcs en oudi et en boudoux. *Caucasian Perspectives*. Ed.G. Hewitt. Munich, 1992. P. 384-386; idem. Le vocabulaire religieux en oudi. *Cauca- sologie et mythologie comparée. Actes du Colloque international du C.N. R. S. IV Colloque de caucasologie, Sèvres, 27-29juin 1988*. Ed. Catherine Paris. Paris, 1992. P. 331-333; idem. Albanie du Caucase et Caucase. *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du moyen âge [chrétien]*. Paris, 1997; idem. Avar, Dargui, Lak, Oudi, Tabassaran, Tsakhour. *Dictionnaire des peuples*. Ed. J.-C. Tamisier. Paris, 1998; idem. A propos de prétendus emprunts en oudi. *Qafqaz alba- niyasmm azorbaycantn va Qafqaztn tarixinch yeri va rolu. Beynolxalq konfransmm osorhri. Travaux de la conférence scientifique internationale. Laplace et le rôle de l'Albanie du Caucase dans l'histoire de l'Azerbaïdjan et du Caucase*. Baku, 2012. P. 65-66; idem. The Albanian Language: from the Palimpsests (7th-9th Century) to the Grammar (1841). *Religions in the Caucasus. A Collection of Essays and Articles*. Baku, 2016. P. 89-93.

Mountains to Sevan and the Aras. They believe that, under the Armenian confessional and political hegemony, the population of Albania was Armenized and disappeared from the historical scene in the 7th-8th centuries CE (according to some versions, in the 12th-13th centuries); it is also assumed that some Albanians were Kartvelized, while the others were Islamized and became one of the constituent parts of the modern Azerbaijani people.<sup>123</sup> Based on this idea, the Albanian literature was gradually consigned to oblivion following the assimilation of the Albanians.<sup>124</sup>

The advocates of another view think that neither the Albanian script nor the Albanian literature existed but that some people, namely the Armenian-speaking Albanians, had access to the Armenian literature.<sup>125</sup> The opponents of this theory try to convince everyone that the Albanians had a rich literature, whose originals, however, were pre-translated into Armenian and then destroyed under a special program of the Armenian clergy.<sup>126</sup>

The foregoing speculations have resulted in Albania being perceived as the territory from the Caucasus Mountains to Sevan and the Aras and in the population of these places being declared Albanian. Accordingly, all Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and in some provinces of Armenia used to be called Albanians in the past.<sup>127</sup> But, on the other hand, since the Azerbaijanis inhabiting modern

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<sup>123</sup> For instance, A.G. Shanidze writes: "After Albania had been conquered by the Arabs, the Albanians started to gradually convert to Mohammedanism, which accelerated their denationalization. Under these conditions, the Albanian National Church began to increasingly decline until its remnants finally merged with the Armenian Church south of the Kura and to Nukha. This process continued for several centuries (8th-13th centuries and beyond)." See Shanidze A.G. *Yazyk i pismo kavkazskikh albansev* [The Language and Writing of the Caucasian Albanians], p. 169.

<sup>124</sup> "After losing their national identity and merging with their neighbors (mainly with the Turkic-speaking population of Azerbaijan and Armenians, to a lesser extent with the Georgians and other peoples of the Caucasus), the Caucasian Albanians no longer needed the national script created over the centuries, and it perished being useless to anyone." See Shanidze A.G. *Yazyk i pismo kavkazskikh albansev* [The Language and Writing of the Caucasian Albanians], p. 170.

<sup>125</sup> Akinian N.A. *Mashots vardapet* [Mashtots Vardapet]. Vienna, 1949. P. 317-819.

<sup>126</sup> "The Armenian clergy gradually nullified the influence of the Aran Church among this population and by the hands of the Arab authorities destroyed all the literary monuments of the Albanians — everything that could at least slightly remind of the Albanian culture." And further: "... before destroying the literary monuments of Aran the Gregorian clerics pre-translated them into Grabar" (Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX vv.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 97).

<sup>127</sup> "Although the population of the mountainous regions and districts of Aran-Syunik, Art-sakh, Khachen, Shaki, Gardman, and some other villages of the present-day Kirovabad, Ismayli, Qutqashen, Vartashen, and other districts of the Azerbaijani SSR, as well as Sisian, Basarkechar, and other districts of the Armenian SSR, is currently Armenian, this population has the same customs and manners as the Azerbaijanis living next to them, whose ancestors became Muslims for one reason or another. The inhabitants of these areas are exactly the ones

Azerbaijan are also considered to be the descendants of the Albanians, the fact remains that there are no criteria to define these phenomena, which leads to all kinds of misconceptions.

The judgment of the historian A.G. Babakhanian<sup>128</sup> about the Albanians, expressed almost a century ago, is still largely true today: “However one looks at it, the people known as the Albanians were and still are a mystery. The ancient writers speaking of them do not seem to have actually seen them, but only to have heard that there are, or rather were, such people.”<sup>129</sup>

In 1966, Mnatsakanian<sup>130</sup> published a monograph outlining his vision of this issue. Regarding the question of the ethnic composition and identity of the population of Albania, he agrees that the term *Albanians* should be understood as a conglomerate of many tribal groups, whose way of living was characterized by a simple nomadic, pastoral lifestyle. This conglomerate of tribes speaking 26 languages or dialects at the time of Strabo, i.e. in the early 1st century CE, was no longer ruled by 26 kings but by one king.<sup>131</sup> Subsequently, the Albanians, together with the Armenians and the Georgians, converted to Christianity. After summarizing and briefly presenting the available material, Mnatsakanian turns to the question of the Albanian homeland, i.e. the territory of their settlement in the past. He believes Albania and the Albanians to have been located not on both banks of the Kura River from the Caucasus Mountains to Lake Sevan and the Aras River, but on only the left bank, i.e. on the territory between the Caucasian Ridge and the Kura River.

Speaking of the Sacae raids,<sup>132</sup> Strabo notes that the *gavar*<sup>133</sup> of Sakasena (Shakashen) on the right bank of the Kura was part of Armenia in ancient times: “The Sacae... occupied Bactriana, and acquired the best land in Armenia, which they left named after themselves, Sacasene”;<sup>134</sup> “After these comes Sacasene, this too bordering on Albania and the Cyrus River.”<sup>135</sup> Determining the course of the Kura, he says that this river flows through a narrow valley from the west into Albania and

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whose ancestors “joined the Armenian Church and became assimilated with the Armenians” (Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX vv.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th century], p. 100).

<sup>128</sup> Leo/Babakhanian Arakel Grigoryevich (1860-1932) was an Armenian historian, writer, publicist, and professor of the Yerevan University. He published many studies on the major issues of history and culture of Armenia at the beginning of the 20th century. He worked on the multi-volume history of Armenia in his final years.

<sup>129</sup> Babakhanian A.G. *The History of Armenia*. Vol. III. Yerevan, 1947. P. 146.

<sup>130</sup> Mnatsakanian A.S. *Some Issues of the History of Literature of Aghuania*. Yerevan, 1966.

<sup>131</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*, Book XI, Chapter IV, §6, p. 229.

<sup>132</sup> The Sacae was a collective name for Iranian-speaking nomadic tribes from the 1st millennium BCE — the first centuries CE in ancient sources.

<sup>133</sup> *Gavar* was an administrative unit of the country such as a province, region, or district.

<sup>134</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*, Book XI, Chapter VIII, §4, p. 261-263.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XI, Chapter XIV, §4, p. 321.

becomes a natural border between this country and Armenia.<sup>136</sup>

Pliny the Elder, defining the Armenian-Albanian border, also says that the Albanians spill out of the Caucasus Mountains and exist “as far as the river Kur, which forms the boundary between Armenia and Hiberia.”<sup>137</sup> Regarding the peoples surrounding Armenia from the north, he informs us: “The entire plain from the Kur onward is occupied by the race of the Albani and then that of the Hiberes, separated from the Albani by the river Alazon,<sup>138</sup> which flows down from Mount Caucasus into the Cyrus.”<sup>139</sup>

Claudius Ptolemy points to the Kura (Cyrus) “running along the entirety of Iberia and Albania and separating Armenia from both.”<sup>140</sup>

Thus, as evidenced by the oldest historical sources, this suggests that Albania was located north of the Kura River, while the territory lying south of the Kura belonged to Armenia.

But at the same time, it is possible that the ancient authors in their descriptions of the South Caucasus were referring to information provided by Armenian sources (with whom the Greeks and Romans were in continuous contact and close communication), which were in turn presenting a political picture from the time of the existence of Greater Armenia. These sources of the past are echoed by later Armenian authors, presenting all the regions once occupied by Artaxias I<sup>141</sup> and Tigranes II<sup>142</sup> as ontologically Armenian and asserting that the population (about 3 million people) of these regions was completely Armenized, which sounds extremely doubtful.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Book XI, Chapter III, §2, p. 217-219.

<sup>137</sup> Pliny. *Natural History*. With an English translation by H. Rackham. Cambridge-London, 1961. Book VI, Chapter XV. P. 365-367.

<sup>138</sup> The Alazani River is intended here.

<sup>139</sup> Pliny. *Natural History*, Book VI, Chapter XI, p. 359.

<sup>140</sup> Claudius Ptolemy. *The Geography*. Translated and edited by E.L. Stevenson. New York, 1991. Book V, Chapter XI. P. 123.

<sup>141</sup> Artaxias, Artashes I (230-160 BCE) was an Armenian and Middle Eastern statesman of the Hellenistic period. He was originally a Seleucid strategist and later the first king (189-160 BCE) of Greater Armenia, or Armenia Major, who founded the Artaxiad dynasty.

<sup>142</sup> Tigranes II the Great (140-55 BCE) was a king of Greater Armenia and a successful military commander and conqueror during the Hellenistic period. He ruled in 95-55 BCE and was the grandson of Artaxias I.

For instance, Stephanus of Byzantium,<sup>143</sup> relying on Asinius Quadratus<sup>144</sup> work *Ἰαπεθικὸς*, notes that Utik (Otene, according to his and other Greco-Roman sources) was one of the *gavars* (districts) of Armenia located in the area of the Kura River.<sup>145</sup> Later, as also reported by Pliny the Elder, Utik was a *nahang*<sup>146</sup> (province) of Armenia, separated from Atropatene by the Aras River.<sup>147</sup> Armenian historians claim that Utik was part of Greater Armenia. It appears from Movses Khorenatsi's *History* that Utik was a district belonging to the Armenian Kingdom<sup>148</sup> even under the Eruandids<sup>149</sup> and Artaxiads.<sup>150</sup> Recounting the campaigns of the Armenian commander Mushegh Mamikonian in 370, Faustus of Byzantium mentions Sakasena, Utik, and the adjacent districts south of the Kura as belonging to Armenia. Noting that the Kura River served as an Armenian-Albanian border, he writes this: "He (Mushegh Mamikonian – A. N.) made war against the Aghuanian country, smoting them with unfathomable blows. He seized many districts from them that they had seized from [the Armenians]: Uti, Shakashen, Gardmanajor, Koght, and the districts surrounding them. And he established the river Kura as the boundary between the country of Aghuania and themselves, as it had been previously."<sup>151</sup> The anonymous 7th-century Armenian Geography views the situation similarly.<sup>152</sup>

Modern Armenian historians interpret all this evidence about territories lying

<sup>143</sup> Stephanus of Byzantium (*Zréf avoq à BvÇâvnoq*, 527-565) was a Neoplatonic philosopher, grammarian, and the last Alexandrian commentator on Plato and Aristotle. During the reign of Justinian I, he compiled and dedicated the ethnogeographic dictionary *Ethnica* ("Description of Peoples") to the emperor by making extracts from numerous Greek and Latin authors, whose works were subsequently lost, and thereby preserving a wealth of information. The dictionary describes in alphabetical order all the peoples of the ecumene known at that time.

<sup>144</sup> Asinius Quadratus (2nd century) was a Roman historian, who compiled a chronicle of Rome in fifteen books and described the history of the Parthian War of 161-165 CE.

<sup>145</sup> Stephani Byzantii. *Ethnicorum quae supersunt*. Ex recensione A. Meinekii. Vol. I. Berlin, 1849. P. 713. There is no doubt that Otene and Utik are identical. See Langlois V. *Collection des historiens anciens et modernes de l'Arménie*. Vol. II. Paris, 1869. P. 102, Note 2; Hübschmann H. *Die altarmenischen Ortsnamen*. Strasbourg, 1904. P. 271.

<sup>146</sup> *Nahang* was a large administrative unit, region, province.

<sup>147</sup> Pliny. *Natural History*, Book VI, Chapter XVI, p. 369.

<sup>148</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*. Translation and commentary on the literary sources by R.W. Thomson. Cambridge-London, 1978. Book 2, Chapter 44. P. 184.

<sup>149</sup> The Eruandids (Orontids, Eruandunis) (c. 570 or 520-200 BCE) were an Armenian dynasty that ruled Armenia as the Persian (Achaemenid) *satraps* of Eastern Armenia in the 5th-6th centuries BCE and as independent kings of the Ayrarat Kingdom in 323-200 BCE.

<sup>150</sup> The Artaxiads were an Armenian king dynasty. According to one theory, their dynasty derives from the Armenian Eruandid dynasty of Iranian origin. It ruled from 189 BCE to 1 CE.

<sup>151</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. New York, 1985. Book 5, Chapter 13. P. 231.

<sup>152</sup> Ananias of Shirak. *The Geography*. Introduction, translation and commentary by R.H. Hewsen. Wiesbaden, 1992.

to the south of the Kura as follows. They believe that the territories, called the right-bank territories, belonged to Greater Armenia, both geographically and ethnically, from the time of the initial formation of the Armenian people in the 7th century BCE. But why did the name *Albania* subsequently apply to this area known as Utik and Artsakh, and how did they become its constituent parts? The answer stems from the treaty of 387 CE, concluded between Persia and Byzantium, which was fatal for Armenia. The treaty put an end to the existence of Armenian statehood, and the country was divided between powerful neighbors. Wishing to finally weaken Armenia, which was subordinate to the two powers, the Persians annexed its northern provinces of Utik and Artsakh to Albania, thereby creating an administrative division, a sort of New Albania under the authority of the Persian Arsacids.<sup>153</sup> Mnatsakanian finds that Albania is a complex concept: its territory stretched into the north (from the Caucasian ridges to the Kura) before 387 but began to reach Sevan and the Aras after that. The 7th-century Armenian geography *Ashkharatsuyts*, which reflects the situation existing in 387, says regarding the Armenian-Albanian border that the right bank of the Kura is an area that “the Albanians have taken from the Armenians.”<sup>154</sup>

In light of this, Armenian historians conclude that, in reality, the toponym *Albania* should be dually perceived as Albania proper before 387 and New Albania after 387 (the latter turns out to have been almost twice as large as Albania *per se*, both geographically and ethnically). But the most significant consequence of such transformations, as Mnatsakanian emphasizes, was that the ethnic composition of New Albania became very complicated: while the population of the left-bank (actually Albanian) territories of the Kura was Albanian, the right-bank territories (Gardman, Utik, Artsakh) were inhabited by the Armenians.

However, it should be mentioned in opposition that Movses Khorenatsi in Chapter 8 of Book Two of his *History* does not refer to the Utians as Armenians and calls them a separate “tribe” originating from the commander of King Valarshak.<sup>155</sup>

Here is what Trever writes, for example: “In the 2nd century BCE, the Armenian king Artaxias I annexed a number of neighboring regions to Armenia, including the right bank of the Kura, where the Sacae, Utians, and Gargareans-Albanians lived; being fragmented, these tribes could not prevent the seizure of their lands. Since then, the ancient authors have called the Kura a border river between

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<sup>153</sup> Yeremian S.T. Krizis rabovladelcheskoy sistemy i zarozhdeniye feodalizma na territorii SSSR, III–IX w. [The Crisis of the Slave System and the Birth of Feudalism on the Territory of the USSR, the 3rd–9th centuries]. *Ocherki istorii SSSR* [Essays on the History of the USSR]. Moscow, 1958. P. 312–314.

<sup>154</sup> Ananias of Shirak. *The Geography*, Chapter V, §22, p. 65.

<sup>155</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 2, Chapter 8, p. 140.

Albania and Armenia.”<sup>156</sup> And she adds in the commentary that “the conquered regions remained part of Armenia until the 4th century CE... and then were reunited with Aluank.”<sup>157</sup>

Delving into the problem, Mnatsakanian raises the question of whether the population of right-bank *gavars* was Albanized after the annexation or remained Armenian. He writes this: “The Albanians, as nomadic pastoral tribes, were at a lower stage of development than the Armenians, who subsisted on advanced farming. The Albanians spoke different languages, while the Armenians had a common language. The Albanians did not have an extensive ethnic background or cultural framework, while the Armenians of New Albania were supported by a highly cultured historical Armenia.”<sup>158</sup>

In order to successfully rule this New Albania, according to Mnatsakanian, the Arsacids must have relied in the first place on “the developed, progressive, and monolithic Armenian part of the country, rather than on the underdeveloped and divided Albanian tribes.” Armenian must have become their official language, because it was the official language of the church, and besides, the kings of Albania would not have been able by any stretch of imagination to master the languages of all Albanian tribes, even assuming after Strabo that their number was reduced to 20,15, or even 10. The state interests of the country required confessional and linguistic consolidation around the Armenians as the largest constituent of the population.

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<sup>156</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v.n.e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE], p. 18.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Anasian A.S. *Novaya kontseptsiya v albanistike* [A New Concept in Albanian Studies], *K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and the Eastern Provinces of Armenia]. Yerevan, 1991. P. 126-153.

Yet, this statement is contradicted, first, by the creation of the Caucasian Albanian alphabet in the 5th century; second, by the Albanian historian's message about the opening of schools to teach the Albanian language throughout the country; and, third, by the discovery of palimpsests (with nearly 120 pages of Albanian text) by an expedition of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, led by Alexidze, in Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai in 1996. V. Schulze,<sup>159</sup> one of the leading modern specialists and researchers of Caucasian languages, holds that, although the Albanian Kingdom collapsed shortly after 705, the Albanian script, nevertheless, continued to be used until the 12th century.

The Armenian researchers try to convince us that the Albanian script, despite the good intentions of translators and teachers, was doomed to a short life and oblivion from the very beginning, especially as the Albanian tribes soon lost their ethnic features and assimilated into the Muslim and Armenian milieu under the constant onslaught of the Persians, Greeks, Huns, and Arabs. Consequently, the medieval definition *Albanian literature* meant the literature created in Caucasian Albania in the Armenian language. And while the specialists looking for examples of Albanian literature in the Albanian language have certainly found almost nothing, A.S. Mnatsakanian interprets the term *Albanian literature* to include a significant number of ancient books of New Albania from the 5th-12th centuries — an Albanian literature that was written in Armenian rather than in Albanian.

Mnatsakanian essentially formulates a new political and cultural history for an entire region once called the *Eastern Land*. He argues that it was another Armenia existing next to Armenia, in which a part of the Armenian people lived for many centuries and preserved their ethnic identity.

Still, as Alikberov notes,

**Thanks to the preserved written sources, we know more or less exactly what tribes created this country, what languages they spoke, and what happened to them over the centuries. The term *Albanians* seems to have been not only the designation of a specific ethnic community, but also a collective name for many peoples inhabiting Caucasian Albania.**

**Therefore, it is difficult to justify categorical statements on the issues of Caucasian Albania, which are based on the exaggeration of some facts and the downplaying**

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169 Wolfgang Matthias Schulze (1953-2020) was a German linguist and professor specializing in the theory of language and study of Caucasian languages. He was one of the leading experts in the language of the Caucasian Albanian palimpsests.



**or even suppression of others. Intentional distortions, illogical interpretations repeated over and over like mantras, opinions that are often very poorly reasoned, all indicate that a researcher is politically biased and eager to prove his point at any cost.<sup>160</sup>**

The question of ethnocultural heritage in Caucasian Albania, as Alik-berov rightly notes, is clearly debatable, but this is a completely different and much broader issue. It is as broad as the complex and diverse processes in the ethnic history of the peoples of the Caucasus, whose fate was in one way or another connected with Caucasian Albania. While recognizing the continuity of culture in ancient Albania and medieval Arran (which cannot be denied), there is simultaneously no doubt that all peoples in close contact with the Albanians were involved in the ethnocultural heritage of this ancient state to some extent, even taking into account that this heritage was significantly transformed under the influence of later processes of Islamization and de-ethnization of the indigenous population.<sup>161</sup>

Dzhafarov, relying on solid historical arguments, convincingly proves that the population of the right-bank Kura was neither assimilated nor Armenized during the period under review, but, on the contrary, the Gargarean and Utian tribes, which inhabited it and had closely related languages, managed to unite the country under their cultural influence and become its political center.<sup>162</sup> He points out that the Utians were one of the most significant ethnic components (if not the most significant) in the union of Albanian tribes.<sup>163</sup> By the 5th century, the Utians had become an already established and generally almost homogeneous array of ethnically and linguistically related ancient tribal groups on the right bank of the Kura united under one ethnonym. Their main area of settlement was in the region of Lowland (and most of Highland) Karabakh, i.e. exactly where the existence of the Gargareans has been attested. Hence, it is easy to deduce that the latter were not a

<sup>160</sup> Alikberov A.K. Kavkazskaya Albaniya i lezginskiye narody: aktualnye problemy, novye diskursy [Caucasian Albania and the Lezghin Peoples: Current Problems, New Discourses], p. 22-23.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost [The Gargareans and the Aluanian Script], p. 46-47.

<sup>163</sup> Yeremian S.T. Ekonomika i sotsialnyy stroy Albanii III-VII w. [The Economy and Social System of Albania in the 3rd-7th centuries], *Ocherki istorii SSSR. III-IX w.* [Essays on the History of the USSR. The 3rd-9th centuries]. Moscow, 1958. P. 303-305; Trever K.V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. – VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE], p. 46-47; Aliyev I.G. *Istoriya Midii* [The History of Media]. Baku, 1960. P. 65-67; Aliyev K.G. *Antichnaya Kavkazskaya Albaniya* [Ancient Caucasian Albania]. Baku, 1974. P. 127-133.

special tribal group isolated from the surrounding array of Utian tribes. The Gargareans undoubtedly belonged to the Utian tribes *per se*, subsequently merged with the Utians, assimilated utterly, and lost their distinct tribal name.<sup>164</sup>

The researcher sums up numerous disputes, arguing that the ethnic composition of the right bank of the Kura “consisted of tribal communities that lived for thousands of years between the Greater Caucasus and the Lower Aras (as well as to the south) and spoke languages belonging either to the Ibero-Caucasian language group (the Aluanians, Utians, Gargareans, Tsodians, etc.) or to other non-Indo-European languages (the Caspians, Par-sians-Parrasians, Mikians, etc.).”<sup>165</sup>

Another important issue in the history of Caucasian Albania is whether the Albanian Church was independent. Armenian researchers insist that the latter was completely dependent on the Armenian Church, while Azerbaijani historians consider its autocephalous status as fact. Regarding the dependence of the Albanian Church on the Armenian, we should note that there are no institutional documents confirming that the Albanian Church was established by the Armenian and no documents determining its position in the diptychs, degree of subordination or autonomy. The references to the Albanian king Urnayr being baptized by St. Gregory the Illuminator and his grandson Grigoris being consecrated bishop of Albania, as evidenced by the sources, mean nothing in this respect, since the Armenian Church itself, like St. Gregory, was dependent on the Caesarean see during the establishment and formation of the Albanian Church. Despite the absolute authority wielded by St. Gregory in the Caucasus as bishop of Ashtishat, he was not entitled to set up ecclesiastical units in order to determine their canonical status in the future. His task, or rather calling, was to preach and prepare clergymen to meet the spiritual needs of the Caucasian Christians.

Yet it should stressed that the Albanian Church, although quite independent, was not autocephalous. Autocephaly is a special status of independence from an institutional organization that is granted by a special conciliar act. From the very beginning of its existence, the Albanian Church enjoyed freedom and independence due to the territorial remoteness of Caucasian Albania from the borders of the Orthodox ecumene represented by the Byzantine Empire, being also part of the

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<sup>164</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. Gargarskaya problema i alvanskaya pismennost [The Gargarean Problem and the Aluanian Script], *XXIII nauchnaya sessiya molodykh uchenykh, posvyashchennaya 70-letiyu osnovaniya Instituta istorii, arkheologii i entografii im. I.A. Dzhevakhishvili AN Gruz. SSR* [The 23rd Scientific Session of Young Scholars Dedicated to the 70th Anniversary of Foundation of the I.A. Dzhevakhishvili Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR], Tbilisi, 1988. P. 58-60.

<sup>165</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost [The Gargareans and the Aluanian Script], p. 48.

Universal Church with its apostolic traditions. The status of the primate of the Albanian Church, as is the case with the Armenian or Persian Church, allowed him to act freely and unrestrictedly within the Albanian ethnic group in his own state. The bishops of Caesarea, as history shows, did not interfere in any way in the affairs of the Caucasian churches and only assisted them in hierarchical succession and doctrinal issues in times of need.

## **1.1. OVERVIEW OF BOOK ONE OF THE HISTORY OF ALBANIA**

The account in Book One of the *History of Albania* contains rather general information providing insight into the emergence of the Albanian ethnic group, the formation of the Albanian state, Albanian rulers, their lands, and the natural resources of the country. It also mentions the political events from the age of independent Albanian kings. In this section, author Movses Kalankatuatsi also presents valuable evidence of the Christianization of the Albanians, as well as some hagiographic information (on saint's lives), folk tales about the discovery of relics, and epistolary documents.

Book One is divided into thirty chapters. The titles of the chapters correspond to their content:

1. Foreword to the history. Genealogy from Adam to Noah.
2. The genealogy of Japheth and his descendants.
3. The nations acquainted with writing.
4. The formation of the principality of Aluank by Valarshak.
5. Knowledge of the country's fertility.
6. Knowledge of the apostolic sermon.
7. The discovery of the relics of St. Eliseus.
8. The explanation of missing accounts from Arran to Urnayr.
9. The conversion of Urnayr and baptism of the Albanians.
10. The life of King Vache.
11. The letter from Bishop Giwt to King Vache.
12. The war between Tiridates and northern peoples. The seizure of Albania by the Persians and reign of Sanatruk.
13. Tiran and Pap placed in Armenia by the Persians.
14. The lives of St. Gregory the Illuminator and Grigoris of Albania.
15. The rulers of Albania from Japheth and Arran to Vachagan III.
16. The life of King Vachagan.
17. The reign of the Persian king Valarshak.
18. The foundation of schools in Albania by Valarshak. Concerning the sect of finger-cutters.
19. Concerning the discovery of the relics of St. Zacharias and Pantaleon.
20. The discovery of the relics of St. Grigoris.
21. The letter of King Vachagan to the Albanian Church. The king's vision.
22. The preaching activity of the hermit Yob in Artsakh.
23. The vision of Khochkorik.

24. King Vachagan's question to the learned priest Matte concerning the dead.
25. A letter from Bishop Abraham to King Vachagan concerning the dead.
26. The canons of the Council of Aluen.
27. The life of Mesrop Mashtots.
28. The activity of Mashtots' disciples.
29. The invasion of Transcaucasia by the northern tribes.  
The martyrdom of Mesrop's disciples.
30. The conversion and martyrdom of the Agiostratosean force.

Analyzing the contents of Book One of the *History of Albania*, it can be easily concluded that Movses Kalankatuatsi used very scanty and fragmentary information at his disposal to write a section on the ancient period of the Albanian history. The scarcity of data available to the author is explained by the remoteness of events from the lifetime of the historian himself, though Movses Kalankatuatsi nonetheless tried to describe them. It may be presumed that the records of the local history in the ancient period had not been preserved by the time of the Albanian historian (if any of them have ever been documented at all, in other sources unknown to us).

Given the amount of information contained in the above chapters of Book One of the *History of Albania*, it can be inferred that Movses Kalankatuatsi copied some sections from surviving written sources. Among these sources, we find not only the liturgical and canonical documents of the Albanian Church, but also letters, epistles, hagiographic materials (often resembling folklore pieces), and the acts of martyrs. Movses Kalankatuatsi makes extensive use of the works of his predecessors and contemporaries such as Agathangelos (285-330), Faustus of Byzantium (4th-5th centuries), Koriun<sup>166</sup> (5th century), Movses Khorenatsi (5th-6th centuries), Elishe (5th-6th centuries), Petros Syunetsi (6th century), and Anania Shirakatsi<sup>167</sup> (7th century).

The following chapters stand out for their content: Chapter 11 includes a letter from the Armenian bishop Giwt to King Vache; Chapter 14 sets out the life of St. Gregory the Illuminator; Chapters 16, 17, and 18 involve the Albanian king Vachagan

<sup>166</sup> Koriun was an Armenian historian, writer, and translator from the first half of the 5th century, a disciple of Mesrop Mashtots. He wrote a work called *The Life of Mashtots*.

<sup>167</sup> Anania Shirakatsi (7th century) was an Armenian geographer, cartographer, historian, and astronomer, who continued the works of Movses Khorenatsi (5th century). He compiled the World Geographic Atlas (*Ashkharatsuyts*) that contained extensive information on the historic geography of Armenia. It described in detail the historically established administrative and political status of the territory of ancient and early medieval Armenia within the borders of Greater Armenia and Lesser Armenia to the west of it and provided geographic and cartographic information on the countries of Asia, Europe, and Libya (Africa).

and his educational activities; Chapter 19 tells the story of the miraculous discovery of the relics of St. Zacharias and Pantaleon; Chapter 21 documents the letter of King Vachagan to the clergy of the Albanian Church; Chapter 23 recounts the vision of Khochkorik; Chapters 24 and 25 present the doctrine and view of the Church on the posthumous state of the human soul after death; Chapter 26 reproduces the exact list of church canons adopted at the (Albanian) Council of Aluen; Chapters 27, 28, and 29 contain excerpts from the life of St. Mesrop Mashtots.

The chapters in Book One can be thematically divided into the following sections:

- historical information;
- liturgical and canonical documents;
- hagiographie stories;
- general legendary tales.

This division of chapters into thematic areas may be considered somewhat general and conventional. For instance, the chapters representing historical data are based on biblical historical sources, as well as the history of Persia, Armenia, and Albania itself. Among the hagiographie materials, we find episodes related to the real historical situation during the described period. The section of liturgical and canonical documents also includes examples of the epistolary genre.

Thus, historical information can be found in Chapters 6,9,12,13,15,17, 18, and 29.

Chapters 11,21, 24, 25, and 26 may be assigned to the section of liturgical and canonical documents.

Hagiographie materials and the acts of martyrs are contained in Chapters 7, 9,10,14,16,19,20, 22, 27, 28, 29, and 30.

And finally, Chapters 1,2,3,4,5,8,21, and 23 can be categorized as general information, which is often of a legendary or folkloristic nature.

Based on the above classification, we conclude that the bulk of Book One by Movses Kalankatuatsi consists of hagiographie and narrative materials that had probably survived in written form in the church and folk environment by the time of the *History of Albania*. The data included in this section reveal the Albanian history's outstanding personalities who are associated with the country's Christianization and faith testimony and cherished in the memory of the people.

There is also important evidence in the chapters attributed to the liturgical and canonical section. They show the faith of the Albanian Church in the documented wordings during the described period and demonstrate the maturity of dogmatic thinking and the stability of canonical forms of the ecclesiastical institution.

The shortage of chapters in the historical section is regrettable, as is the fact that

the historian did not attempt to compile a chronologically consistent history of the Albanian state during the initial period of its development. The information contained in the so-called “historical” chapters is obviously of a compilatory nature.

The chronological framework of Book One of the *History of Albania* covers the period from biblical times to the 5th century. The account begins with biblical history. The Albanians are descended from Noah’s son Japheth. The geography of the country is represented by the description of the terrain, the characteristics of natural resources, and the clarity of its border outlines. Chapter 4 starts to present the real history of Albania during the reign of Kings Urnayr, Esualen, Vache II, and Vachagan III. The history of the spread of Christianity in Albania has a prominent place in Book One, which underscores its status as official religion. Book One ends by describing the invasion of the Huns into the country in the 5th century.

## 1.2. THE HISTORY OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA FROM BIBLICAL TIMES TO THE 5TH CENTURY

Movses Kalankatuatsi prefaces his history with a biblical genealogy, transmitting the names of the antediluvian patriarchs in sequential order from Adam to Noah. This trope is common among medieval historians, and the author of the *History of Albania* uses it to establish the origins, if mythical, of the Albanian ethnic group.<sup>168</sup>

In Chapter 2, he recounts the story of fifteen peoples who were descended from Noah's son Japheth.<sup>169</sup> Torgom,<sup>170</sup> Japheth's grandson and Gomer's son,<sup>171</sup> is named the progenitor of the Armenians. Tarshish and Kitris,<sup>172</sup> Japheth's grandsons from his son Javan, are called the ancestors of the Iberians and Albanians.

In Chapter 3, the historian offers a list of peoples capable of writing: "... the Medes, the Armenians, the Albanians."<sup>173</sup> However, it is unclear from the passage quoted when these peoples acquired their writing systems. Later, the author names the Armenian scholar and monk Mesrop Mashtots, who lived in the 5th century, as the inventor of the alphabet for the Albanians. In the same chapter, Kalankatuatsi determines the confines of the territory owned by Japheth's descendants, calling the Caspian Sea the eastern border of these possessions. This explains why sometimes the historian refers to Caucasian Albania as the *Eastern Country* or the *Eastern Land*.

Chapter 4 describes the formation of the Aluan Kingdom, from which the statehood of Caucasian Albania is derived. Following the Armenian legend, the historian calls the legendary Parthian Valarshak<sup>174</sup> the creator of Albanian statehood. Here Kalankatuatsi admits that "we cannot say anything definite for the benefit of our readers about the people who inhabited the great Mount Caucasus from the creation of the world down to Valarshak, king of Armenia."<sup>175</sup>

According to the generally accepted tradition, the historian credits Valarshak with unifying the mountainous Caucasian tribes into a single union, which provided

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<sup>168</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 1, p. 1.

<sup>169</sup> Genesis 6:10.

<sup>170</sup> Torgom is the biblical Togarmah. The Armenian legend has it that Torgom was the father of Hayk, ancestor and eponym of the Armenians. Hence, Armenia is commonly referred to as Torgom's home or country (cf.: Ezekiel 27:14 and 38:6).

<sup>171</sup> According to Movses Khorenatsi, Torgom was Gomer's grandson. However, Movses Kalankatuatsi, unlike Movses Khorenatsi, follows the biblical narrative here.

<sup>172</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 2, p. 2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 3, p. 3.

<sup>174</sup> Valarshak was a legendary Armenian king of Parthian origin, who founded the Arsacid dynasty of Armenia and Albania.

<sup>175</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 4, p. 4.



a basis for the Albanian state. Kalankatuatsi writes that Valarshak elected the elders of the new state entity as “governors and prefects,” then appointed a certain Aran of the ancient and noble Sisakan family, descended from Japheth, as their chief. This Aran received “the plains and mountains of Albania from the river Araxes (Aras — A. N.) to the fortress of Hnarakert.”<sup>176 177</sup> The historian notes that they called Aran *alui*<sup>177</sup> on account of his agreeable disposition, hence the name of the country: Aluank. And from Aran descended the tribes of the principalities of Uti, Tsovdik, Gardman, and Gargark.<sup>178</sup>

As a matter of fact, it would be more accurate to interpret the name of the country, *Albania*, as a “mountainous country,” since its mountain peaks are white with snow even in the southern latitudes. *Albus* means “white” in Latin. Any mountainous area was often called *Albania* in ancient times.<sup>179</sup> It is quite possible that the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus were the reason behind the name of the country.

At the same time, F. Asadov notes that

**the origin of the name *Albanian* and *Albania* is a more complex problem than the etymology of the terms used. First and foremost, it should be noted that the corresponding grammatical forms of the word are used to designate the country, ethnic community, state, and language of Albania. The Greek and Latin names utilized in many other languages correspond to the Armenian *Aluank/Aghuank*, Parthian *Arđan*, Middle Persian *Arran*, Arabic *Ar-Ran*, and Georgian *Rani*.<sup>180</sup> We can see that a series of Iranian linguistic forms from *Arđan* to *Arran* has survived to the present day and remains in the modern Azerbaijani (*Aran*) and Georgian (*Rani*) languages to denote the central region of present-day Azerbaijan. Are the Iranian and ancient written traditions of rendering the name of the country related? This suggests that Trever has been right in stating that the word *Albania* was a Latin translation of the local name, which, again presumably, could have been the Parthian *Arđan*: in any case, there are**

<sup>176</sup> Hnarakert was a fortress city located on the Middle Kura, southeast of Tbilisi. The fortress was called Hunan in the ancient Arab sources.

<sup>177</sup> *Mu* (Classical Armenian) means “sweet”, “tasty”

<sup>178</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Mbanians*, Book 1, Chapter 4, p. 4.

<sup>179</sup> Azimov A. *Slova na karte* [Words on the Map]. Moscow, 2007. P. 16,18.

<sup>180</sup> Schulze W. *Caucasian Albanian (Aluan). The Language of the "Caucasian Albanian" (Aluan) Palimpsest from Mt. Sinai and of the "Caucasian Albanian" inscriptions. A tentative interpretation of 2 Cor 11, 25-27 (specimen of the Caucasian Albanian (Aluan) Lectionary) and of the Aluan inscriptions*. Based on the transliteration by Zaza Alexidze, re-read and corrected by Wolfgang Schulze and Jost Gippert, 2003. P. 3.

**no other credible contenders for the original word proposed in our sources.<sup>181</sup>**

Yet, the researcher himself remarks that the earliest mention of the ethnonym *Albanians* dates back to Arrian's account of an Albanian detachment present in the army of the Media governor Atropates during the Battle of Guagamela in 331 BCE, i.e. long before the appearance of the Parthians in the Middle East and the South Caucasus. Combining all these details and existing versions into a single logical chain to build a convincing theory is not an easy task.

Chapter 4 of the *History of Albania* is almost entirely quoted by the Albanian author from the 5th-6th-century Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi and will serve to explain the compiled data. Here is what he writes about Valarshak: "...sixty years after the death of Alexander the Valiant, Arshak<sup>182</sup> reigned over the Parthians ... he made very fierce wars and seized for himself the entire east... thus he reigned for thirty-one years, and after him his son Artashes for twenty-six years ... he was succeeded by his own son Arshak, called "the Great," ... Arshak ruled over a third of this world, as we learn from the fourth book of Herodotus' *Histories* of events,... he made his brother Valarshak king of Armenia, giving him the regions of the north and west."<sup>183 184 185</sup>

Kalankatuatsi, describing the dispensation of Albanian land by Valarshak, cites Khorenatsi's text. Valarshak

**established in the governorship of the great and renowned and fertile northeastern region Aran, a man famous and outstanding in every deed of**

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<sup>181</sup> Asadov Farda. Novaya kniga o Kavkazskoy Albanii: Nikonorov, igumen Alexy. Istoriya Tserkvi Kavkazskoy Albanii po Moiseyu Kalankatuyskomu [A New Book about Caucasian Albania: Nikonorov, Hegumen Alexy. History of the Church of Caucasian Albania according to Movses Kalankatuatsi], p. 94.

<sup>182</sup> Parthia was originally a small country southeast of the Caspian Sea that was inhabited by the Parthians, one of the Iranian tribes. This kingdom was formed here around 250 BCE in the struggle with the Seleucid state, which owned most of the lands in Near Asia, after being founded by Arshak I the Brave (248-216 BCE). His successors, the Parthian Arsacids, bore, along with personal names, the dynastic name Arshak. Under one of them, Mithridates I (170-139 BCE) (Arshak the Great in Movses Khorenatsi's work), a small Parthian kingdom turned into a huge power, driving out the Seleucids beyond the Euphrates in the west and reaching India in the east. The Parthian Empire lasted until 226 CE, when it was crushed and conquered by Ardashir I (226-241), who represented another Iranian people, the Persians, and founded the Sassanid dynasty. Following Movses Khorenatsi, the Albanian historian frequently refers to Parthia as Persia based on common territory and to the Parthians as Persians.

<sup>183</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 2, Chapters 2-3, p. 130-132.

<sup>184</sup> In Chapter 27 of Book One, Movses Kalankatuatsi points to the Gargark (Gargareans) as a tribe settled in the Caucasus by Alexander of Macedon.

<sup>185</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 2, Chapter 8, p. 139-140.

**wisdom and sagacity; [this region] is by the great river called Kur (Kura – A. N.), which cuts the extensive plain. But know this, that in the first book we forgot to mention this illustrious and famous race, the tribe of Sisak, which inherited the plain of Albania and the mountainous region of the same plain from the river Araxes as far as the fortress called Hnarakert. And the country was called Aluank [Albania] after the gentleness of his mode of life; for they called him *alu*. Descended from him was this famous and valiant Aran whom the Parthian Valarshak made military governor. From his offspring, they say, descend the families of Uti and Gardman and Tsowdek and the principalities of Gargar.<sup>194195</sup>**

The researchers believe this legendary genealogy to have been created in the first centuries CE, probably during the period when the Parthian Arsacids managed to put their dynasty members on the thrones of some Transcaucasian countries (in Armenia, Atropatene, the country of the Maskuts, and Albania) in the middle and perhaps at the end of the 1st century. The Arsacids may have sought closer unity with the state, through which the Alans and other nomads passed or forced their way, inflicting deep wounds on the economy of the countries of Transcaucasia and Parthia in 75 CE. In order to bring together the interests of Armenia and Albania, the Arsacids could have created a legend about the formation of the Albanian state under the direct influence of Valarshak, the legendary dispenser of the Armenian land. In fact, the first kings of Albania undoubtedly represented the local Albanian nobility from among the most prominent tribal leaders. This is also illustrated by their non-Armenian and non-Iranian names.<sup>186</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi starts to describe the political events of the Albanian history in Book One of his work from the rule of the Albanian king Urnayr in the early 4th century.<sup>187</sup> The Albanian historian brings the political events mentioned here to the time of the reign of Vachagan III, the last king of Caucasian Albania belonging to the Arsacid dynasty.

The historian explains the introduction to the 4th century Albanian history as follows: “We have found no accounts in chronological order concerning the events from Aran to Urnayr, king of Albania... it would be most desirable to have chronological accounts of the events from the reign of Aran down to the present time,

<sup>186</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. – VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE], p. 144-145.

<sup>187</sup> However, Chapter 8 of Book One by Movses Kalankatuatsi describes the events related to the confrontation of the mid-1st century Armenian kings Sanatruk, Eruand, and Artashes. The events depicted in this chapter retell Chapters 37,44,50, and 52 of Book Two by Movses Khorenatsi.

but the manifoldness of the nations of the east and the destruction of books and written records by fire explain why [this is not possible]."<sup>188 189</sup>

As can be seen from Movses Kalankatuatsi's account, Urnayr became the ruler of Albania in the early 4th century. The beginning of his reign partially coincided with the reign of Tiridates III (287-330) in Armenia, as well as those of Diocletian (284-305) and Galerius (305-314) in Rome. This time was marked by the victory of Rome together with Transcaucasian peoples over Sasanian Persia, which was ruled by Narseh (293-303).<sup>190</sup> A peace treaty was concluded in Nisibis in 298. The victory of the Transcaucasian peoples and the 40-year peace period that came after the Treaty of Nisibis had a positive impact on the development of the economy and culture of the Transcaucasian countries. During the same period, Christianity became an official religion in Albania (following a similar process in Armenia and Iberia), although it was accepted mainly by the court and the nobility.

The struggle between the two empires, Rome-Byzantium and Persia, inevitably involved the countries of Transcaucasia, Albania and Iberia, which had to take one side or the other depending on the political situation. Armenia, whose kings were relatives of the dynasty deposed in Persia, was at odds with the Sassanids and therefore often allied with Byzantium against them.

The history of Caucasian Albania, intertwined as it is with the history of Armenia and Persia during this period, resists proper coverage due to the scarcity of sources. Only a few mentions of the Albanians' participation in the international relations and events of this time can be found in the works by Movses Kalankatuatsi, Faustus of Byzantium, and Movses Khorenatsi. These little pieces of information do refer to the prince of Uti, among the sixteen most important *satraps*<sup>190</sup> and *toparchs*<sup>191</sup> gathered by the Armenian king Tiridates III, apparently in the first quarter of the 4th century, to accompany St. Gregory the Illuminator to Caesarea.<sup>192</sup>

Sources say that the Albanian king Urnayr was a relative of the Persian king

<sup>188</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 8, p. 6-7.

<sup>189</sup> According to other sources, Narseh reigned in 296-302.

<sup>190</sup> *Satrap* (Old Persian: *xSadrapavan* "protector of the kingdom"; Middle Persian: *Satrap*) was a governor of the *satrapy*, a ruler in Ancient Persia. He was appointed by the king and usually belonged to his relatives or the highest nobility. He was responsible for collecting taxes and maintaining the army, was the supreme judge, and had the right to mint coins on his territory. The division of Persia into *satrapies* was introduced during the Achaemenid dynasty (558-330 BCE). Darius I, who created a huge empire, regulated this system. His 20 *satrapies* roughly corresponded to the number of conquered countries, which retained their laws and language, but paid taxes to the center.

<sup>191</sup> *Toparch* (Greek) is the ruler of a region, country, district; a governor.

<sup>192</sup> Agathangelos. *History of the Armenians*. Translation and commentary by R.W. Thomson. Albany, 1976. Chapter 11, §795. P. 333-335.

Shapur II (309-379), having married his sister.

This kinship is thought to have led to friendship between the two states. Movses Kalankatuatsi calls King Urnayr “a powerful man who had acquired splendid renown in many battles.”<sup>193</sup> It is unknown how long Urnayr reigned over his country, but it can be assumed that he died around the early ‘30s of the 4th century, to which our historian indirectly refers: “Urnayr, king of Albania ... lived as a son of the eternal light and then quit this human life. After his death the Albanians asked for the young Grigoris to be their catholicos.”<sup>194</sup> The consecration of Gregory is known to have taken place in the ‘30s of the 4th century.

It is clear from the evidence given in Chapter 12 of Book One by Movses Kalankatuatsi and confirmed by the information of other sources that an Arsacid named Sanatruk (sometimes called Sanesan) became the ruler in the area of Paytakaran near the confluence of the Aras and Kura Rivers (historical Kaspiane) in the ‘30s. The author of the *History of Albania* says that “at the time of the death of Trdatios, a certain Sanatruk ruled over the Albanians in the town of Paytakaran.”<sup>195</sup> This expression should be understood not in the sense that Paytakaran was part of Albania, but in the sense that Sanatruk from Paytakaran extended his power to Albania. The Armenian king Tiridates III reigned from 287 until his death in 330.

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<sup>193</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 9, p. 8.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 12, p. 17.

Based on Movses Khorenatsi's account, Sanatruk belonged to Tiridates' family and was sent to Paytakaran in the company of "the young Grigoris," the propagator of Christianity "in the remoter parts of the kingdom," after "the governors of the northeastern regions, the commanders of the distant city called Paytakaran," had come to Tiridates.<sup>196</sup> In the wake of Tiridates' death, this Sanatruk (involved in St. Grigoris' death), "crowning himself, occupied the city of Paytakaran and with the support of foreign nations planned to rule over all of Armenia."<sup>197</sup>

The historian reports that the Armenians turned to the Roman emperor Constantius II (337-361) for help and received an army led by the commander Antiochus. Antiochus elevated Khosrow II Kotak (330-338), son of Tiridates III, to the Armenian throne and marched with armies against Sanatruk. The latter left in Paytakaran the Persian troops that had come to his aid and "fled with the princes of the Aluank to King Shapuh for rescue." When Antiochus saw that the Persian troops had not yielded, he ordered "the lands of the rebels to be subjected to pillage," collected the tribute from local population, and returned with his army to Rome, considering his mission complete.<sup>198</sup> After the united campaign of the Armenian, Roman, and Iberian troops against Paytakaran, the second stage of the struggle began, when Sanatruk invaded Armenia with assembled Albanian troops.<sup>199</sup>

This time Sanatruk took over Armenia, then "held and tyrannized over the entire country for about a year."<sup>200</sup> A year later, the Armenians managed to oust Sanatruk from their capital, Vagharshapat.

Movses Kalankatuatsi summarizes in Chapters 12 and 13 of Book One what happened thereafter. Following the events described above, probably in the next decade after the accession of Tiran in Armenia (338-345/350), Albania again became the scene of military clashes between the northern peoples on the one hand, and Armenia and Persia on the other hand. "The northern nations ..., having united, penetrated the pass of Chor and encamped on the borders of Albania for four years,"<sup>201</sup> attacking Armenia from there. This time the Persian king Shapur II sided with the Armenians and, supporting and assisting Tiran, "saved him from an attack of the northern nations."

The subsequent decade saw the continuation of Shapur's friendly relations with the Albanians. Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>202</sup> (writing between 394 and 395), a famous

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<sup>196</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 255-256.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 256-257.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 6, p. 259.

<sup>199</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 12, p. 17-18.

<sup>200</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 7, p. 16.

<sup>201</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 12, p. 265.

<sup>202</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus (born c. 330 in Antioch, the Roman Empire — died after 395, possibly in

representative of Latin historiography, reports, describing Shapur's appearance before the battle against the Romans at Amida in 359, that next to the Sasanian king on his left hand marched Grumbates, king of the Chionites,<sup>203</sup> and "on his right hand was the king of the Albani, of equal rank and splendor, after whom came various generals, renowned for their rank and power."<sup>204</sup>

From the mid-4th century onward, the relationship between Albania and Armenia was broken.

Having gained the complete control of Persia, Shapur II, looking around the world, had to notice the drastic change that had taken place during peace with Rome. The persecution of Christians, which began in Rome after the great victory over the Persians at the time of Galerius, faded away without achieving the goal of crushing the new religion. Emperor Constantine I (who began his reign in 306), unlike other strongly anti-Christian claimants to the throne, considered it virtue to win over the empire's Christian population. In the end, he won and became the undisputed ruler of the entire empire by 324, gradually turning it into an officially Christian one. Now Shapur II faced this new, Christian Rome.

Until then, Persia had granted reasonable tolerance to the Christians. Christianity spread freely among the population of Mesopotamia, where flourished Manichaeism, a curious mixture of Zoroastrianism<sup>205</sup> and Christi-

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Rome) was an ancient Roman historian. He participated in the wars of Rome against the Persians in the mid-4th century and served in the western part of the Empire. He was a Syrian Greek by origin, but wrote his only work, *Res Gestae* (The Deeds), in Latin. The surviving part of his historical work (Books XIV-XXXI) covers the period from 353 to 378, starting in general from the reign of Emperor Nerva (96). Ammianus Marcellinus is sometimes characterized as the last major Roman or even ancient historian.

<sup>203</sup> The Chionites or Kermichiones were an ancient nomadic people that appears to have spoken the Eastern Iranian dialects. They lived in Bactria and Transoxiana. The first mention of the Chionites was by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus in the 4th century. They were defeated by the Turks in 556. The remnants of the Chionites fused with the Avars.

<sup>204</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus. *The Roman History*. Translated by C.D. Yonge. London-New York, 1894. Book XVIII, Chapter VI, §21. P. 176.

<sup>205</sup> Zoroastrianism, also Mazdeism (Avestan: *vahvi-daena-mazdayasna* "the good faith of worshipping the Wise Lord," Persian: *behdin* "the good faith"), is one of the oldest religions that originates in the revelation of the prophet Spitama Zarathustra received by him from the deity, Ahura Mazda. The teaching of Zarathustra is based on a person's free moral choice of good thoughts, good words, and good deeds. Zoroastrianism was spread mainly on the territory of Greater Iran in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

anity. While Rome was anti-Christian, the Christians of Persia loyally served their motherland. Some of them had fled here from Roman persecution, and as always with exiles, one could count on their fierce hostility to the power from which they had fled. But then the circumstances abruptly changed. Rome officially became Christian. Its emperor took paternal care of the bishops and governed church councils. Rome turned from a cruel persecutor into a good shepherd. This meant that every Christian in Persian lands now potentially belonged to a “fifth column.” It also meant that the Transcaucasian countries, which had long been performing a balancing act between Rome and Parthia-Persia, were suddenly on the verge of defecting entirely to Rome for religious reasons. Persia had to act. It assembled its own Zoroastrian orthodoxy and declared war on heretics. That in itself made it possible for the war with Rome to resume, but this installation was destined to be much a more vicious due to the religious zeal of both sides.

Shapur II waited for Constantine’s death. When he died in 337, the empire was left to his three sons, and Shapur II reasoned that an empire ruled by three should be weaker than an empire ruled by one. Therefore, as soon as Constantine died, he launched a war against Constantius (337-361), a son who ruled in the East.

Naturally, the Christians of Persia immediately and loudly opposed this war. The bishop of Ctesiphon furiously denounced Shapur II. It was a sincere but short-sighted move, for Shapur II was not one to trifle with. He intensified his persecution of the Christians until they almost completely disappeared.

Shapur II’s policy was to gradually win over first Albania, formerly an ally of Armenia, and then Iberia, which he invaded in 368. Albania continued to assist the Persians during this period. Arshak II (350-367) and Pap (367-374) in turn reigned in Armenia at that time. When Shapur II set out on a campaign and began to distribute his troops against the Roman and Armenian army, King Urnayr, who was with him, requested a favor from him to go with his brigade “as a champion against the brigade of Pap, king of the Armenians,” but on condition that the Persians march against the Roman army.<sup>206</sup>

Based on the foregoing arguments, it can be presumed that the second Albanian king named Urnayr is meant here. We find some contradiction in the Albanian historian’s work: he says in Chapter 9 that “after his death the Albanians asked for the young Grigoris to be their catholicos,”<sup>207</sup> i.e. the Albanian king Urnayr had already been dead by 330; but, giving a list of Albanian

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Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 5, Chapter 4, p. 211.

<sup>217</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 9, p. 8.



rulers in Chapters 14 and 15, the author mentions only one king named Ur- nayr, and, as it appears from Faustus of Byzantium's account, he did participate in a battle against the Armenians in the Dzirav field in 371.

Assuming this Urnayr was one and the same, it would be unimaginable to expect this man of 80 years or older (the age he should have reached by 371, given he was already a baptized Albanian king in the late "10s or early "20s of the 4th century) capable of leading a military campaign.

The battle that took place in the Dzirav field, near Mount Npat, in the Bagavan area, was fierce and ended with the victory of the Armenians and Romans.

**Mushegh, the *sparapet* of Armenia, struck the Iranian troops with incredible blows. Then he encountered the Aghuanian brigade and generally killed all of the troops. He caught up with Urhnayr, the king of Aghuania, who was fleeing and with the shaft of his spear Mushegh struck Urhnayr on the head many times, saying: "Be grateful that you are a king and have a crown. I will not kill a king even if I am put into great straits." And Mushegh permitted him to flee to the land of Aghuania, with eight cavalrymen.**<sup>208</sup>

Mushegh also started to wreak havoc on the countries that had attacked Armenia, including Albania. He made the Kura River a border between his country and Albania in 371. And yet Mamedova considers Faustus of Byzantium's report of the establishment of a border along the Kura River to be exaggerated and inconsistent with the historical realities of 4th century Armenia.<sup>209</sup>

Faustus of Byzantium goes on to say that when Shapur II later began to prepare for a new campaign against the Armenians, "Urhnayr, the king of Aghuania, sent some information to Mushegh via messenger: *"I have great thanks for you for not putting me to death. God put me in your hands, and you spared me. For the rest of my life I will not forget your affection. However, I am informing you that the king of Iran, Shapuh, with all of his troops is coming to fall upon you unawares."*<sup>210</sup> Mushegh and the Roman commander Terentius prepared in advance to face the enemy and defeated Shapur for the second time.

Armenia was divided between the Byzantines and the Persians in 387. The border between Albania and Armenia shifted again, moving beyond the right-bank regions of the Kura. The Arsacid dynasty ceased to exist in the eastern part of

<sup>208</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 5, Chapter 4, p. 216-217.

<sup>209</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 282-283.

<sup>220</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 5, Chapter 5, p. 219.

Armenia in 428. Sources are silent about Albania during this period.<sup>211</sup>

In Chapter 15 of his work, Movses Kalankatuatsi gives a list of ten rulers of Albania known to him from the 3rd-5th centuries, starting from Vachagan I the Brave and ending with the last member of the Arsacid dynasty on the Albanian throne, Vachagan III the Pious: "The number of days from Aran to Vachagan the Brave, who was of the great Arsacid family, is not clear, but those who subsequently became the ten kings of Albania bore the following names: Vachagan the Brave, Vache, Urnayr, Vachagan [II], Mrhawan, Satoy, Asay, Esualen, Vache [II], then Vachagan [III] the Pious, king of Albania."<sup>212</sup> The same list is repeated by the 13th-century author Kirakos Gandzaketsi in his *History*.<sup>213</sup>

In Chapters 10, 16, and 17 of Book One of the *History of Albania*, Movses Kalankatuatsi takes us back to the time of the Persian rulers Yazdegerd II (439-457), Hormizd III (457-459), Peroz II (459-484), and Valarsh (484-488). The historical events described in these chapters are confirmed by data shared by Elishe (5th-6th centuries), Ghazar Parpetsi (6th century), and Sebeos (7th century).

It should be clarified that historical information about the events of the first half of the 5th century in Albania is extremely scarce. We know that the position of Albania and its Church improved during the reign of Yazdegerd I (399-421). This period was difficult for the Sassanids, due, first, to the intensified internal struggle between the king and the growing nobility and, second, to unfavorable international relations with the Central Asian Hephthalites.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. – VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE], p. 186-201.

<sup>212</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 24.

<sup>213</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. New York, 1986. Chapter 10. P. 156.

<sup>214</sup> The Hephthalites (the White Huns) were an ancient nomadic people of the early Middle Ages (4th-6th centuries), which created a large state in Central Asia and Afghanistan. They undertook several campaigns in India against the Gupta Empire. There are a number of theories regarding the origin of the Hephthalites. Most scholars identify the Hephthalites with the Chionites. However, some of them argue that they were different, but related peoples. Others also suggest that both the Tocharian tribes, which had migrated from China, and the local Sogdian population contributed to the ethnogenesis of the Hephthalites.

The struggle on the Euphrates between the Romans on the one hand, and the Iranian peoples on the other, had continued for four centuries now, and there was no stopping it. It became a crazy but inevitable way of life, even when both powers fell to their knees under the onslaught of barbarian tribes. The fifth century of struggle brought unimaginable chaos. In part, it was fueled by the rapidly changing variations of different religions. Sometimes it even seemed that the Christians would be able to achieve tolerance in Persia. This possibility never materialized to the full extent, but when Yazdegerd I<sup>215</sup> ascended the throne in 399, it almost came true. He, like the former Persian monarchs, was besieged by pugnacious magnates and powerful clergymen. It escalated to the point that the monarch was left with practically nothing but the role of commander (perhaps that is why the Persian kings were so willing to go to war, for this gave them an opportunity to exercise power, at least in a limited sphere).

Yazdegerd I came up with a brilliant idea. He could limit the power of both nobility and clergy if he leaned towards the Christians for support. Therefore, he signed what he hoped would be a lasting peace with Rome in 408 and granted the Christians of Persia freedom from persecution in 409, even allowing them to rebuild their temples. There were rumors that he was going to be baptized in order to become a Persian Constantine.

The Iranian Christians were to serve as a link between Yazdegerd I and the Byzantine Empire. The council, convened in Seleucia in 410, decided to unite the Persian and Byzantine Churches and reorganize the church hierarchy.<sup>216</sup> Such Sasanian policy towards the Christians in the early 5th century was bound to affect the position of the Albanian Church, because Albania was politically connected with Persia.<sup>217</sup>

Unfortunately for Yazdegerd I, his brilliant idea turned out to be not so brilliant. He was rapidly losing ground on both sides. The Zoroastrians, cruelly insulted, called him Yazdegerd the Sinner, and he is known in history by this name. They exerted relentless pressure on him, ominously flashing the killer's knife right into his eyes. He could have endured if he had been

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<sup>215</sup> Yazdegerd I (Persian: literally "God-made") was the shahanshah of Iran (399-421), son of Shapur III, and member of the Sasanian dynasty. He is described in the Persian Zoroastrian tradition as "the Sinner" and "the Outcast," allegedly for religious tolerance and confrontation with the clergy.

<sup>216</sup> Dyakonov M.M. *Ocherki istorii Drevnego Irana* [Essays on the History of Ancient Iran], Moscow, 1961. P. 271.

<sup>217</sup> Geyushev R.B. *Khristianstvo v Kavkazskoy Albanii* [Christianity in Caucasian Albania], Baku, 1984. P. 35.

confident in the support of the Christian clergy. They, however, were intoxicated with the wine of sudden freedom and, knowing that they had Rome's powerful backing behind them, proved completely irreconcilable. They made it increasingly clear that tolerance and even royal conversion to Christianity were not enough. Persia was to become completely Christian, while Zoroastrianism was to be completely eradicated.

Yazdegerd I, faced with religious totalitarianism on both sides, preferred the religion he knew and returned to the old customs. The Christians had been placed under the Zoroastrian yoke again by 416.

Elishe (a contemporary of the above), Ghazar Parpetsi,<sup>218</sup> and later Movses Kalankatuatsi have preserved vivid descriptions of the events from the second half of the 5th century, when Albania, Iberia, and Armenia jointly defended their independence.

Yazdegerd II<sup>219</sup> (439-457) was enthroned in Persia in 439 and became famous for his persistent and violent struggle against the peoples of Transcaucasia. Yazdegerd II was a devout Zoroastrian, and Christianity was once again driven underground.

Since Persia was threatened by the Chionites (Kushans) at that time, the preparation of a campaign against them required a lot of money and fell upon the Transcaucasian peoples. Yazdegerd II doubled their taxes and, in addition, decided to call the cavalry of the Albanians, Armenians, and Iberians to help him, thereby weakening the resistance of the Transcaucasian countries, bleeding them. Elishe cites the Sassanid's message to the peoples of Transcaucasia and states this: "Innocently unaware of the king's duplicity, they marched from each one's land obediently and with loyal intentions in order to fulfill their military service with sincere faith."<sup>220</sup> For the first time, the

Persian army was defeated by the Chionites. Yazdegerd II again began to recruit

<sup>218</sup> Ghazar Parpetsi was a 5th century Armenian historian and monk, who wrote the continuation of Faustus of Byzantium's history at the request of Prince Vahan Mamikonian. Based on the biographical data left by Ghazar Parpetsi in his work, he is known to have been born in the village of Parpi, in the Aragatsotn province, around 443. He is believed to have been related to the *nakhara* families Mamikonian, the rulers of the Tayk and Taron provinces, and Artsruni, the rulers of the Vaspurakan province. Parpetsi wrote the book *History of Armenia* in 490-495. He used the historical works of Agathangelos, Faustus of Byzantium, and Koriun as sources and borrowed a lot from the works of Movses Khorenatsi and Elishe. According to Movses Khorenatsi, he was a disciple of Mesrop Mashtots and wrote his main work at the request of Prince Sahak Bagratuni, who died in a battle with the Persians in 482. However, these statements are rejected by most serious scholars, largely due to anachronisms in Khorenatsi's texts.

<sup>219</sup> Yazdegerd II was the 15 th king of the Sasanian dynasty (439-457), a son of Bahram V.

<sup>220</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*. Translation and commentary by R.W. Thomson. Cambridge-London, 1982. Chapter 1. P. 65.

troops and increase taxes levied on the peoples of Transcaucasia, which naturally caused unrest in Albania. In order to protect Iran from the hostile actions of these countries, the Persians decided to bind them closer to themselves by imposing a shared Zoroastrian religion on their peoples. In 449, the Persian king Yazdegerd II issued a decree, ordering the Transcaucasian peoples to convert to Zoroastrianism and introducing cruel punishments for those who would persist in professing Christianity: "So that no one dares to call themselves a Christian," the decree says, "otherwise they will be judged by the sword, fire, and gallows."<sup>221</sup> The Albanian historian writes, "Albania received the strict command to abandon the Faith and submit to the Magian sect of fire-worshippers."<sup>222</sup> Following the announcement of the decree, the people rose in revolt. As a result, the Transcaucasian countries waged an ongoing guerrilla war with the Sassanids for thirty-five years (until 484).

Yazdegerd II commanded the Armenian, Albanian, and Iberian princes to come to him in Ctesiphon. The king ordered that "those who had come from Armenia, Iberia, and Aghbania/Aghuania be brought before him" and then threatened them: "But should you Armenians, Iberians and Aghbanians/Aghuans stubbornly persist, then I shall regard your great benefit and labor as nothing. Rather, I shall wipe you out, with your women, children, and *azg*."<sup>223</sup>

"Then all the *nakharars* who were from the three lands of Armenia, Iberia, and Aghbania/Aghuania assembled. They had doubts within themselves and took counsel to see by what stratagems and design they could find a way out of the situation."<sup>224</sup> The princes agreed that they should, for the benefit of their peoples, pretend to give the king consent and accept the teaching of magi.<sup>225</sup> So the princes and nobles of the three countries went to the "altar house"

<sup>221</sup> Quoted from: Guaita G. *1700 let vemosti. Istoriya Armenii i yeyo Tserkvi* [1700 Years of Loyalty. The History of Armenia and Its Church], Moscow, 2002. P. 84-85.

<sup>222</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 2, p. 65.

<sup>223</sup> Ghazar Parpetsi. *History of the Armenians*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. New York, 1985. Part 2, §26. P. 83-84.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, §27, p. 85.

bride's parents to be converted. The *nozud* initiation ceremony is performed by 3 *dasturs* in the presence of 9 *beh dins*. *Mobed* has the right to read all parts of the Avesta during the service and perform all rituals. The ranks of *mobeds* are determined by their role in the service by the sacred fire. *Mobed* is entitled to vote at the *mobed* assembly. The highest authority of the Zoroastrian priesthood is the Anjoman of the Magi of Iran. *Mobeds* are the guardians of sacred fires and must protect them, including with weapons in their hands.

and bowed to the fire. "Then were the *tanuters* and the *sepulhs* of the three lands of Armenia, Iberia, and Aghbania/Aghuania dressed and adorned in royal clothing. They were, moreover, all supplied with many and diverse sorts of gifts and honors," after which Yazdegerd II let them return to the motherland. Elishe writes that the king "gathered a large force of cavalry to escort them, and not a few magi; more than seven hundred teachers he sent with them, and over them he appointed a certain great prince as chief-magus."<sup>226</sup> Ghazar Parpetsi revisits these events as follows: "They had been given a multitude of false *vardapets*, called mages, and exhorted to study the ridiculous [Zoroastrian] teaching with its grumbled, mumbled words which resemble the rattling of snakes and the growling of stomachs. They were ordered to set up schools of deceit across the land, and to instruct everyone, men and women, in the teaching of the mages."<sup>227</sup> Having come to the places, "the brigades of mages hurriedly compelled [people] to carry the fire into the temple of the Lord's holiness, to build *atrushans* (altars for sacred fire – *A. N.*) in other renowned and attractive places."<sup>228</sup> Thus, before the Zoroastrian sanctuaries were built, the Christian churches had been turned into fire temples after removal of their proper shrines. All this certainly sparked the indignation of the population, despite the fact that Persian cavalry detachments had been added to the garrisons already stationed in the fortresses. At first, the population passively resisted the attempts to introduce a new faith into its milieu. Ghazar Parpetsi reports that "the *nakharars*" wives, whom the mages thought to instruct, were repulsed at their very sight. Furthermore, [the parents] constantly ordered the instructors [*dastiarakacn*] of their sons and daughters not to send them [to the mages]. The men who had pretended [conversion to Zoroastrianism], to let it appear that they had apostasized, did not allow these false *vardapets* to even eat bread in their presence."<sup>229</sup> The activity

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<sup>226</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 2, p. 102.

<sup>227</sup> Ghazar Parpetsi. *History of the Armenians*, Part 2, §28, p. 92.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 2, §29, p. 97.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, Part 2, §32, p. 104-105.

of the magi led to a popular uprising, which soon assumed such proportions that the fire servants, as yet unaffected, were eager to return to the homeland to keep their heads.

Elishe and Movses Kalankatuatsi report about the subsequent situation in Albania.

**The hazarapet of Albania arrived with the holy bishop of that country, and urgently exhorted the soldiers, saying:** *“The Persian army which was in the land of the Huns has returned and reached our land, and many more cavalry from the court have also arrived. In addition to all this, they have brought with them another three hundred magi as teachers; they have created discord in the country and have brought some over to themselves. They desire to lay hands on the church, and at the king’s command they put pressure on everyone, saying: “If you willingly accept his religion, you will receive gifts and honors from him and you will gain relief of taxes from the treasury.”*<sup>140</sup>

The magi seem to have faced opposition in Albania, for Elishe says that they “desired to lay hands on the church,” but apparently did not, trying to seduce the Christians with honors and gifts and, most importantly, with remission of duties. In the case of disobedience, they threatened to build fire temples (*atrushans*) in the villages and towns, appoint “magi and chief-magi as arbiters” for the entire country, punish those who resisted with death, and enslave their wives and children.

According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, “when the Armenian army heard this, they did not despair, but uniting in face of this bad news they humored [the Persian envoys] and sent them back so as to find an opportunity later to take them by cunning and to prevent them from laying hands on the church.”<sup>230 231</sup> The Albanians, Armenians, and Iberians decided to act together; they started negotiations with the Huns who promised to help the allies against a common enemy. They turned to the Byzantine emperor Theodosius II (408-450), but when he suddenly died, his successor Marcian (450-457) refused to support them. Meanwhile, the militia, which many *nakharars* had joined forces with, was smashing fortresses and castles with Persian garrisons stationed there. The Persians, not knowing about the secret treaty between the Albanians and the Armenians, included the former in their regiments and sent them against the Armenians. The Armenian troops, led by

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Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 3, p. 121.

241 Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 2, p. 66.

the commander Vardan, merged with the Albanians and gave battle to the Persians close to the borders of Iberia, opposite the town of Khalkhal (near present-day Qazakh — A. N.), which was the winter residence of the Albanian kings. The Albanian historian says: "Thus did every man deal with his opponent, and in the determined attack there were more drowned in the river than were slain by the sword on dry land, and the clear waters of the river (Kura — A. N.) ran with the blood of the hosts of fallen; and not one of them escaped."<sup>232</sup> This battle took place in 450.

The new Armenian catholicos Hovsep I Vayotsdzorts (Ogotsimtsi) (444- 451), disciple and successor of Sahak, gathered bishops and *nakharars* in Artashat. Together they made up a document that proclaimed the superiority of Christianity over Zoroastrianism; they declared their submission to the king, but categorically rejected any religious dictate: "From this faith no one can shake us, neither angels nor men, neither sword nor fire nor water, nor any kind of cruel torture."<sup>233</sup> "All these bishops and many chorepiscopi and honorable priests from many places, and the holy clergy of the church, with one accord and in unison, gathered in the capital city of Artashat, in concert with the greatest princes and all the people of the land, and wrote an answer to the letter."<sup>234</sup>

The events described led to the Battle of Avarayr,<sup>235</sup> fought by the army of Transcaucasian peoples under Vardan Mamikonian against the Persians in 451. There was also another revolt against the Persians in Albania six to eight years later. Yazdegerd II died in 457, and his two sons, Hormizd and Peroz, started to struggle for the throne; consequently, the Persians found it difficult to contain the growing resentment of the Albanian people against their oppressors. The uprising, inter alia, resulted in the Albanian king Vache II renouncing the Zoroastrianism that had been imposed upon him by Yazdegerd II. Moreover, as our historian says, the Albanian king Vache II "threw open the gates of Cholay and led in the forces of the Maskutk; he allied himself to the eleven mountain kings, opposed the Aryan army in battle and inflicted great losses upon the royal forces. Although Peroz sent him petitions a second and a third time, he was unable to persuade him."<sup>236</sup> In retaliation for the Albanian ruler's attack on Persia, the Persians summoned one of the hordes of the Khaylandurs, the Caucasian Huns (Hons), forced the Albanian gates,

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>233</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 2, p. 92.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>235</sup> The battle itself was preceded, according to Elishe, by the betrayal of the Syunik *marzpan* Vasak.

<sup>236</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 9.



rallied a large number of Huns, and with their help began a long struggle with the Albanians, forcing them to yield. This war devastated most of Albania and brought a lot of grief and severe suffering to the population, but it did not shake its courage in the struggle for independence. Realizing the hopelessness of the situation, Peroz<sup>237</sup> (459-484) made a request of King Vache: "Send my sister and my sister's child back to me, since they were originally Magians, and it was you who made them Christians; then your kingdom shall be yours."<sup>238</sup> These events took place in the early "60s of the 5th century.

According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, Vache II in his reign built a new city, Partaw (Perozapat),<sup>239</sup> by order of the Persian king Peroz. This city became a new capital of the Albanian Kingdom a century later.

However, contrary to Movses Kalankatuatsi's report of Partaw being founded in the 5th century and widespread belief<sup>240</sup> that the political center of Albania shifted to the right bank of the Kura at the end of the 5th century or even in the 6th century,<sup>241</sup> Dzhamfarov convincingly proves that the city of Partaw had already existed as the capital of the Albanian Kingdom by the early 5th century. After all,

**it was Partaw to which Mesrop Mashtots came and it was here that he helped to invent the original Aluanian script in the "20s of the 5th century... This, in turn, suggests that the political, economic, and cultural center of the Aluanian Kingdom was transferred from the foothills of the Greater Caucasus, from the former capital of Kabalaka (present-day Qabala) on the left-bank Kura to its right-bank part, to the Gargarean steppe, at least as early as the end of the 4th century (apparently in 387).<sup>242</sup>**

Thus, we can assume that the political, economic, and cultural center of Albania

<sup>237</sup> Peroz (Persian: "victorious") was the 17th king of the Sasanian dynasty (459-484), a senior son of Yazdegerd II. He ascended the throne after defeating his brother Hormizd III with the help of the Huns. He spent his entire reign in wars with the nomads and Huns. Peroz was extremely unsuccessful during wars with the Huns and died in a battle with them in 484.

<sup>238</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 10.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 25.

<sup>240</sup> Yeremian S.T. *Ekonomika i sotsialnyy stroy Albanii III-VII vv.* [The Economy and Social System of Albania in the 3rd-7th centuries], p. 327; Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 309.

<sup>241</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 126, 238, 250.

<sup>242</sup> Dzhamfarov Y.R. *Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost. K voprosu vozniknoveniya etnoya-zykovoy obshchnosti* [The Gargareans and the Aluanian Script: On the Occurrence of the Ethnolinguistic Unity], p. 48.

shifted to the right bank of the Kura, to the region of Gardman and Utik, for a number of reasons due to the new political situation prevailing after 387. Here arose Partaw, a new capital of Albania. But it does not seem possible to regard King Vache as its founder. Shah Peroz may have started to call the Albanian capital Perozapat in the official documents after suppressing the anti-Sasanian rebellions and carrying out reforms.

Dzhafarov rightly supposes that Partaw was founded at least several centuries before Shah Peroz, most likely under the Parthian rule. The etymology of Partaw (Arabic: *Barda*), as the researcher points out, is “sufficiently transparent and literally means *Parthia* or *Parthian*. Partaw could have originated from a small trading settlement, a factory center, through which important trade was conducted with the nomads of the North Caucasus and the Caspian region.”<sup>243</sup> A.P. Novoseltsev<sup>244</sup> has expressed the view that the South Kura regions were economically more developed, because their cities were even mentioned by Strabo, who did not know the cities in Albania.<sup>245</sup>

As for King Vache, according to the Albanian historian, he abandoned the royal throne and retired to his ancestral estate, devoting himself to ascetic practices:

**The blessed man was not fighting for his domains, however, but for his religion. He had his mother and his wife brought to him and then surrendered the whole country, while he himself took the Gospel and prepared to depart. When King Peroz heard of this, he repented and threw all the blame on his father; he set his seal to sincere promises and sent them to him, saying: “I shall do whatever you say, only do not depart from your country.” But he agreed to accept only his personal property, the thousand families (erd) he had received from his father; these he accepted from the king and dwelt within them in the company of monks. Thus did he live free from care in the paths of God, forgetting that he had ever been**

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<sup>243</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost [The Gargareans and the Aluanian Script], p. 48.

<sup>244</sup> Novoseltsev A.P. K voprosu o politicheskoy granitse Armenii i Kavkazskoy Albanii v an- tichny period [On the Political Border of Armenia and Caucasian Albania in the Antiquity], *K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia], Yerevan, 1991. P. 15.

<sup>245</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*, Book XI, Chapter VII, § 1, p. 249; the question of Albanian cities is now solved based on archaeological evidence. See Khalilov D.A., Babayev I.A. O gorodakh drevney Kavkazskoy Albanii [On the Cities of Ancient Caucasian Albania]. *Sovetskaya Arkheologiya* [The Soviet Archaeology], No. 4. Moscow, 1974. P. 98-100.

king.<sup>246</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi specifies that the royal throne of Caucasian Albania remained vacant for 30 years after King Vache stepped down from ruling.<sup>247</sup>

Modern researchers believe that the Persian royal court violently suppressed the anti-Persian riots in Transcaucasia in the '50s to '60s of the 5th century, which ultimately brought down the government of the Albanian king Vache II in 461. By right of the owner, the Persian king Peroz also annexed the Caspian regions to the *marzpanate* of Albania.<sup>248</sup>

The situation existing during the reign of Peroz was vividly characterized two centuries later by Sebeos<sup>249</sup> (7th century), who wrote this: "In the years of Peroz king of Persia there took place a suppression of all the privileges and rituals and usages of Christianity. Such severe tribulation of persecution and contempt assailed the princes, so that they cast off from themselves the yoke of servitude."<sup>250</sup>

Balash<sup>251</sup> (484-488), who ascended the throne in Persia after Peroz, "found nothing in the Persian treasury, and his land was laid waste and depopulated."<sup>252</sup> The difficult political and economic conditions in Iran forced Peroz's successor on the Persian throne, Balash, to conclude the Treaty of Nvarsak with the peoples of Transcaucasia in 484 and make significant concessions, which included restoring the privileges of the Albanian nobility and declaring freedom of religion.<sup>253</sup> The

<sup>246</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 10.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 16, p. 25.

<sup>248</sup> For more details see Vardanian A.M. The Formation of the Marzpanate of Aluan (in Armenian). *Herald of Social Sciences*, No. 1-2 (627-628). Yerevan, 2010. P. 101-106.

<sup>249</sup> Sebeos was a 7th century Armenian historian, who participated in the Council of Dvin in 645 and wrote the *History of Emperor Heraclius*, chronicling the reign of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (610-641). The narrative continues until 661.

<sup>250</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*. Translated, with notes, by R.W. Thomson. Liverpool, 1999. Chapter 8. P. 3-4.

<sup>251</sup> Balash (Vhalohj) was the king of Persia from 484 to 488, the eighteenth one in the Sasanian dynasty. He was the brother and successor of Peroz, who fell in the war with the Hephthalites. Balash managed to organize effective resistance to the Hephthalites, forcing them into peace negotiations, and invaded Armenia. The peace with Armenia reduced it to a Persian province, in which Zoroastrianism was severely repressed and the rights of Christians were supported. Throughout his reign, Balash was heavily dependent on the Sakastan ruler Zarmihr and the Ray governor Mihran, who held the real power. When Zarekh, son of Peroz, rebelled, Balash put down the revolt and executed his nephew. He could not, however, stand against the second conspiracy, led by his second nephew, Kavad I. Balash was deposed, blinded, and soon died.

<sup>252</sup> Joshua the Stylite. *The Chronicle*. With a translation into English and notes by W. Wright. Cambridge, 1882. Chapter XVIII. P. 12.

<sup>253</sup> *Istoriya SSSR s drevneyshikh vremen do obrazovaniya drevnerusskogo gosudarstva* [The History of the USSR from Ancient Times to the Formation of the Old Russian State]. Parts 3-4. Moscow-

Sassanids agreed not to impose Zoroastrianism upon the Christians, whereas the Christians pledged not to convert fire worshippers to their faith.<sup>254</sup>

With the consent of King Balash, the Albanian *nakhars* called Vache's nephew Vachagan III (son of his brother Yazdegerd), nicknamed the Pious, to the throne of Albania. Our historian describes Vachagan as follows: "He was most virtuous and brought prosperity to his country; he was peace-loving and master of all the lands in his kingdom which the wicked Peroz had wrested out of his authority and whose native princes, to each of whom Vachagan now restored his authority, he had suppressed."<sup>255</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi dedicates one third of Book 1 of the *History of Albania*, i.e. ten chapters (from 17 to 26), to the Albanian king Vachagan III. His educational, missionary, ecclesiastical, and political activities will be given an entire section further on.

The Albanian historian ends the final Chapters 29 and 30 by documenting the invasion of the northern tribes Rosmosoks<sup>256</sup> and Huns into Albania. It should be noted that Movses Kalankatuatsi devotes these chapters mainly to the reports of Christian martyrs and mentions the invasion only as historical context: "At that time the king of Rosmosok (Meshech) together with his army and the Tubal regiment assembled all the forces of the Honk, crossed to this side of the River Kur, spread into the province of Uti, and encamped near the town of Khalkhal ... He commanded them to divide into three groups and to attack the lands of Albania, Armenia, and Georgia."<sup>257</sup>

Treuer holds that the events described by the historian occurred at the beginning of the 6th century, namely in 531, when a large invasion of North Caucasian peoples took place in the countries of Transcaucasia.<sup>258</sup> But since Mashtots' disciples are mentioned in the text (which will be discussed in more detail in the next section), this fact indicates that the events happened right in the middle of

Leningrad, 1939. P. 120.

<sup>254</sup> Treuer K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 201-216.

<sup>255</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 17, p. 27.

<sup>256</sup> The ethnic terms *Rosmosoks* and *Tubals*, encountered only in this text, cannot be properly interpreted. It seems most likely that they were tribal names and that the raid in question was organized and led by these little-known tribes, which had allied with the Huns (Hons) for the given campaign.

<sup>257</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 29, p. 56-57.

<sup>258</sup> Treuer K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 226.

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the 5th century, especially as the sources are practically silent on Albania during this period. Dzhaferov<sup>259</sup> agrees with this opinion, placing the event around 466.

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<sup>259</sup> Dzhaferov Y.R. *Gunny i Azerbaydzhan* [The Huns and Azerbaijan], p. 52.

### 1.3. THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN ALBANIA AND ITS ESTABLISHMENT AS THE OFFICIAL RELIGION

#### 1.3.1. *The Initial Religion of Caucasian Albanians*

Before presenting the historical data on the Christianization of Albanian tribes, we deem it right to follow Movses Kalankatuatsi and show the religious situation against which the seeds of Christian evangelism were sown in the Caucasus.

In the earliest times, the Albanian tribes, like the inhabitants of Urartu and most ancient peoples, were mainly animists. In other words, they worshipped nature, its main elements and phenomena, such as the sun, stars, moon, fire, wind, water, or trees. The origins of the pagan religion of the Caucasian Albanians, apparently, should be sought in the cults of ancient Babylon. Indeed, we find the first historical mentions of the Albanians in the 4th century BCE, when the region was dominated by the Persian Empire, successor of the Chaldean Empire.

Astronomy was one of the most important sources of knowledge among the ancient Babylonians. It was considered a specialty of Babylonian scientists during the heyday of the empire. The Babylonian custom of naming planets after gods was also adopted by other peoples. For instance, the Babylonians referred to the combination of evening and morning stars as Ishtar<sup>270</sup> (a suitable name for the brightest of all planets). The Romans called it Venus, just like we do today. Venus is visible only in the evening and in the morning, but another planet, almost as bright, can be seen all night. It seemed natural to name it after the chief god. The Babylonians dubbed it Marduk (it was called Zeus by the Greeks, and Jupiter by the Romans and us). Likewise, the blood- red planet, calling to mind war, was named by the Babylonians after the god of war, Nergal (it was called Ares by the Greeks, and Mars by the Romans and us). Babylon was a commercial and cultural center in the Middle East for a long time, therefore its ideological influence is likely to have reached the South Caucasus, which means that the same Babylonian beliefs could have hypothetically spread among the tribes of Caucasian Albania. This is

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<sup>270</sup> Ishtar was the central female deity of the Akkadian mythology: the goddess of fertility and bodily love, war and strife, an astral deity; sometimes she had androgynous features.

attested by Strabo, who says that the Albanians “honor Helius,<sup>261</sup> Zeus,<sup>262</sup> and Selene,<sup>263</sup> but especially Selene,”<sup>264</sup> i.e. the sun, the sky, and the moon. The Greek historian names the local deities after the Greek gods. These deities were especially revered not only in the Caucasus, but also in Near and Central Asia: Mihr, Aramazd, and Anahit. This somewhat modified perspective on the ancient Chaldean gods reflects the impact of the new religious system developed by the Persians and adds to it.

Mihr (Pahlavi: *Mihr* “Mithra”) was the god of the sun, heavenly light, and justice in Persian mythology. Mihr, who was widely venerated in Albania and throughout the Caucasus in pre-Christian times, could have spread under the influence of the Achaemenid Empire, which brought the traditions of Zoroastrianism to the region.<sup>265</sup>

Aramazd was the supreme god in the Armenian pantheon, creator of heaven and earth, god of fertility, and father of the gods.<sup>266</sup> His name is derived from the Persian creator deity Ahura Mazda (Hormizd).

Anahit was a mother goddess, the protectress of the earth, water, vegetation, wildlife, and female fertility, daughter (or wife) of Aramazd in Caucasian mythology. Anahit was also considered one of the most revered goddesses in the ancient Armenian state and the patroness of Armenian kings. Therefore, the Armenian king Tiridates I extolled the “great lady Anahit,” calling her “the glory of our race and our savior,... mother of all virtues, benefactor of all human nature, and the offspring of the great and noble Aramazd.”<sup>267</sup> There were golden statues of Anahit in the temples all over the Caucasus.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Helios (Greek: *HXioq* or *HeXioq*, sometimes *Eelios* “sun”) was a solar deity, son of the titan Hyperion (hence his nickname *Hyperionides*) and Theia (or son of Hyperion and Euryphaessa), and brother of Selene and Eos in ancient Greek mythology.

<sup>262</sup> Zeus (Greek: *Zevq*) was the god of the sky, thunder, and lightning, who ruled over the whole world in ancient Greek mythology.

<sup>263</sup> Selene (Greek: *SeXtjvij*) was one of the deities in Greek mythology, also known as Mena (Mene). She was the daughter of Hyperion and Theia, sister of Helios and Eos, and goddess of the moon.

<sup>264</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*, Book XI, Chapter IV, §7, p. 229.

<sup>265</sup> Redgate A.E. *The Armenians*. Oxford, 1998. P. 61.

<sup>266</sup> Mercatante A.S., Dow J.R. *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend*. New York, 2009. P. 68.

<sup>267</sup> Agathangelos. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 3, §53, p. 65.

<sup>268</sup> In Armenia, Anahit (Anaitis) was first considered the patroness of its capital Artashat and then the whole country. She was glorified as the great mother goddess, protectress and benefactress. The harvest festival, which was held during the celebration of Navasard (New Year) (on August 15), began with celebrations in her honor. During these festivities, thousands of pilgrims (many of whom hoped for healing) gathered at the temples of the goddess. The celebrations were accompanied by chants, dances, sporting competitions, and feasts.

White bulls with gilded horns, whose numerous herds grazed on pastures near the temples of

A similar situation was observed in neighboring Georgia. The inhabitants of Kartli also deified and honored the natural forces and phenomena. Distinct communities and clans, mountains, gorges, fields, trees, houses, etc. had their “shared” gods. Furthermore, ethnographic materials indicate that the Georgians also had common great (or major) gods, as well as tribal and intertribal deities.<sup>269</sup> Historians consider it an established fact that the Georgian astral pantheon was headed by a triad (*sameuli*) in ancient times. The supreme god, or god of order, was the first one (the senior god) in *sameuli*, identified with the Moon; Morige (later Arma-Armazi<sup>270</sup>), the goddess of the Sun, Mzekali, was the second one; Kviria was the third one.

One cannot ignore the parallels in the names of Caucasian gods: Kartlian Armazi, Albanian Armazd, and Persian Ahura Mazda.

According to Strabo, there were special sacred temple areas in the Caucasus, characteristic of both Albania and Iberia, as well as Armenia and Asia Minor. Describing this priestly area, Strabo reports: “...the office of priest is held by the man who, after the king, is held in highest honor; he has charge of the sacred land, which is extensive and well populated, and also of the temple slaves, many of whom are subject to religious frenzy and utter prophecies.”<sup>271</sup> Based on the data provided by Strabo, it can be concluded that there were several special areas called “sacred” in the Caucasian countries, with the main temple being dedicated to a particularly venerated deity. The high priest, who managed the area, was the second most powerful man in the country after the king and commanded not only the lands, but also the hierodules (temple people)<sup>272</sup> and those “subject to religious frenzy,” according to Strabo, i.e. prophets possessed by the spirits.

Movses Kalankatuatsi says that there were “divers forms of sacrificial service to the worship of unclean idols,” as well as “witches, sorcerers, hea-

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Anahit, were sacrificed to the Great Lady. The 19th day of each month was named after her.

<sup>269</sup> *Istoriya Gruzii* [The History of Georgia]. Edited by S.N. Dzhnashia. Tbilisi, 1946. P. 95.

reio The researchers link the name of Armazi, the supreme deity of the Georgian pantheon, to the Hittite names of the moon and Moon god Arma, seeing this as the influence of the Hittite-Anatolian world (Boltunova А.И. К вопросу об Армazi [On the Issue of Armazi], *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], No. 2. Moscow, 1949. P. 237.

<sup>271</sup> Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*, Book XI, Chapter IV, §7, p. 229.

<sup>272</sup> Manandian Y.A. Problema obshchestvennogo stroya doarshakidskoy Armenii [The Problem of Social System in pre-Arsacid Armenia], *Istoricheskiye zapiski* [The Historical Notes], No. 15. Yerevan, 1945. P. 7.



then priests, finger-cutters, and poisoners" in Artsakh. "The divers sects of wicked Satan ... oppressed the unfortunate people of Albania," he writes.<sup>273</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi specifically mentions the sect of "finger-cutters" in Chapter 18 of Book One. He describes how the Albanian king Vachagan

**began to investigate the wicked sect of finger-cutters [and poisoners], for both are murderous sects ... For a long time, ever since Vache had learned of their wickedness in Albania, other kings had either been unable to capture them or had remained indifferent. The accursed and wicked Persian marzpan** often caught them, however, but they released them again in exchange for bribes.

**But one day, when they were performing the evil act of finger-cutting in a cave in a wood on the banks of the river Kur and had bound a boy to four sticks by his thumbs and big toes and were flaying him alive ...**

**When the king heard this, ... [he] ordered the arrest of the men who had been seen committing the murder and many other men who were known by repute, but when they put them to the test with many heatings and cruel tortures, ... [the king] ordered them to be taken to the scene of the murder. First of all, he commanded one of them who was younger than the rest to be released, and to him he solemnly swore as follows: "I shall not command you to be put to death if you confess and truthfully reveal to us the details of this devil-worship." And falling on his face, the young man began to divulge the secrets of the evil sect: "The devil appears in human form and orders three ceremonies to be held, each one comprising three men; these are not to be wounded or slain, but while still alive are each to have the skin and thumb of the right hand removed and drawn with the skin over the chest to the little finger of the left hand; the little finger is then to be cut and broken off inside [the skin]. The same is to be done to the feet while the victim is still alive, and then he is to be slain and flayed, arranged and placed in a basket.**

*When the time appointed for the wicked service arrives, a folding iron chair is set up, the feet of which are in the shape of human feet, and which many of us saw brought there. A valuable garment is placed upon the chair, and when the devil comes, he dons this garment, sits on the chair, and taking a weapon, he examines the skin of the man together with the fingers. If one is unable to acquire the stipulated [victim], he orders the bark to be stripped from a tree and an ox or a sheep to be offered to him, and he eats and drinks with the evil congregation. A saddled and harnessed horse is held ready, and mounting the horse, he gallops it to a standstill; then he becomes invisible and*

*disappears. This he repeats every year.*"<sup>2\*\*</sup>

Numerous studies conducted by the Azerbaijani archaeologist R.B. Gey-ushev have confirmed the statements of ancient authors that, before the adoption of Christianity, the Caucasian peoples "worshipped the elements and various phenomena of nature such as lightning, heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars), and daevas,<sup>274 275</sup> i.e. everything frightening and incomprehensible to them."<sup>276</sup> It turns out that the polytheistic cults associated with worshipping the forces of nature — sun, heavenly bodies, fire, sky, water, and earth — were widespread among the local population.<sup>277</sup>

Under the sway of various Persian dynasties, pre-Christian Albania could not but feel the influence of Mazdeism (or Zoroastrianism), the religion of ancient Iran. The local rulers of Persian or Parthian origin are believed to have reconciled the cult of local deities with Zoroastrianism.

### 1.3.2. *The Jewish Communities of Caucasian Albania at the Turn of the 1st Century*

It is not entirely fair to say that the first Christian sermon in Caucasian Albania was addressed to the local highlanders. As happened almost everywhere, apostles, the disciples of Christ, were primarily sent to proclaim the

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 18, p. 30-31.

<sup>275</sup> Daevas, devas (Avestan: *daeuaa*, *daaua*, *daeva*) are evil spirits in Persian mythology. The mythological image of daevas is common in the folklore of peoples of the Caucasus, Asia Minor, Central Asia, Western Siberia, and other regions, and mainly shows them as anthropomorphic or zoomorphic giants (for example, in Caucasian mythology). They are big, strong, stupid and depicted with small horns. The fairy tales describe how they abducted women to live together. In Indian mythology, on the contrary, *daevas* are gods or demigods, which is largely explained by the collapse of the Indo-Iranian community (See Snasarev G.P. *Relikty domusulmanskikh verovany i obryadov u uzbekov Khorezma* [The Relics of Pre-Muslim Beliefs and Rituals among the Uzbeks of Khorezm]. Moscow, 1969).

<sup>276</sup> Geyushev R.B. *Khristianstvo v Albanii* [Christianity in Albania], Abstract of the Doctoral Thesis in History. Tbilisi, 1976. P. 15.

<sup>277</sup> Petrushevsky I.P. *O dokhristianskikh verovaniyakh krestyan Nagomogo Karabakha* [On the Pre-Christian Beliefs of Nagorno-Karabakh Peasants]. Baku, 1930. P. 16-24; Yampo- lsky Z.I. *Drevnyaya Albaniya v III-I vv. do n. e.* [Ancient Albania in the 3rd-1st Centuries BCE], p. 40-41; Yampolsky Z.I. *Drevniye religii v Azerbaydzhanе* [Ancient Religions in Azerbaijan], p. 17-19.

coming of the Messiah to those who were already waiting, i.e. to their fellow tribesmen. The Church historian V.V. Bolotov<sup>278</sup> wrote this:

**One of the most important means of verifying different legends about the preaching of apostles is to compare them with what the canonical books of the New Testament say about apostolic preaching. We see from the Holy Scripture that apostolic preaching outside of Palestine was directed to places where the Jewish diaspora lived. Paul the Apostle, who was mainly the apostle of tongues, chose the prayer houses of the Jews to deliver his sermon and spoke to them in the first place as the most receptive listeners. It is more than likely that other apostles practiced the same method in Christian evangelism. Therefore, those accounts in which the apostles appear to have acted in Jewish settlements should be treated with confidence.**<sup>279</sup>

The biblical information supported by research suggests that a large Jewish diaspora settled throughout the Caucasus since the earliest times. This issue used to be specifically studied by Petr Uslar.<sup>280</sup>

It is evident that the current settlement of the Jews around the world was preceded by several forcible deportations from Palestine of an entire people or most of it by Asian conquerors. Such deportations or, in the language of the Bible, “captivities” occurred repeatedly and were related to the special policy of the Assyrian Empire.

In the mid-8th century BCE, the talented ruler Tiglath-Pileser III (745- 727)<sup>281</sup> put the Assyrian crown on his head. He created a new Assyrian policy of dealing with defeated countries. The old system of endless terror was discarded. Tiglath-Pileser III established a subtler practice instead. He captured the leaders of the nation,

<sup>278</sup> Vasily Vasilyevich Bolotov (1853-1854) was a Russian orientalist and church historian. He was the corresponding member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (1893) and Doctor of Church History (1896).

<sup>279</sup> Bolotov V.V. *Leksii po istorii Drevney Tserkvi* [Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church], Minsk, 2008. Vol. 2. P. 394.

<sup>280</sup> Uslar Petr Karlovich (1816-1875) was a Russian military engineer, linguist, and ethnographer. He was one of the largest researchers of the Caucasus in the 19th century (See Uslar P.K. *Nachalo khristianstva v Zakavkazye i na Kavkaze* [The Beginning of Christianity in Transcaucasia and the Caucasus], *Sbornik svedeny o kavkazskikh gortsakh* [A Collection of Information on the Caucasian Highlanders]. Vol. II. Tiflis, 1869; Moscow, 1992).

<sup>281</sup> Tiglath-Pileser III (Assyrian: *Tukulti-apil-Esharra*, Biblical: *Tiglat Pileser*) was the king of Assyria, who ruled approximately in 745-727 BCE. Tiglath-Pileser was not only an outstanding administrator, but also a brilliant commander and a realistic politician. He reduced the Kingdom of Israel to Samaria only, conquered the whole north, and took away part of the population as captives (2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chr 5:26).

relocated them to remote areas of his kingdom, and replaced them with people from other areas.

There was a tricky psychological background to this. It was believed in ancient times that every god was connected to the land and that any god could be truly worshipped only in one specific place. And, accordingly, if people were expelled from their country, they were evicted from the homeland of their gods. They were driven to a new land, where they were bereft not only of their languages and customs but of their old gods. The exiles had to feel their sense of identity fade as their national sentiments were crushed. It finally resulted in the general weakening of the empire's non-Assyrian regions, to the gain of the Assyrian ruling party.

The Bible says that Tiglath-Pileser III took the Jewish tribes of Reuben and Gad captive, while King Sargon II<sup>282</sup> (722-705 BCE) seized Samaria in 721/722 BCE.<sup>283</sup> When Samaria fell, they turned to the policy of deportations initiated by Tiglath-Pileser III. In fact, it was the most famous example of this policy. The Israeli chiefs expelled from the country represented the Ten Lost Tribes. They were never found again, though reported in one location or another by various legends for many centuries. They may have simply assimilated, their descendants losing any memory of their national identity.

In the early 6th century BCE, a new power appeared on the Middle Eastern map, the Chaldean Empire (sometimes called the Neo-Babylonian Empire). This state was ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar<sup>284</sup> (606-562 BCE). Nebuchadnezzar focused his military efforts mainly on the south, where an independent Egypt caused all sorts of troubles. The Egyptian intrigue kept little Judea at loggerheads with Nebuchadnezzar, despite the pro-Babylonian activity of the Israeli prophet Jeremiah. Twice Judea tried to rebel, and twice Nebuchadnezzar reacted vigorously. Both times he besieged Jerusalem and forced Judea to submit. The first time, in 598, he removed some chiefs, continuing the Assyrian policy of deportations, but left Judea a king, a temple, and self-government.

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<sup>282</sup> Sharrukin II or Sargon II (Akkadian: 5AR.RU.KI.IN "the faithful king") was the king of Assyria, who ruled approximately in 722-705 BCE, the younger son of Tiglath-Pileser III. Sargon II ascended the throne after the death of his elder brother Shalmaneser V in 722 BCE and was determined to return Assyria to its past glory. Many clay documents about the reign of Sargon II have been preserved. In 722-719, Sargon II led a military campaign in the west, in Syria and Palestine, cleared the trade routes to Asia Minor that were strategically important for Assyria, and moved hostilities to the north starting from 718 BCE.

<sup>283</sup> The Bible never mentions Sargon II as the conqueror of Samaria; this honor is given to Shalmaneser V.

<sup>284</sup> Nebuchadnezzar II (Akkadian: *Nabu-kudurri-usur*, literally "Nabu, watch over my heir"; c. 634-562 BCE) was the king of the New Babylonian Kingdom, who ruled from 605. He came from Neo-Babylonian (Chaldean) Dynasty X. He was the son of Nabopolassar.

The second time, in 587, he completely lost patience and destroyed Jerusalem and its Temple. The dynasty of David, which reigned in Jerusalem for almost four hundred years, was interrupted, and a large number of prominent citizens were taken into exile to Babylonia. The reign of Nebuchadnezzar was the most remarkable period in the life of the Jewish people, in fact, a turning point in their history. At first glance, it may seem that the death of independence, monarchy, the capital, and the Temple should have meant the complete and absolute end of the Jewish history. Still, the Jews survived. This was partly due to Babylonia's cosmopolitan atmosphere and religious tolerance. The Jews were not oppressed in exile. They could buy land, do business, even get rich. Indeed, when some of them were preparing to return to Jerusalem over time, those who remained were wealthy enough to help them significantly: "All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts ..." (Ezra 1:6)

Further, the Jews fully preserved their religious freedom.<sup>285</sup> No attempt was made to force them into worshipping Marduk.<sup>286</sup>

After conquering the Babylonian-Assyrian Kingdom, the Persian king Kurush (559-530), better known to us by his Greek name Cyrus, allowed the Jewish captives scattered throughout the vast Persian monarchy to return to the country of their fathers in 536 BCE. The new invader gained immortal honor to himself by a simple act of kindness. He permitted the exiles in Babylon to return to their homeland. Yet, only a small part of Babylonian Jewry returned to Jerusalem. Most of them stayed in the region, which they now considered their home and in which they lived comfortably. The Jewish colony in Mesopotamia remained an important center of Jewish learning for fifteen centuries after Cyrus.

The Bible does not mention any further returns of the Jews to Palestine, and there are no reasons to believe that such returns were repeated, at least on a large scale.

According to Uslar,<sup>287</sup> this suggests that some Jewish people did not return from captivity at all, except for those settled near Palestine during their captivity. The Jews

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<sup>285</sup> The biblical book of the prophet Daniel certainly includes stories about Nebuchadnezzar's persecution of Daniel himself and three youths with him, but the Book of Daniel was written four centuries after the Babylonian captivity at a time when the Jews were persecuted by the Hellenistic king Antiochus IV. The Book of Daniel, which covered the previous persecution, was intended to strengthen the spirit of the Jews to resist Antiochus. We still tend to consider Babylon a particularly vicious city because of various biblical associations, but this is completely unfair, for it was no more vicious than any large city.

<sup>286</sup> Marduk (Akkadian: MAR. *DUK* "son of the clear sky") was the supreme deity of the Babylonian pantheon, major god of Mesopotamia, and patron deity of the city of Babylon in Sumerian-Akkadian mythology.

<sup>287</sup> Uslar P.K. Op. Cit.

taken prisoner managed to grow closer to their new motherland for two or three centuries. Of course, persecution for the faith of the fathers could have stirred their desire to return to Palestine at any cost, but the Achaemenid dynasty (from Cyrus to Darius) was marked by general religious tolerance.

Incidentally, the Georgian sources also point to the resettlement of the Jews to the Caucasus in the 4th century BCE. The first such information has reached us through Leonti Mroveli's work (11th century): "After the passing of much time, King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem. The Hebrews who fled from there came to Kartli; they asked the *mamasakhlisi* of Mtskheteta to allot them some land and to place them under tribute (*kharki*). The *mamasakhlisi* complied with their request and settled them in the gorge of the river Aragvi by the spring, which is called Zanavi."<sup>288</sup>

The 18th century Georgian historian Vakhushti Batonishvili describes the same event as follows: "Then came the Jews expelled by Nebuchadnezzar again, and the *mamasakhlisi* of Mtskheta also settled them in Kherki, north of the Aragvi."<sup>289</sup>

E. Mamistvalishvili further explores the reports of resettlement of the Jews to the Caucasus in his study<sup>290</sup> on the topic.

The list of some countries of Jewish settlement can be found in the Bible (1 Chronicles 5:26; 2 Kings 17:6; Obadiah 20). Uslar quotes some researchers of biblical geography in his work to clarify the places of settlement of the Jewish diaspora mentioned in the Holy Scripture:

**The Gozan River is present-day Kizil-Ozen, i.e. the Ozen River, flowing into the southern end of the Caspian Sea near Rasht. The ruins of the city of Rages in Media, in which Tobit's debtor Gabael lived, are located near Tehran. Gala,<sup>291</sup> the land of the Gelae, present-day Gilan, is also on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Gabor<sup>292</sup> (Avor, Iovor) appears to be Iberia, although this similarity is doubtful. The Hebrew form of the name of the Jews themselves is Eber, which is very close to Iber, as the Georgians were called in Antiquity, although they do not know this name themselves. Arran is the ancient name of Karabakh. The confines of Media stretched to the very foot of the Caucasus Mountains, as is proved by an ancient legend about the Caucasus preserved for us in excerpts from Hecataeus of Miletus.<sup>293</sup> In addition, there is also a**

<sup>288</sup> Kartlis Tskhovreba. *A History of Georgia*. Tbilisi, 2014. P. 19.

<sup>289</sup> Batonishvili Vakhushti. *The History of the Kingdom of Georgia*. Prepared for publication by S.G. Kaukhchishvili. Tbilisi, 1973 (in Georgian).

<sup>290</sup> Mamistvalishvili E. *The History of Georgian Jews (from Antiquity to 1921)*. Tbilisi, 2011.

<sup>291</sup> Halah in the Russian Synodal Bible.

<sup>292</sup> Habor in the Russian Synodal Bible.

<sup>293</sup> Hecataeus of Miletus (born c. 490 BCE) was an ancient Greek historian and geographer, one of

**story of the historian Abydenus,<sup>294</sup> transmitted to us by Eusebius,<sup>295</sup> that King Nebuchadnezzar settled the captives near the right side of the Pontus Euxinus.<sup>296</sup> If you look at the Pontus Euxinus from the south, the right bank will be the Caucasian one.<sup>297</sup>**

Some comparisons may obviously give rise to doubts, but nevertheless it is impossible not to draw a general conclusion from the above that a considerable part of the Jewish population in ancient times was settled in the area from the southwestern coast of the Caspian Sea to the southeastern shore of the Black Sea.

There are historical accounts that the Armenian king Tigranes II (95-55 BC) repeatedly removed the Jews from Palestine in large colonies and settled them in Armenia. It is hard to imagine to what extent such Jewish migration to the Caucasus may have been plausible shortly before the Birth of Christ, but we will confine ourselves to the conclusion that a very significant number of Jews had already existed in the Caucasus by the time of the apostolic sermon.<sup>298</sup>

Jerusalem was captured by the future Roman emperor Titus Flavius in 70 CE, leading to another wave of Jewish migrations.

The Jewish resettlers could have also fled to Caucasian Albania, as borne out by facts: the largest number of Jews in the Caucasus lived in Im-ereti (Georgia), southern Dagestan, and northern regions of Azerbaijan in the 19th century. There is a legend among the mountain Jews inhabiting this region that their ancestors left Palestine before the Christian era.<sup>299</sup>

Some studies on Azerbaijan's mountainous Jews say that the modern Jews and Tats descend from the ancient Jews, who migrated to the Caucasus under the Achaemenids, and belong to the Tribes of Judah, Levi, and partly Benjamin.<sup>300</sup>

And while the Jewish diaspora in the Caucasus noticeably increased after the capture of Jerusalem in 70, it can be assumed that "many newcomers from Palestine

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the closest predecessors and literary sources of Herodotus.

<sup>294</sup> Abydenus was a 2nd-3rd century Greek historian, who wrote works about ancient Assyria and Babylonia. He is mentioned in the Church History by Eusebius of Caesarea.

<sup>295</sup> Meaning Eusebius of Caesarea, the Father of Church History.

<sup>296</sup> The Pontus Euxinus is the name of the Black Sea in Ancient Greek.

<sup>297</sup> Uslar P.K. Op. Cit.

<sup>298</sup> Faustus of Byzantium reports that there were 5,000 Armenian households and 8,000 Jewish households in the Armenian city of Zarehavan, 30,000 Jewish households in the city of Eruandashat, 16,000 Jewish households in Nakhchivan, etc. Of course, these figures relate to the 4th century CE, but such a large number of Jews in the Caucasus indicates that they settled there a long time ago.

<sup>299</sup> Bekker M. *Evrei Azerbaydzhana: istoriya i sovremennost* [The Jews of Azerbaijan: Past and Present]. Baku, 2000. P. 16.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

were living witnesses of the Savior's life and all events in the Holy Land. They had witnessed people follow the Christ and listen to His sermons, seen the signs performed by Him, mourned His crucifixion, rejoiced at the Resurrection ... The Caucasian diaspora could not have remained indifferent."<sup>301</sup>

Writing the history of the Caucasian Jews, evidencing their stay in the region during the Antiquity, is a difficult task, since we have no indisputable written records of certain periods and must judge them on the basis of assumptions and indirect arguments. Nevertheless, in view of the above, it can be rightly stated that the early spread of Christianity in the Caucasus became possible due to the participation of the Jewish population.

### 1.3.3. Apostolic Father Eliseus<sup>302</sup>

Relying on the data provided by the Roman historian Tacitus<sup>303</sup> (55/56-117/120), we may infer that the political situation in Caucasian Albania was quite calm in the first years of the 1st century CE and that the peoples of the South Caucasus were sufficiently independent in the last years of the reign of Emperor Octavian Augustus (29-14), having made a merely nominal submission to Rome. As a matter of fact, the Monumentum Ancyranum,<sup>304</sup> which constitutes a sort of final account of Augustus' deeds compiled by him at the end of his life, says: "Nostram amicitiam appetiverunt per legatus... et ultra reges albanorum qve rex et hebirorum et medorum" ("And the kings of the Albanians and the Iberians and the

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<sup>301</sup> Ibragimov G.H. Khristianstvo u tsakhurov [Christianity among the Tsakhurs], *Alfa i Omega* [Alpha and Omega], No. 1 (19). Moscow, 1999. P. 171-172.

<sup>302</sup> Nikonorov Alexy, hegumen. Apostol Elisha's Activities in Caucasian Albania. *Collection of Research Papers of the Yakutsk Theological Seminary*, No. 9-10, Yakutsk, 2021. P. 65-76.

<sup>303</sup> Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus was an ancient Roman historian (c. 56-117). He was presumably born in southern Gaul, in a noble family. He received education and then entered civil service, consistently holding, in particular, the posts of quaestor, praetor, and consul. During the period from 98 to 116, he wrote two of his main works, *Histories (Historiae)* (of 14 books covering the period from 69 to 96, only Books I-IV and part of Book V have survived) and *Annals (Annalium ab excessu divi Augusti)* (of 16 books covering the period from 14 to 68, only Books I-IV and part of Books V, VI, XI, and XVI have survived).

<sup>304</sup> The *Monumentum Ancyranum* was a political testament of Emperor Octavian Augustus. According to Suetonius and Dion Cassius, after the death of Augustus his successor Tiberius uncovered various documents, including a scroll, which Augustus "wanted to be engraved on copper tables and placed in front of his mausoleum." One of the copies of this will was found at the site of the ancient city of Ancyra (modern-day Ankara in Turkey). It was carved on the wall of the Temple of Augustus and Rome and has survived relatively well. A replica of this inscription was placed at the foundation of the modern sarcophagus enclosing the Altar of Peace (Ara Pacis) in Rome.



Medes sent embassies to seek our friendship").<sup>305</sup> These words lead us to conclude that Caucasian Albania was ruled in the early 1st century by the local kings, who had made peace with Rome. An embassy was sent from Albania to Rome, asking to ratify a treaty of "friendship." We also learn from these words that "the Albanians ranked high among the Caucasian peoples, for they were mentioned in the inscription first."<sup>306</sup> Researchers believe that Caucasian Albania may have kept peaceful relations with Rome during subsequent years under the reign of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Later, during the struggle for Armenia between Rome and Parthia, Albania was Iberia's ally, taking the side of Rome.<sup>307</sup> Such conditions surrounded the penetration of evangelism into the Caucasus.

Kalankatuatsi considers St. Eliseus, disciple of Thaddaeus the Apostle, to be the first source of Christian evangelism among the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania. The Albanian historian describes the beginning of St. Eliseus' sermon as follows: "The holy apostle Thaddaeus was appointed for us easterners. He came to the Armenian canton of Artaz and there suffered martyrdom at the hands of Sanatruk, king of Armenia, and his disciple St. Eliseus returned to Jerusalem and related the enviable martyrdom of his fellow apostle.

Thereupon he was ordained in the Holy Spirit by St. James, the brother of Our Lord, who was the first patriarch of Jerusalem."<sup>308</sup>

Two apostles called Thaddaeus are widely believed to have preached in Armenia, one being of the Seventy and the other one of the Twelve. But which of them may be related to the story of St. Eliseus? The biggest problem is that there was some confusion in the sources quite early due to one Thaddaeus the Apostle (of the twelve disciples) being conflated with another Thaddaeus the Apostle (of the seventy disciples). The early Christian tradition recorded by Eusebius of Caesarea,<sup>309</sup> the Father of Church History, on the basis of Syriac documents from Edessa's *Archive of Kings*<sup>310</sup> clearly indicates that Thaddaeus the Apostle, who healed the Edessan king

<sup>305</sup> *Res Gestae Divi Augusti. The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*. With an introduction and commentary by P. A. Blunt and J.M. Moore. Oxford, 1967. §31. P. 35.

<sup>306</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 115-116.

<sup>307</sup> Tacitus. *The Annals of Tacitus. Books I to VI*. Translated by A.V. Symonds. London-New York, 1906. Book VI, Chapters XXXIII-XXXIV. P. 265-267.

<sup>308</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 6, p. 5.

<sup>309</sup> Eusebius Pamphilus (Greek: *Evocfhoc*, *rov Tla^tpiXov*, 258-265-339/40) was the bishop of Caesarea Palaestinae, church historian and writer, theologian, apologist, and interpreter of the Holy Scripture.

<sup>310</sup> the *Archive of Kings* was a chronicle kept at the court of the Osroene kings.

Abgar,<sup>311</sup> was of the Seventy, not the Twelve.<sup>312</sup> Addai (Thaddaeus) is named one of the Savior's 72 disciples in the Syriac source *Doctrine of Addai* (4th-5th centuries).<sup>313</sup> The sermon of Thaddaeus in Edessa is dated 340 by Eusebius of Caesarea and 343 of the Seleucid era in the *Doctrine of Addai* (29 and 31 CE respectively). But Blessed Jerome<sup>314</sup> already attributes Abgar's baptism to Thaddaeus of the Twelve: "Church history has it that Thaddaeus the Apostle was sent to Abgar, king of Osroene, in Edessa; he is called Jude of James by Luke the Evangelist and Lebbaeus elsewhere."<sup>315</sup>

It is important to note the unanimity of opinion on Thaddaeus (Addai) the Apostle of the Seventy in different apostolic lists, where he is called an envoy to the Edessan ruler Abgar,<sup>316</sup> whereas biographical information about Judas-Lebbaeus-Thaddaeus the Apostle is extremely contradictory: there are nearly 10 versions of his missionary activity and death.

The researchers hold that St. Eliseus could have been a disciple of Thaddaeus the Apostle of the Seventy.<sup>317</sup>

<sup>311</sup> Abgar V bar Manu Ukkama (he ruled from 4 BCE to 7 CE and in 13-50). According to Tacitus, "Acbarus, King of the Arabians," (rex Arabum Acbarus) took an active part in the struggle for the throne of Parthia in 49-50 (Tacitus. *The Annals of Tacitus. Books XI-XVI*. An English translation by G.G. Ramsey. London, 1909. Book XII, Chapter 12, §4. P. 59). Procopius of Caesarea also tells a legend that Augarus, "the most clever of all men of his time," stayed at the court of Emperor Augustus in Rome for a long time and describes the trick he used to return to his homeland (Procopius. *History of the Wars*. Translated by H.B. Dewing. London-New York, 1914. Book II, Chapter XII. P. 365). Abgar V is traditionally considered the first Christian ruler of Osroene, thereby the appearance of Christianity in the Mesopotamian region can be traced back to apostolic times. His name is associated with several ancient Christian apocryphal legends, of which the most famous one is Abgar's correspondence with Jesus Christ (the original copy has not survived).

<sup>312</sup> Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History*. With an English translation by K. Lake. London-New York, 1926. Vol. I, Book I, Chapters XII-XIII. P. 83-97.

<sup>313</sup> Meshcherskaya E.N. *Apokrificheskiye deyaniya apostolov. Novozavetnye apokrif v siriyskoy literature* [The Apocryphal Deeds of Apostles. The New Testament Apocryphs in Syriac Literature]. Moscow, 1997. P. 80.

<sup>314</sup> Jerome of Stridon (Latin: *Hieronymus Stridonensis* or *Eusebius Hieronymus*) (c. 347- 419/20) was a blessed man, presbyter, biblical scholar, exegete, translator of the Holy Scripture, and one of 4 great teachers of the Western Church.

<sup>315</sup> Eusebii Hieronymi Stridonensis Presbyteri. *Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei ad Eusebium libri quatuor. Liber I, caput. X, vers. 4. Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*. Vol. 26. Paris, 1845.

<sup>316</sup> *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Graeca*. Edit.J. P. Migne. Paris, 1857-1866. Vol. X, col. 953; Schermann T. *Prophetarum vitae fabulosae: Indices apostolorum discipulorumque Domini Dorotheo, Epiphania, Hippolyto aliisque vindicata*. Leipzig, 1907. P. 134; Esbroeck M. Neuf listes d'apôtres orientales. *Augustinianum*, Vol. 34. Rome, 1994. P. 116,127,144, 156; *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*. Edit.F. Bovon, P. Geoltrain. Vol. 2. Paris, 2005. P. 477.

<sup>317</sup> Arzanov D., Arzanov Y. *Opyt nachertaniya istorii tsarstva Armyanskogo: Drevnyaya istoriya* [The Experience of Writing the History of the Armenian Kingdom; Ancient History], Moscow, 1827.

This Thaddaeus the Apostle was from the Syriac city of Edessa, where he preached the Gospel. The oldest mention of the Edessan sermon can be found in Blessed Jerome's Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew,<sup>318</sup> and it is detailed in the *Acts of Thaddaeus*.<sup>319</sup>

There are various legends about his further activities after the foundation of the Edessa Church. One of the Greek editions of the *Acts of Thaddaeus* additionally informs that, having left a bishop and presbyters in Edessa, the apostle went to Amida (present-day Diyarbakir, Turkey) and worked at enlightening its inhabitants for 5 years. Then he visited the cities of Syria, teaching and evangelizing, and died peacefully in the Phoenician Berytus (present-day Beirut, Lebanon).<sup>320</sup>

The legend of the Edessan king Abgar being converted by Thaddaeus the Apostle was translated from Syriac into Armenian in the 5th century<sup>321</sup> and elaborated in the Armenian literature. The Classical Armenian manuscript *Martyrdom of Thaddaeus*,<sup>322</sup> written by Bishop Samuel between the 5th and 7th centuries, says that Thaddaeus the Apostle went from Edessa to the court of Abgar's relative, King Sanatruk in Armenia. Here he converted Princess Sandukht and many other people to the Christian faith and was martyred in the town of Shavarshan (the canton of Artaz, northeast of Lake Van).<sup>323</sup>

The surviving chapters of Faustus of Byzantium's *History* briefly mention the death of Thaddaeus the Apostle in Armenia as executed by order of King Sanatruk.<sup>324</sup> Movses Khorenatsi writes in the *History of Armenia* about Thaddaeus as one of the seventy apostles, and about Sanatruk's conversion to Christianity, followed by his subsequent apostasy for fear of *nakharars*.<sup>325</sup>

The same Thaddaeus the Apostle is referred to in the *Martyrdom of Bartholomew*, originally written in Syriac and translated into Classical Armenian no earlier than the 7th century.<sup>326</sup> According to this document, after preaching among the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, Bartholomew the Apostle "went to the district of

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P. 95,97.

<sup>318</sup> Hieronymi Stridonensis. *Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei*, I, X, 4.

<sup>319</sup> *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*. Leipzig, 1851. P. 261-265; *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, Vol. 2, p. 645-660.

<sup>320</sup> *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, Vol. 2, p. 656-659.

<sup>321</sup> Abgarus. Lettre d'Abgar, ou Histoire de la conversion d'Edesse et de la correspondance d'Abgar avec le Christ. Trad. Laboubnia. Venice, 1868. *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis*. Edit. Socii Bollandiani. Bruxelles, 1910-1970. No. 9.

<sup>322</sup> *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis*, No. 1145.

<sup>323</sup> *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, Vol. 2, p. 669-696.

<sup>324</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 1, p. 1.

<sup>325</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 2, Chapters 33,34, p. 170-176.

<sup>326</sup> *Bibliotheca hagiographica orientalis*, No. 156.

Gokhtn (present-day Ordubad in Nakhchivan — A. N.), hurrying to follow in the footsteps of Thaddaeus.”<sup>327</sup> On one of the hills in Ar- tashat, Bartholomew met the apostle Jude of James, who then went “his way,” while Bartholomew moved on to the district of Zaravand (present-day Khoy County in the province of West Azerbaijan, Iran).<sup>328</sup>

The martyrdom of Thaddaeus the Apostle by King Sanatruk in Armenia is also mentioned in the so-called apostolic lists<sup>329</sup> of the 2nd Syriac type.<sup>330</sup>

Interestingly, Judas-Lebbaeus-Thaddaeus the Apostle of the Twelve is widely believed in the western tradition to have perished in Persia. The Mar- tyrology of Blessed Jerome says that the apostles Simon the Canaanite and Judas the Zealot died in the city of Suanis<sup>331</sup> in Persia.<sup>332</sup>

Let us return to our apostle Thaddaeus (Addai). The Armenian chroniclers consider this apostle to have preached the Gospel “in Armenia, Greater and Lesser, for 18 years (32-49) and died there.”<sup>333</sup> The apostle was most likely accompanied by several disciples, one of whom was Eliseus. We do not know whether he was of local origin or came with the apostle from one of the places where Thaddaeus had preached.

It should be noted that, as the distinguished Church historian Bolotov has assumed, “once Christianity stood firm in Edessa, this obviously opened up an opportunity for preaching it in ... Armenia and the southern regions of the Caucasus,”<sup>334</sup> which gives more credence to the legend of apostolic sermon in the

<sup>327</sup> *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens*, Vol. 1. Paris, 1986. §18-19.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, §19.

<sup>329</sup> Apostolic lists (Latin: *indices apostolorum*) are a term denoting individual texts or parts of other works that list the names of apostles and may add information about them (place of origin, preaching, death, discovery of relics, etc.). They are one of the most widespread types of ancient and medieval Christian literature and have a large number of versions and manuscripts. The apostolic lists of the 2nd Syriac type are closer to Thomas of Harqel's Syriac translation, where Thaddaeus is replaced by Lebbaeus in the Gospel of Matthew. This type is documented in Clement's *Recognitiones* (1,55-62).

<sup>330</sup> Manuscript No. 871 of the Mesrop Mashtots Matenadaran (Yerevan) — Esbroeck M. *Neuf listes d'apôtres orientales*, p. 113; Vinogradov A.Y. *Apostolskiye spiski — “zabytaya” stranitsa khristianskoy literatury* [The Apostolic Lists: A “Forgotten” Chapter of Christian Literature], *Bogoslovskiy Trudy* [The Theological Works], Vol. 40. Moscow, 2005. P. 146.

<sup>331</sup> The city of Suanir/Suanis is unknown in ancient sources. It may have been the region of Suziana in the southwest of Persia.

<sup>332</sup> Delehaya Hippolyte. *Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum ad recensionem H. Quentin in Acta Sanctorum*. Part II. Brussels, 1931. P. 575.

<sup>333</sup> Bulgakov Macarius, metropolitan. *Istoriya Russkoy Tserkvi* [The History of the Russian Church], Moscow, 1994. Book 1. P. 140.

<sup>334</sup> Bolotov V.V. *Lektsii po istorii Drevney Tserkvi* [Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church], Vol. 2, p. 405.

Caucasus. But later, in 1897, following the criticism of Movses Khorenatsi's *History* in the scholarly community, Bolotov could no longer treat the Armenian tales, from which this information was derived, with full confidence.<sup>335</sup>

The records of Eliseus being ordained by James, brother of the Lord, in Jerusalem can be found not only in Movses Kalankatuatsi's work but also in later sources, including those by Mkhitar Gosh<sup>336</sup> and Kirakos Gandzaketsi.<sup>337</sup>

Curiously enough, the apostolic list of Pseudo-Epiphanius (5th-6th centuries) refers to Thaddaeus the Apostle as the brother of James the Apostle, the first Bishop of Jerusalem.<sup>338</sup> This fact seems to have been also known to Movses Kalankatuatsi, who decided to use it to build his story of St. Eliseus. Later, we will discuss another potential reason why the Albanian historian decided to link Eliseus to Jerusalem.

Based on the analysis of various ancient sources, we may conclude that any attempts to date the preaching activity of St. Eliseus in Caucasian

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 405, Footnote 2 (A. Brilliantov's commentary).

<sup>336</sup> Mkhitar Gosh. *The Albanian Chronicle*. Translated by C. J. F. Dowsett. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Cambridge, 1958. P. 476.

<sup>337</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 10, p. 155.

<sup>338</sup> Schermann T. *Prophetarum vitae fabulosae*, p. 112.

Albania are meaningless. Movses Kalankatuatsi points out that Eliseus' mentor suffered martyrdom at the hands of King Sanatruk. But Armenia was ruled during this period by Artaxias III (18-34), Arshak I (34-35), Mithridates (35-37, 47-51), Rhadamistus (51-52), Tiridates I (52-60, 63-75/88), and Tigranes VI (60-63), while Sanatruk I became the king only in 88 or 91 (88-110 or 91-109).

As for testimonies of the life and service of James the Apostle, they can be found in 1st-4th century sources of all sorts and origins such as the canonical books of the New Testament, the works of Flavius Josephus, Christian apocrypha, Gnostic texts, the writings of early Christian authors, and patristic literature. The canonical texts (as more ancient sources) and the account of Flavius are undoubtedly of historic importance. After the Ascension of the Lord, James the Apostle led the Christian community in Jerusalem for 30 years. As appears from the analysis of Flavius' reports, he died in 62/63.<sup>339</sup>

Thus, it does not seem possible to synchronize the activities of St. Eliseus with the time spent by Thaddaeus the Apostle in Armenia, the reign of Sanatruk, and the life of James the Apostle. However, based on the source's account of Eliseus being ordained by St. James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, efforts have been made to approximately date Eliseus' period of stay in Caucasian Albania. The researchers agree that his sermon began in the Caucasus no later than the "60s CE."<sup>340</sup> However, in this case it turns out that Eliseus could not have been chronologically aligned with the time of Sanatruk's reign, or with events that took place under the rule of the Armenian kings Mithridates, Rhadamistus, or Tiridates.

The Albanian historian informs us: "Eliseus received the east as his diocese, travelled from Jerusalem via Persia, and escaping from the Armenians, walked among the Maskutk. He commenced his preaching in Cholay, and attracting many disciples in many different places, announced the Salvation. From there he arrived at the town of Srharn in the province of Uti with three disciples . . . t h e n "the holy patriarch came to Gis, he founded a church there and offered up bloodless sacrifices. This place was the original source of all the churches and cities and the conversion of us easterners."<sup>341</sup>

Consequently, it can be seen from Movses Kalankatuatsi's *History of Albania* that Eliseus, disciple of Thaddaeus the Apostle and witness to his martyrdom, returned to Jerusalem and told the holy apostles about the death of their fellow

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<sup>339</sup> Flavius Josephus. *The Works of Josephus*. Translated by W. Whiston. London-New York-Melbourne, 1878. Book XX, Chapter IX, §1. P. 529-530.

<sup>340</sup> Kananchev Z.V. Iz istorii apostolskogo perioda khristianstva Kavkazskoy Albanii [From the History of the Apostolic Period of Christianity in Caucasian Albania]. *The History of Caucasus*, No. 2. Baku, 2002. P. 62-63.

<sup>341</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 6, p. 5-6.

apostle. Eliseus was ordained there by James, brother of the Lord, who was the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and went to Albania, where he continued the work of his teacher, St. Thaddaeus.

The path of St. Eliseus from Jerusalem lay through Persia (bypassing Armenia) to the inhabitants of the southern course of the Samur River, the Maskuts, where he began preaching the Good News in Chola (Derbent or the surrounding area). Then, according to the historian, Eliseus went to the province of Uti (on the right bank of the Kura River) and later to Gis (Kish),<sup>342</sup> where he founded a church community and celebrated the Eucharist.

G.H. Ibragimov, researcher of the history of Christianity among the Tsakhurs, has noticed that there are many illogicalities in St. Eliseus' route as described by Movses Kalankatuatsi: Chola – Uti – Gis. Based on historical geographical data, Chola is in the extreme northeast of Albania (identified with a village near Derbent), Gis (the village of Kish in the Shaki District) is in the extreme northwest, in the area of the left bank of the Kura, and Uti is on the right bank. Assuming Eliseus came to the Maskuts and began preaching in Chola, his subsequent journey should have traveled up the Samur Valley. He is believed to have visited the high-mountain village of Surkhary (identified with the village of Zrykh, where the Lezgins-Kurins live) and gone from there to Kish/Gis, where he built a church. He went from Kish to Yargun (the middle course of the right bank of the Samur). Eliseus is further claimed to have crossed the river and reached Gelmet.

G.H. Ibragimov sees an irreconcilable contradiction in this description of Eliseus' route. The mountains of the Greater and Lesser Caucasus are united by the Kura-Alazani Valley, which could have been accessed from the Samur Valley only via certain passes that travelers used as shortcuts. For example, to get from Zrykh to Kish, a traveler should have returned to Akhty and reached the File or Shin passes from there, while, to get from Kish to

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<sup>342</sup> Kish (Gis, Azerbaijani: *Kış*) is a village situated 5 km away from the city of Shaki in the district of the same name. Kish used to be an Udi village, but has no Udi representatives at this point. The main historical site of the village is an ancient 12th century Christian temple (it has been operating as a museum since 2003). According to the modern Armenian historian Samvel Karapetian, the geographical location of Kish does not correspond to Movses Kalankatuatsi's description. Karapetian believes that Gis should be identified with the village of Bum in the Qabala District of Azerbaijan.

Gelmets, they would have had to return to Zrykh and then go up the Samur. Such round trips in the mountains were simply not done.

But one thing may be taken at face value in Movses Kalankatuatsi's description: St. Eliseus did have an opportunity to visit Chola, Uti, Kish, Gelmets, Zrykh, etc. There were large Aramaic-Jewish communities in these places that provided a genuine basis for the spread of Christianity.

The following path of Eliseus seems more realistic: Uti — Kish — Chola — Akhty — Zrykh — Myukhrek — Gelmets. With such a route, there was no need to use the passes of the Greater Caucasus.<sup>343</sup>

Yet, G.H. Ibragimov disregards the fact that Movses Kalankatuatsi mentions Gis several times elsewhere as a city located in the right-bank area of Albania, in the same province of Uti, rather than in the left-bank area. The Albanian chronicler may have detailed Eliseus' route of preaching not to specify his exact itinerary, but to point out that the apostolic father's activities covered all of Caucasian Albania, including both the left bank of the Kura (Gis) and its right bank (Uti), as well as the northeastern province of Chola.

The Albanian historian's remark about a church being built by Eliseus in Gis could be supported by the existence of an ancient Christian temple in the village of the same name. The Azerbaijani historian Mamedova tends to regard the Kish Church in the Shaki District as a 1st-century monument.<sup>344</sup> But this theory is strongly opposed. From 2000 to 2003, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded a project of archaeological research and restoration of the church in Kish. The radiocarbon analysis of various artifacts found in the excavation area showed that the cult site, discovered beneath the church altar, dated back to around 3000 BCE, with the current church building being erected between 990 and 1160.

Thus, the church building cannot be dated to St. Eliseus' period, but archaeological discoveries show that the church is located on territory used for worship since ancient times. St. Eliseus is unlikely to have built the church in the modern sense of the word. According to Archbishop Averky (Taushev), researcher of the history of the New Testament Church, the Christian temples as special houses of worship only began to appear among the Christians after the end of persecution by the pagans, i.e. in the 4th century. However, the temples had already been built at least before the 3rd century.<sup>345</sup> It is not ruled out that Movses Kalankatuatsi's expression "founded a church there"

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Ibragimov G.H. Op. Cit., p. 174.

<sup>345</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albanii* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 533.  
Taushev Averky, archbishop. *Liturgies*. Jordanville, 2000. Part I, Chapter 3. P. 19.



can be understood in the sense of instituting a Christian community through preaching. The author of the *History of Albania* may have also brought the construction of the Kish Temple contemporary to him up to the time of St. Eliseus' sermon, thereby using an anachronism typical of all medieval authors.

Interestingly, Bjornar Storfjell, manager of the Kish project, said in an interview to the Azerbaijan International magazine that "there is clear evidence that this church was built as a Dyophysite church. Excavations revealed that the church represented two different periods of use, with two different corresponding floor levels." According to Storfjell, since the architecture of the apse of the original church suggests a Dyophysite Christology, and since the Georgian Orthodox Church was the only Dyophysite church existing in the Caucasus in the late medieval period, it seems reasonable to assume that the church was originally built as a Georgian one and was later taken over by the Monophysites.<sup>346</sup> Though the church in the village of Kish is believed to have been founded at the end of the 1st century CE, *Bjornar Storfjell* says that this view is not worthy of investigation or supported by archaeological evidence, while the earliest church buildings in the world date back only to the 3rd century.<sup>347</sup>

The Georgian researchers report that the diocese of Gish-Kurmukh of the Mtskheta (East Georgian) Catholicosate was established in the area of the current Qakh and Shaki Districts of Azerbaijan in the early 6th century. Bishop Ezra of Gish is mentioned among the participants of the Council of Dvin in 506.<sup>348</sup> Moreover, the Gish Church dedicated to the Holy Mother of God is listed, inter alia, in the 1310 postscript to the Magalashvili Four Gospels and dates back to the 5th-6th centuries.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Storfjell J.B. The Church in Kish. Carbon Dating Reveals Its True Age. *Azerbaijan International*, No. 11 (1). Baku, 2003.

<sup>347</sup> Storfjell J.B. The Church in Kish, p. 33-39: "Therefore, the medieval literary tradition concerning the church in Kish (and earlier oral tradition which cannot be verified), repeated by several present-day scholars (Mammadova, 2002, p. 34,35,38), cannot be given serious consideration. This tradition suggests that the Kish Church was built at the end of the first century A.D. If true, that would indeed make this a truly significant church, since no church structures anywhere in the world are known to have been constructed earlier than the mid- to late-third century. To refer to the Kish church as the "Church of St. Eliseus" is to attempt to give scholarly credence to a medieval literary tradition whose date cannot be substantiated and supported by archaeological evidence."

<sup>348</sup> *The Book of Letters*. The Armenian text with Georgian translation by Z.N. Alexidze. Tbilisi, 1968. P. 97.

<sup>349</sup> Cheishvili G. Kurmukhsкая епархия [The Diocese of Kurmukh]. *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. XXXIX. Moscow, 2015. P. 410-414.

Movses Kalankatuatsi also informs that, after proclaiming the apostolic message on the territory of Caucasian Albania, St. Eliseus suffered martyrdom:

*.. from there he (St. Eliseus — A. N.) arrived at the town of Srharn in the province of Ulti with three disciples, some of whose wicked brothers had pursued them. One of the disciples was martyred by them and the other two deserted the blessed Eliseus and followed the murderers... From there he crossed the plain of Zargun to the site of the sacrificial altars of the heathen idolaters and there he received the martyr's crown. It is not clear who did the deed. The murderers threw the holy remains into a ditch in the place called Homenk, where they lay hidden for a long time.<sup>TM</sup>*

Bishop Barkhudarian identifies Homenk with the village of Bum in the Qabala District of Azerbaijan: “The village of Bum has been called Homenk from the earliest times. There is a large ancient cemetery atop the village of Bum, which used to include a temple ..., of which barely noticeable traces have survived.”<sup>350 351</sup> The municipality of Bum currently consists of the village of Zergerli, which can be identified with Kalankatuatsi’s “plain of Zargun.” I.V. Kuznetsov notes that “the Muslim families, who considered themselves Azerbaijanis, but still remembered the Udi language” lived in the village of Bum at the beginning of the 19th century.<sup>352</sup>

The Albanian Church has always regarded St. Eliseus as its apostle and patron. Apart from naming him the “apostle,” Kalankatuatsi counts Eliseus among the direct disciples of Christ: “... the Albanians ... pointed to a certain apostle who came in ancient times to Albania, Elisha by name, *one of the disciples of the Lord* who was consecrated by James, brother of the Lord.”<sup>353</sup> Judging by the testimony of the Albanian historian, it can be assumed that St. Eliseus might quite well have been not only a disciple of one of the apostles but also an eyewitness to the life and preaching of Christ Himself. However, we find no other evidence supporting this theory.

Some historians hold that “at first Christianity spread quickly and achieved major success in the East during the Parthian rule, but with the rise of the Sasanian dynasty in Persia that pursued a hostile policy, the results of

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<sup>350</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 6, p. 5-6.

<sup>351</sup> Barkhudarian M. *The Aghuank Region and Its Neighbors*, p. 254-256.

<sup>352</sup> Kuznetsov I.V. *Pontijsko-kavkazskiy issledovaniya* [The Pontic-Caucasian Studies]. Krasnodar, 2008. P. 169.

<sup>353</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 48, p. 177.

two centuries came to an end.”<sup>354</sup> Bolotov reiterates this view: “After the rapid expansion of Christianity during the apostolic and post-apostolic eras, there came a period of either its continued preservation or reduction. In any case, it is assumed to have reduced on the northern shores of the Black Sea, in the Caucasus, in Armenia, and perhaps in other places, where the seed of Christianity was thrown by the apostles and barely existed.”<sup>355</sup>

The above statement is partly true, because we cannot find any other evidence in the sources regarding the life of Christian communities in Caucasian Albania during the period from the 1st century to the early 4th century. This suggests that the seeds of the Word sown by the apostolic father Eliseus and his disciples in Albania did not perish, and small Christian communities lived in the little mountain settlements, lost from the rest of the world until the second wave of Christianization began in the region.

It should be noted that, except for information given by the Albanian historian, there are no other mentions of St. Eliseus anywhere up to the 7th century. Smbatian thinks that, when reviewing the issue of Eliseus’ mission in Albania, consideration should be given in the first place to the specific historical conditions that gave rise to this legend.<sup>356</sup> As pointed out by the researcher, Movses Kalankatuatsi reports in Chapter 48 of Book Two of his *History* that after “the articles of orthodox faith were destroyed” by the Council of Chalcedon, the Orthodox repeatedly entered into disputes with representatives of the Armenian Church and demanded that they conform to the canons adopted at the council. The main argument of the Greeks requesting the Armenian Church to submit to one of the patriarchal sees was that there were no three highest ranks in the Armenian Church hierarchy — namely the patriarch, the archbishop, and the metropolitan — and therefore, according to the Greeks, the Armenian Church did not have an autocephalous status. These disputes were clearly aimed at expanding the Byzantine Empire’s sphere of influence in the East. Trying to put an end to the controversy with the Greeks regarding the “nine ecclesiastical ranks” considered dangerous for the Armenian Church seeking sovereignty, the Armenian clergy decided to establish the missing highest

<sup>354</sup> Adontz N.G. *Armeniya v epokhu Yustiniana. Politicheskoye sostoyaniye na osnove nakhararskogo stroya* [Armenia in the Period of Justinian: The Political Conditions based on the Nakharar System], Yerevan, 1971. P. 346.

<sup>355</sup> Bolotov V.V. *Lektsii po istorii Drevney Tserkvi* [Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church], Vol. 2, p. 408.

<sup>356</sup> Smbatian S.V. *Zamechaniya po povodu knigi R. Geyusheva “Khristianstvo v Kavkazskoy Albanii”* [Comments on R. Geyushev’s Book “Christianity in Caucasian Albania”]. *Kosveshcheniye problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia], Yerevan, 1991. P. 410-411.

ecclesiastical ranks in their country as well. At the council of the Armenian Church, in the presence of the bishops of Iberia and Albania, the head of the Armenian Church was declared patriarch, the bishop of Albania declared archbishop, and Koriun of Iberia declared metropolitan. The latter, however, refused to be a rank lower than the Albanian prelate and, provoked by the Byzantines, wanted an archbishop rank, to which the Albanians could not agree either. "It was during these disputes that the Albanians first came up with the legend of Elisha," Smbatian writes, "to prove that the residents of the Eastern Land ... adopted Christianity earlier than Iberia."<sup>357</sup>

Kalankatuatsi's work reads:

**The head of the Georgian Church, Kiwrion by name, rebelled and declared his opposition, but the patriarch Abraham stated that the Albanians had preceded the Georgians in the faith and that the rank of archbishop fell to them. As a result of this dispute the Georgians turned from the orthodox faith and became Chalcedonians. The Greek generals at first encouraged them to seek precedence over the Albanians, but the latter would not yield and pointed to a certain apostle who came in ancient times to Albania, Elisha by name, one of the disciples of the Lord who was consecrated by James, brother of the Lord, and who preached there and built a church before there was one in Armenia, namely, the Church of Gis, the first mother church of the east..**<sup>358</sup>

#### 1.3.4. Religious Reforms in Sasanian Iran<sup>359</sup>

In the early 3rd century, the Sassanids overthrew the Arsacid dynasty and cemented their hold on the throne for four centuries. It seemed at this point that the Arsacids had run out of steam and could no longer provide the central authority in Iran and beyond, while the new dynasty proclaimed itself the successor of the Achaemenids and was preparing to follow in their footsteps.<sup>360</sup> A long and fierce

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<sup>357</sup> Smbatian S.V. Op. Cit., p. 411.

<sup>358</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 48, p. 176-177.

<sup>359</sup> Nikonorov Alexy, archimandrite. Christianization of Caucasian Albania in the context of Sasanian religious reforms. *Ethnocultural heritage of Caucasian Albania* (collection of articles), No. 3, Baku, 2022. P. 131-136.

<sup>360</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy. Istoriya Irana III-VII w. v legendakh, istoricheskikh khronikakh i sovremennykh issledovaniyakh* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings. The History of Iran in the 3rd-7th centuries in Legends, Historical Chronicles, and Modern Studies], Moscow, 2008. P. 58-59.

struggle ensued for the Transcaucasian countries. In the next two centuries, Caucasian Albania witnessed two landmark events: the adoption of Christianity and the creation of its own script.

It was not just a chronological coincidence. The layer of Hellenism in the Iranian civilization was quite powerful and deep, but it was also a layer that was slowly dissolving under the Iranian Arsacids. During the reign of the Sassanids, Hellenism underwent rapid erosion.<sup>361</sup>

Ardashir I Papakan (220-239), the first Sasanian king, saw his empire in a completely different way than he saw the fragmented Parthian state he had defeated, viewing it not just as small kingdoms, loosely allied to the central government, or independent Zoroastrian communities with sometimes quite varied religious practices, but as a powerful state with a single religion subordinate to one king.<sup>362</sup>

Like the Roman Caesars, the Kings of Kings sought their own religious doctrine not for spiritual reasons, but rather to bolster their authority. Ardashir I instructed his son: "Always consider the altar and the throne inseparable. May these two always support each other ... know that faith and king-ship are brothers and cannot exist without each other. Faith is the foundation of the kingdom, while the kingdom is the protection of faith."<sup>363</sup> This concept will determine the political direction of Sasanian Iran for years to come.

The Sassanids themselves originated from a priestly family and were servants of the goddess Anahit. But since her cult was local in nature, it could not cover the entire Iranian Kingdom. Iran was looking for something universal, and perhaps the very first such God-seeker was Ardashir's son Shapur I (240/241-271/272).

"Shapur," the *Denkard*<sup>364</sup> says, "commanded to collect everything that had been recorded about faith ... in India, in the Roman Empire, and elsewhere."<sup>365 366</sup>

<sup>361</sup> Martirosian A.A. *Mashtots*. Yerevan, 1988. P. 8-11.

<sup>362</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 60.

<sup>363</sup> Quoted from: Lukonin V.G. *Kultura Sasanidskogo Irana* [The Culture of Sasanian Iran], Moscow, 1969. P. 70.

<sup>364</sup> The *Denkard* ("Acts of Religion") is an encyclopedia of late Zoroastrianism (Parsism) canonized under the Sassanids, which also includes literary and historical information. Book 3 says (seven out of nine original books have survived, with two books being lost) that the compilation of the *Denkard* was started by the Zoroastrian priest Adurfarnbag during the reign of Caliph al-Ma'mun (813-833) and completed in the last quarter of the century by a certain Adurbad, son of Hemat. The *Denkard* is generally considered an apologetic work directed against Christianity and Judaism, but especially sharply against the Manichaean "heresy" (see Braginsky I.S. *Literatura na sredneiranskikh yazykakh* [Literature in Middle Iranian Languages]. *Istoriya vseмирnoy literatury* [The History of World Literature], Moscow, 1983-1994. Vol. II. P. 249-250).

<sup>365</sup> Quoted from: Lukonin V.G. *Kultura Sasanidskogo Irana* [The Culture of Sasanian Iran], p. 94.

<sup>366</sup> Quoted from: Lukonin V.G. *Op. Cit.*, p. 74.

Like the first Achaemenids, the king did not long for religious universalism as an integration or coexistence of religions and teachings, which was something expressed in religious tolerance. Shapur simply decided to familiarize himself with religions in order to make his choice. He selected Ahura-Mazda (Hormizd).

Some religious novelties also appeared during the time of Shapur I. They were introduced by the new prophet Mani (c. 216-277), who attempted to combine Zoroastrianism, Christian Gnosticism, Buddhism, and astrology in his doctrine. Shapur I allowed Mani to preach in the world under his control, but very soon turned away from him. The cosmopolitan nature of his teaching and subtle Gnosticism showed good promise: "My faith is clear in every country and in every language and extends to distant countries,"<sup>365</sup> Mani assured.

At first, the Sassanid ruler believed what served his own political aspirations well. He wanted to pave the way to the West, but failed, since there was already his antipode in the West, and Mani was helpless against Christ. Manichaeism turned out to be not so national as to retain the East and not so international as to attract the West.<sup>367</sup> The former did not accept it, while the latter rejected it.

After Shapur I's death in 271/272, clouds began to gather over Mani. In 274, during the reign of Bahram I (273-276), the younger son of Shapur I, he was imprisoned and later executed. An inscription on the walls of the royal necropolis Naqsh-e Rostam,<sup>368</sup> which used to be a stone book of the Sassanids, pompously states that faith was cleansed from filth, "the deeds of Ahura Mazda and gods ascended from region to region, and the Mazdean faith and magi gained dominance throughout the great country ... And many people, who had been unfaithful, became faithful."<sup>369</sup> Power and faith, according to the testament of Shapur I's father, relied on each other, and political conquests were followed by religious expansion. But the Transcaucasian «»un

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<sup>367</sup> For more details see Dashkov S.B. *Op. Cit.*, p. 79-83.

<sup>368</sup> Naqsh-e Rostam (Persian: "mural of Rostam") is an ancient tomb of Achaemenid kings in Persepolis.

<sup>369</sup> Quoted from: Martirosian A.A. *Op. Cit.*, p. 10.

tries stood in the way of this expansion, leading to the continuous and arduous struggle. Wherever the horses and men of Shapur I, King of Kings, reached "in Antioch, city and Syrian country, in the province of Syria, in Tarsus, city and Cilician country, until the Cilician borders in Caesarea, city and Cappadocian country,... up to Greece, in the Armenian country, Iberia, and ... Balasagan further to the Albanian gate, Shapur, King of Kings, with horses and men, himself ... caused destruction and fire. There, by order of the King of Kings, magi... were made superior and revered."<sup>370</sup>

Zoroastrianism became an official religion in Iran. Albania, where the throne was held by the Albanian Arsacids, responded by adopting Christianity.

It can be said that, when Iran started a large religious expansion, Caucasian Albania contrasted Iranism with Christianity. And while the Iranian religion dictated aggression, the religion of Transcaucasian countries dictated resistance. The opposition of Christianity to Zoroastrianism was both ideological and political in nature.

### 1.3.5. *King Urnayr and Gregory the Illuminator, Equal of the Apostles*<sup>371</sup>

The spread of Christianity in Caucasian Albania is inextricably linked with the general course of events in the Caucasus, namely in Armenia, Albania, and Iberia. In the early 4th century, Christianity was granted the status of a legal religion in the Roman Empire with a fairly large area of distribution, and people gradually came to believe that the Christians were not just some evil sect, but, on the contrary, fellow citizens who lived by high gospel ideals and observed moral standards. The three centuries that followed the apostolic preaching provided a fertile ground for a new religious system to be adopted simultaneously throughout entire regions and states as an official religion.

Legend has it that Armenia accepted Christianity as a state religion in 301 (but, most likely, not earlier than 313). It is important for us to find out more precisely, if possible, when Armenia adopted Christianity in order to specify the date of Christianization of Caucasian Albania.

Modern historical research shows that the date of Christianization of Armenia, which is traditionally believed to have taken place in 301, needs

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<sup>370</sup> Quoted from: Lukonin V.G. *Op. Cit.*, p. 87-88.

<sup>381</sup> Nikonorov Alexy, archimandrite. Christianization of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century. *Collection of Research Papers of the Yakutsk Theological Seminary*, No. 19-20, Yakutsk, 2023. P. 9-20.

revision. The 5th-century Armenian historian Agathangelos informs us that the Armenian king Tiridates III (287-330) participated in the Diocletianic Persecution and martyred the Christian virgin Hripsime at the emperor's request. All four of the edicts of Diocletian (284-305) against Christianity and Manichaeism date back to the years 303 and 304. Consequently, the martyrdom of the Roman nuns, which should have preceded the conversion of the Armenian king, is unlikely to have occurred earlier than that. In addition, Tiridates, who was closely associated with Diocletian, was obviously able to officially adopt Christianity only after the emperor's abdication in 305. Finally, according to legend, St. Gregory was ordained bishop by Archbishop Leontius in Caesarea in Cappadocia immediately after Tiridates' conversion to Christianity. We know for certain that Lord Leontius did not hold the Caesarean see<sup>372</sup> before 314, because the period of his ministry falls somewhere between 319 and 325.<sup>373</sup>

The ancient Armenian historians Agathangelos and Movses Khorenatsi tell us the story of the sermon of St. Gregory the Illuminator (c. 252-326), which led to the conversion of King Tiridates and the adoption of Christianity as a state religion in Armenia.

A.I. Anninsky,<sup>374</sup> the researcher of Armenian historical sources, has critically reviewed Agathangelos' *History* about the Christianization of Transcaucasian countries. In particular, the author concludes that all the details of Agathangelos' *History*, which refer to both the conversion of Armenians itself and to the circumstances preceding and following it, constantly and invariably point to the same fact: the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire had already ended by the time the Caucasian peoples were converting, allowing Christians to practice freely.

"The testimonies of Agathangelos," Anninsky writes, "are quite consistent with history and must only be attributed to the time at which they point themselves. If we move the date of conversion of Armenians to the years immediately following 316, Agathangelos' testimonies regarding the circumstances incidental to, but closely associated with it seem probable and are supported by the evidence of western scholars; such transfer clarifies many things in Agathangelos' book that are considered unreliable."<sup>375</sup>

Our Albanian historian gives a completely correct date, linking the conversion

<sup>372</sup> Guaita G.Op. Cit., p. 61-62.

<sup>373</sup> E.V. S. Leontius. *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. XL. Moscow, 2015. P. 488.

<sup>374</sup> Anninsky A.I. *Drevniye armianskiye istoriki kak istoricheskkiye istochniki* [The Ancient Armenian Historians as Historical Sources]. Odessa, 1899. P. 55-79.

<sup>375</sup> Anninsky A.I. Op. Cit., p. 71-72.



of Transcaucasian peoples to the reign of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great (306-337). Movses Kalankatuatsi recounts the story:

**After the blessed St. Eliseus had commenced his apostolic mission from the far corners of the earth, he converted some among the eastern peoples of the north, but not all. He fought a good fight and strove hard for the good of his people. In the days when God visited mankind and caused the west to prosper under the great emperor Constantine ..., he also led to the Faith the lands of the Orient which had been taught a little of the rising of the true Sun of Salvation, and they (meaning the residents of the East, the Albanians, – A. N.) were again converted through the most excellent Urnayr. These divine wonders came to pass at the same time.**<sup>376</sup>

The Albanian king Urnayr, who ruled Albania in the 4th century, belonged to the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia himself, while his wife was the sister of the Persian king Shapur II (309-379). St. Gregory, who was in Armenia at that time, is believed to have been of Parthian origin as well. After preaching in Armenia, St. Gregory accepted the dignity of the Armenian primate in Caesarea in Cappadocia and converted the country to the Christian faith.

Armenian medieval historiographers have assumed that Gregory the Illuminator belonged to the Parthian royal family;<sup>377</sup> his descendant, Catholikos Sahak I the Great (died in 439), was nicknamed "Parthew," i.e. Parthian.

However, according to researchers, the legend that St. Gregory the Illuminator was of Parthian origin has the nature of a tribal tradition invented to link him to the ruling Parthian house. The idea that Gregory was a Parthian, son of Anak,<sup>378</sup> that he was sheltered in Caesarea and that he came to Armenia to atone for his father's sins may be "just a legend, a tale that arose on a completely different ground much later, in the second half of the 5th century. Gregory was a Christian, rather than national, figure, regardless of his origin!"<sup>379</sup>

Ancient historians relate that the Armenian king Tiridates III suffered divine

<sup>376</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 9, p. 7-8.

<sup>377</sup> Yovhannes Draskhanakertsi. *History of Armenia*. Translation and commentary by Rev. K. H. Maksoudian. Atlanta, 1987. Chapter VIII. P. 79.

<sup>378</sup> The Arabic version of the saint's life does not include any information from the Armenian national edition about Anak, father of Gregory the Illuminator and murderer of King Khosrow, about his Parthian origin, etc., and this gap is unlikely to have been accidental. George, Bishop of the Arabs, who seems to have used a Greek source, does not know the Parthian origin of St. Gregory either: he says that Gregory "came from Rome" (Lagardii P. *Analecta syriaca*. London, 1858. P. 122).

<sup>379</sup> Martirosian A. A. Op. Cit., p. 20.

retribution for the execution of the holy virgins Hripsime and Gayane. He could be healed only by Christian Gregory — his blood enemy and son of Prince Anak, who murdered his father — doomed by Tiridates to a painful death. After the repentant king paid tribute to the executed martyrs and converted to the faith of Christ, St. Gregory had the former gods and beliefs declared false. The temple lands were transferred to the young Church. Gregory accepted the episcopal dignity and began the mass baptism of people. Enough has already been said about the dates of this event, and we will focus on all the developments taking place in the first quarter of the 4th century.

Following the baptism of Armenian people, St. Gregory, as reported by our historian, went to enlighten the Albanian country with the Gospel: "...and converted the lands of the Georgians and Albanians. Arriving in the province of Haband,<sup>380</sup> he taught them to keep the commandments of the Son of God. He laid the foundations of a church in the cosmopolis of Amaras<sup>381</sup> and appointed workmen and foremen to build a church there."<sup>382</sup> The details of the life of St. Gregory the Illuminator occupy the entire Chapter 14 of Book One of the *History of Albania* by Movses Kalankatuatsi.

The scholarly literature critically analyzes whether the missionary activities of St. Gregory the Illuminator occurred in all Caucasian countries

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<sup>380</sup> Haband was one of 12 cantons of the province of Orkhistene (Artsakh, Lesser Syunik).

<sup>381</sup> Amaras is an ancient village in the province of Artsakh in the southeastern part of Nagorno-Karabakh, which became part of the Albanian *marzpanate* starting from the 5th century. In the 4th century, St. Gregory the Illuminator founded a church in Amaras, where his grandson Grigoris, bishop of Albania and Iberia, was buried around 338 after being killed by the pagan Maskuts. The relics of the holy martyr Grigoris were discovered in 489 under the Albanian king Vachagan III, who erected a chapel over them and restored the church destroyed by that time. In the early 5th century, Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor (or reformer) of the Armenian alphabet, set up the first school in Amaras. Starting from the 6th century, Amaras became a bishopric within the catholicosate of Albania. The "king of the Romans" gave the Right Hand of St. Gregory the Illuminator stored in Constantinople to the bishop of Amaras. During the Middle Ages, Amaras was known as a monastery and large scriptorium. It was frequently destroyed (demolished by Tamerlane in 1387) and restored many times. A vaulted tomb, made of drafted stones and covered with ornaments typical of the 5th century, has survived beneath the apse built in 1858 (Kazarian A.Y. *Amaras. Pravoslavnaya entsiklo-pediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. II. Moscow, 2001. P. 98).

<sup>382</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 21.

(including Albania). This issue is reviewed by N.K. Aptsiauri in her article *On the Missionary Activities of St. Gregory the Illuminator*.<sup>39\*</sup>

It should be added that the cult of Gregory the Illuminator was not yet pan-Armenian, let alone pan-Caucasian, in the 5th century. Neither the historian Elishe (in the “50s and “60s of the 5th century) nor Koriun mentions St. Gregory. His *Life*, included in Agathangelos’ *History of Armenia*, bears a strong resemblance to Koriun’s *Life of Mesrop Mashtots* not only in occasionally verbatim text, but also in concept. In particular, the idea of unifying the Christian peoples of the Caucasus — Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians — was embodied in the Grecophile edition of the *Life of Gregory the Illuminator*.<sup>383 384</sup>

The Russian Byzantinist and Armenologist V.A. Arutyunova-Fidanian points out that Gregory the Illuminator was declared pan-Caucasian enlightener only in the 6th century, with local missionaries being turned into his companions. The official concept of the three churches — Armenian, Albanian, and Georgian — is presented in the Greek and Arabic versions of the *Life of St. Gregory*. Movses Khorenatsi and Ghazar Parpetsi call Gregory not only the pan-Armenian enlightener, but also the propagator of the new religion within the entire Caucasus region. He was equally venerated in Armenia and Georgia, as evidenced by the correspondence between the Georgian catholicos Kyrion I (599-614/616) and the Armenian spiritual and secular rulers, dating back to the years 604 to 609 and preserved in Ukhtanes’ *Book of Letters and History*: St. Gregory implanted “the holy and righteous faith in the Caucasian lands”;<sup>385</sup> Vrtanes Kertogh writes about him as the Illuminator of Armenia and Georgia;<sup>386</sup> the Georgian catholicos also confirms that the Christian faith was established by Gregory the Illuminator;<sup>387</sup> his opponent, the Armenian catholicos Abraham I Albatanetsi, indicates that “the common worship of God was introduced first by Blessed St. Gregory and then by Mashtots”<sup>388</sup> in Armenia and Georgia. In the third quarter of the 9th century, the Georgian catholicos Arsen of Safara accused the Monophysite Armenians of having departed from St. Gregory’s teaching: “...and there was a big dispute between Somkhiti and Kartli. The Georgians said: “St. Gregory of Greece gave us faith, but

<sup>383</sup> Aptsiauri N.K. O missionerskoy deyatelnosti sv. Grigoriya Prosvetitelya [On the Missionary Activities of St. Gregory the Illuminator], *Khristiansky Vostok* [The Christian East], No. 1 (7), 1999.

<sup>384</sup> Arutyunova-Fidanian V.A. Grigory Prosvetitel [Gregory the Illuminator], *Pravoslavnyaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. XIII. Moscow, 2009. P. 41-42.

<sup>385</sup> *The Book of Letters*. Tiflis, 1901. P. 132 (in Armenian).

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136,138.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

you abandoned his holy confession and submitted to Syriac Abdisho and the rest of the evil heretics.””<sup>389</sup> Gregory the Illuminator is portrayed as the successor of Thaddaeus the Apostle in the Syriac text of the *Life*.<sup>390</sup>

According to Abeghian, the *Life of Gregory the Illuminator* had not been reworked into the Armenian version before the schism between the Armenian and Georgian Churches began,<sup>391</sup> but finally took shape after the Council of Manzikert in 726. It aimed to create a magnificent story of the origin of the Armenian Apostolic Church. This edition had no place for the idea of Gregory the Illuminator's conversion of neighboring peoples to Christianity, and his preaching was limited to 15 provinces of Greater Armenia. The *Life* describes St. Gregory as a “wonderful man” who subjected himself to suffering and asceticism until he was eventually shown a vision establishing the connection of the Armenian Church with the Only Begotten Son of God Himself, Christ.

Discussing the spiritual ties between Georgia and Armenia in the 4th- 5th centuries, protopresbyter John Meyendorff — a historian of Byzantium — notes that St. Gregory

**was consecrated bishop of Ashtishat, a city to the West of Lake Van in Anatolia, ... and became the first head of an organized church in Armenia ... Whether or not direct connections occurred between the king Mirian and Constantine, or between St. Nino and Jewish Christians, it is difficult to deny that, institutionally, the East-Georgian Church was associated, at least until the late fifth century, with the ecclesiastical center established by St. Gregory in Ashtishat and Dvin. That center, although belonging to the Armenian Kingdom, was not, at that time, an exclusively Armenian catholicosate, but a regional primacy using Greek and Syriac in worship ... There was nothing unnatural, therefore, in the ecclesiastical unity between Dvin and Mtskheta.**<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Muradian P.M. Kavkazsky kulturny mir i kult Grigoriya Prosvetitel'ya [The Caucasian Cultural World and the Cult of Grigory the Illuminator]. *Kavkaz i Vizantiya* [The Caucasus and Byzantium], No. 3, 1982. P. 18.

<sup>390</sup> Arutyunova-Fidanian V.A. Grigory Prosvetitel [Gregory the Illuminator], p. 41-42.

<sup>391</sup> Abeghian M.K. *Istoriya drevnearmyanskoy literatury* [The History of Ancient Armenian Literature], p. 102-103.

<sup>392</sup> Meyendorff John, protopresbyter. *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*. Crestwood, 1989. Chapter IV, §3. P. 103-106.

The same reasoning holds true for the spiritual relations of all Caucasian countries, including Caucasian Albania.

It is evident that, when it comes to the conversion of Caucasian Albania, Christianity prevails here not by preaching and missionary work, but through will and force, and if anyone could be called an apostle of Albania, it would be the Albanian king Urnayr (c. 313-371).

The Albanian historian informs that when Urnayr “heard of the great miracles of God, the signs and wonders which were performed by St. Gregory, [he] ... turned from the paths of error and ... soared up to Heaven.”<sup>393</sup> Further, Kalankatuatsi relates that “the great king sent no messenger, but went in person accompanied by his grandees and nobles and numerous forces” to Armenia and visited the blessed king Tiridates. Urnayr talked with St. Gregory, repented of his past errors, and confessed his own sins. The saint encouraged the king with “the coming of the Incarnation of the Son of God, who came to forgive and not to judge, to give life and not to bring death, and promised life to those who had passed from the earth.” When King Urnayr heard all this, he, his companions, and his soldiers imposed upon themselves a fast of many days in the presence of King Tiridates. “On the fiftieth day, when they had rejected Satan and all his works and confessed the Holy Trinity, the king descended into the most holy water and all his soldiers with him. And when the chief priest had performed over them the rite of rebirth in the Heavenly Trinity, all emerged accompanied by the Holy Ghost.”<sup>394</sup>

The Albanian historian obviously describes the details of the proclamation practice before baptism was established in the ancient Church: repentance, confession, bishop’s catechesis, fasting, exorcism, and baptism itself.

Moyses Kalankatuatsi explains the Albanian king’s acceptance of a new faith by deep inner conviction. Urnayr, captivated by the incredible power of St. Gregory’s words and numerous miracles, embraced the Gospel teaching with all his heart. His firm intentions seem to have been proven by the fast of many days, which the king, followed by his army, voluntarily imposed upon himself. Yet in reality, the agreement between Urnayr and Gregory had completely different conditions. Urnayr turned to the Christian Church to make his country a stronghold of resistance to Persian political aggression, which also had a religious component. St. Gregory, as a religious Christian figure, seized this opportunity and enlisted Urnayr’s help in gaining a space for the

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<sup>393</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 11, p. 11.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

religion he professed in Caucasian Albania and in creating a new church organization.

Together they destroyed temples and persecuted the adherents of former pagan cults. Bishop Giwt (461-478) conveys the following church tradition about the Christianization of the Albanian country in his letter to the Albanian king Vache:

**With these heavenly gifts King Urnayr came back to the land of the Albanians, and taught and confirmed them through the apostolic canons; all received the heavenly seal [of baptism] and were inscribed in the Book of Life. The demons in the land were driven out, sacrifices and burnt offerings were abolished, error was confounded and Truth exalted, the Invisible Light reigned and darkness was driven away. First fruits were dedicated to the Church and tithes of the produce of the threshing-floor and harvest, fields and granaries, and all domestic animals; land also was allotted to it, and all was put in proper order.<sup>395</sup>**

Urnayr hoped that a new religion would help him, first, to unite a state consisting of different tribes and, second, to oppose Zoroastrian Persia.

St. Gregory, dispatching the Albanian king to his native land, took care to provide clergy for the young Albanian church. Gregory sent "a blessed man consecrated bishop from the city of Rome"<sup>396</sup> with Urnayr to Albania in order to organize the Albanian Church. This is also mentioned by Kirakos Gandzaketsi (1200-1271): "Saint Gregory gave to King Urhnayr a man from among his deacons who had come with him from Rome, and whom [Gregory] had ordained as bishop."<sup>397</sup>

How shall we take these references to the establishment of the Albanian episcopal see? And who was this bishop "from Rome"?

There is a possibility that it could have actually been a bishop, who arrived with others, from Caesarea in Cappadocia and was called a man "from Rome" by our authors. However, we find no other mentions of this priest, while the Albanian church tradition names St. Gregory as its first patriarch.<sup>398</sup> The journey of St. Gregory, who accompanied Tiridates to Rome, though not

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<sup>395</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 11, p. 11-12.

<sup>396</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 11, p. 11.

<sup>407</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 10, p. 156.

See Nikonorov Alexy, hieromonk. *Istoriya khristianstva v Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The History of Christianity in Caucasian Albania]. Baku, 2005. P. 67.

ed by all Armenian writers – both secular and spiritual – is questioned by the researchers.<sup>399</sup>

It is clear from the sources that the population of Caucasian Albania, led by the king and his army, was baptized following Armenia in the early 4th century, coinciding with the issue of the Edict of Milan (313), and the royal authority set about Christianizing all aspects of life in the state. Urnayr and succeeding Albanian kings showed great concern for the Albanian Church and clergy and granted them privileges. They tried to equate clergymen with lay nobles, *azats*, by creating a church court along with a palace court.<sup>400</sup>

According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, two people played a crucial role in such a landmark event for Caucasian Albania as the adoption of Christianity. One of them was Gregory, Equal of the Apostles, who was originally prepared by God's providence for the great apostolic work in the Caucasus and, having endured trials, suffering, and persecution, became the Illuminator of not only Armenia but also Albania. The second figure that determined the course of the Albanian history for centuries to come was King Urnayr, who has been called the "Blessed One" in the Albanian tradition.

When Christianity in Albania rose to an official religion, the Christian communities in Asia Minor had not been administratively divided into the spheres of influence of different churches. Their distribution and names were of a geographical, rather than an administrative, nature, while Church boundaries could coincide or not. The primacy of local churches, not based on a real political force yet, was determined only by tradition for the time being. The Church of Caucasian Albania should have remained outside this division while enjoying state status, but it also belonged to the general Christian Church and, as such, was among the Anatolian episcopates. Therefore, it is quite understandable why the first Albanian bishop was ordained by St. Gregory the Illuminator. This shows that the Church recognized by the state was not imbued with statehood yet and was essentially non-national. King Urnayr not only did not resist the consecration of the bishop of Albania by St. Gregory in Armenia but also went to be baptized himself.

Kalankatuatsi reports this:

**The brave Urnayr ... the great king ... accompanied by his grandees and nobles and numerous forces, arrived in Armenia and came into the presence of the king of gigantic strength. He received him in brotherly love and**

<sup>399</sup> Anninsky A.I. Op. Cit., p. 88-96.

<sup>400</sup> Mamedova F.D. "*Istoriya alban*" *Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo kak istochnik po obshchestvennoy stroyu rannesrednevekovoy Albanii* [The History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi as a Source on the Social System of the Early Medieval Albania], p. 179-180.

**friendship, placed himself at his disposal, and revealed to him the inward and outward mysteries in the company of St. Gregory and the whole Armenian army. Your king humbled himself, falling down and embracing their hands and feet, and related all the errors of the heathens and confessed his own past sins committed in ignorance.<sup>401</sup>**

Urnayr saw no political background, influence, or interference in it. The Armenian Church was still not political and could not impose its will, but it was able to provide a foundation for the rising new Church, in which the Albanian state was so interested.

### 1.3.6. *Holy Martyr Grigoris of Albania*

After establishing the Albanian Church, St. Gregory, based on our historian's account, returned to Armenia, retired from church ministry around 325, and "... consecrated his son Vrtanes in his place, establishing him upon the patriarchal throne; he was full of grace inherited from his father and lived according to his teaching."<sup>402</sup> The Albanian historian is not quite correct here. Following St. Gregory's departure from the see, the patriarchal throne in Armenia was succeeded by his younger son Aristaces I (325-333), who participated in the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and was martyred in 333. His elder brother Vrtanes (333-341) occupied the see after him.

Vrtanes had two sons, one of whom was named Grigoris after his grandfather. Grigoris was born in Caesarea in Cappadocia (modern-day Kayseri in Turkey). We find information about him in Chapter 14 of Book 1 of *History of Albania* by Movses Kalankatuatsi as well as in the works by Movses Khorenatsi and Faustus of Byzantium.

Faustus of Byzantium describes Grigoris' birth and upbringing:

**Vrtanes had been married, but was childless. For a long time he beseeched God not to deprive him of the blessing of a son, a fruit of his own who he would place**

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<sup>401</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 11, p. 11.

<sup>402</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 21.



in the Lord's service. In [Vrtanes'] old age the Lord heard his prayers, his wife became pregnant and bore twin sons. [Vrtanes] named one of them after his father Gregory, and the other, Yusik. They were raised in the presence of the king of Armenia and they took care to give them an education. Subsequently, the senior son, Grigoris, who was an attractive, virtuous individual, full of spiritual accomplishments and knowledge of God, attained the episcopate in the areas of Aghuania and Iberia [Georgia]. He did not marry, but already at the age of fifteen became bishop of the land of Iberia and Aghuania, that is to say, of the borders of the Mazkutk. Going there, he renovated the churches with luminous orders, resembling his [grand] father Gregory in his actions.<sup>403</sup>

Movses Khorenatsi provides the reasons for Grigoris' consecration as bishop at such an early age:

With great energy the blessed Trdat waged a campaign for the faith and moral life ... Therefore the governors of the northeastern regions, the commanders of the distant city called Paytakaran, came and said to the king: "If you wish to rule those lands in the true way according to this faith, send them bishops from the line of Saint Gregory because they are seeking them very ardently. And we know for certain that they will respect them for the famous name of Gregory and his posterity and will do everything according to their commands." The blessed Trdat, trusting in this, gave them as bishop the young Grigoris, the elder son of Vrtanes. Although he thought the matter uncanonical, considering his young age, nonetheless, seeing the nobility of his spirit and reflecting that Solomon had become king of Israel at twelve years of age [cf. 3 Kings 2:12], he sent him with great confidence, in the company of a certain Sanatruk of his own Arsacid family.<sup>404</sup>

Grigoris was ordained bishop by his father, Lord Vrtanes. Kalankatuatsi recounts the activities of Grigoris in Albania:

For at the age of fifteen the young Grigoris was consecrated bishop of Georgia and Albania, and he went and taught in these two lands and established the Christian faith there; he built churches in accordance with the orders and towns and consecrated priests, exhorting all to serve holiness

<sup>403</sup>

Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 5, p. 8.

<sup>404</sup>

Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 255-256.

**and to be zealous in the commemoration of the saints. Aflame with the zeal of apostolic righteousness, he fulfilled the command of the incarnate Son of God, circulating among all**

the heathens, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, teaching them to keep all the Lord's commandments and to carry with them no gold, silver or bronze, but only a staff and scrip. Teaching all these things, the blessed man received as his fitting and most valuable reward the honored blood of the great patriarch and martyr Zacharias, the father of John, and the relics of St. Pantaleon, who confessed the true faith of Christ and was crowned a martyr in the town of Nicomedia. He brought the most holy relics of the martyrs to the great town of Tsri<sup>405</sup> in the principality of Albania, built a small church there, and deposited therein with great care part of the blood of Zacharia and the relics of St. Pantaleon, appointing a priest named Daniel to watch over and serve the martyrs in Christ.

He took half of the relics of St. Zacharias and the blessed Pantaleon with him to the country of Maskutk and came into the presence of Sanesan, king of the Mas- kutk, who was of the Arsacid family. He preached [there] ... At first they joyfully accepted the word of the gospel. Evil Satan, however, entered their hearts and tempted them to resent the redeeming commandments of the Lord, and they began to reject the true authoritative words of the blessed man. For in his sermons he quoted the wish of the kind Lord that men should not loot, plunder, or steal, but should labor manfully and rejoice in the Lord; and they said: *"This is a ruse on the part of the king of Armenia to prevent us from looting his country; if we do not loot, how shall we live?"* They then persuaded the king to listen to their wiles, tied the young Grigoris to the tail of a mettlesome steed, and released it into the Vatnean plain. Thus was the saint martyred.

His disciples retrieved his body and took it to the cosmopolis of Amaras in the province of Haband. There he was laid to rest in a chapel near the north side of the church.<sup>406</sup>

Khorenatsi relates the cause of Grigoris' murder to the arrival of news of Tiridates' death to Sanatrak.<sup>407</sup>

The researcher Rashid Geyushev holds that the grandson of Gregory the Illuminator headed the Albanian Church during the period from 330

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<sup>405</sup> The city of Tsri in the "land of the Chilbs" is mentioned only by Movses Kalankatuatsi. However, the location of this city cannot be accurately determined based on his information (for more details see Dzhamalov Y.R. Gorod Tsri i strana chilbov v "Istorii alban" Moiseya Kalankatuytskogo [The City of Tsri and the Land of the Chilbs in the History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi], p. 65-80).

<sup>406</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 22-23.

<sup>407</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 256.

to 337.<sup>408</sup> Still, we must question this date. Since Khorenatsi links St. Grigoris' martyrdom to the death of the Armenian king Tiridates III, we have to date Grigoris' death to 330 or 331. The beginning of St. Grigoris' episcopal ministry should be attributed to the time after the seclusion of St. Gregory the Illuminator (c. 325). Thus, 325 to 330 can be regarded as the period of St. Grigoris' service.

St. Grigoris, as evidenced by the historians, "renovated and restored the churches" situated in the Albanian country. This work might have taken several years. Then Grigoris went on a preaching mission to the camp of the Hun tribes, the Maskuts, to meet their leader Sanesan, who was a relative of the Albanian and Armenian Arsacids. The Maskuts, or Massagetae, lived on the coast of the Caspian Sea and belonged to the Scythian tribes. According to Anania Shirakatsi's 7th century *Geography*, their dwelling place was near the western shores of the Caspian Sea and extended to the city of Derbent.

The apostolic mission of Grigoris ended in tragedy. The saint was martyred in the Vatnean field:<sup>409</sup> "Taking a wild horse, they bound the lad Grigoris, tied him to the horse's tail and let the horse run free across the plain which borders the great northern sea outside their camp, in the Vatneay plain. Thus did they kill the virtuous preacher of Christ, the lad Grigoris."<sup>410</sup>

Most researchers call the Dagestani village of Nyugdi (Molla-Khalil), which is 37 km away from Derbent,<sup>411</sup> the place of St. Grigoris' martyrdom. This place is

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<sup>408</sup> Geyushev R.B. *Khristianstvo v Kavkazskoy Albanii* [Christianity in Caucasian Albania], p. 34.

<sup>409</sup> A number of researchers locate the Vatnean field in the valley of the Aras and Kura lower reaches. According to the Dagestani historian E.I. Kozubsky specializing in regional studies (Kozubsky E.I. *Istoriya Derbenta. Temir-Khan-Shura* [The History of Derbent. Temir-Khan-Shura], 1906. P. 12), the Vatnean plain, "as legend has it, has been located 30 versts south of Derbent, near the village of Molla-Khalil, where the Grigoris chapel stands."

<sup>410</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 6, p. 14.

<sup>411</sup> Shikhsaidov A.R. O proniknovenii khristianstva i islama v Dagestan [On the Penetration of Christianity and Islam into Dagestan], *Uchenye zapiski Instituta istorii, yazyka i literatury Dagestanskogo filiala AN SSSR* [Proceedings of the Institute of History, Language, and Literature of the Dagestan Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR]. Vol. III. Makhachkala, 1957. P. 54-76; Gadzhiyev V.G., Grigorian V. Dagestan v armyanskoy dorevolutsionnoy literature. Rostom-bek Yertzinkian o strane gor [Dagestan in the Armenian Pre-revolutionary Literature. Rostom-bek Yertzinkian on the Land of the Mountains], *Istoriografiya istorii Dagestana dosovetskogo perioda* [The Historiography of History of Dagestan in the Pre-Soviet Period]. A collection of articles. Makhachkala, 1986. P. 132; Kozubsky E.I. *Istoriya Derbenta. Temir-Khan-Shura* [The History of Derbent. Temir-Khan-Shura], p. 12; Khanbabayev K.M. Khristianstvo v Dagestane v IV-XVIII w. [Christianity in Dagestan in the 4th-18th centuries], *Sobraniye trudov Tsentra sistemykh regionalnykh issledovaniy i prognozirovaniya ISPI RAN. Yuzhnorossiyskoye obozreniye* [The Collected Papers of the Center of Systematic Regional Studies and Forecasting of the Institute of Social and Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. South-Russian Review], Vol. 20, 2004.

marked by the church built at the site of an ancient chapel in 1916. Yet, the modern researcher Akopian believes Old Khachmas to have been the actual place of St. Grigoris' martyrdom.<sup>412</sup> St. Grigoris is traditionally commemorated on the penultimate Sunday in August.<sup>413</sup>

St. Grigoris is only one in a series of Albanian martyrs, which started with the apostolic father Eliseus. Despite numerous attempts, Christianity found it hard to penetrate the minds of Caucasian mountainous tribes. Therefore, the researcher of the events described may be right in saying of St. Grigoris' martyrdom: "This example provides striking evidence that Christianity had no solid ground here, whereas the Caucasus consisting of various tribes was not ready to accept the teaching of Christ. And it, like a log thrown into the sea, was thrown back to the shore."<sup>414</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi supports this view of events following St. Grigoris' death: "After the martyrdom of Grigoris ... the barbarous people of the eastern regions fell once more into heathen idolatry, and ... brought persecution upon the Christians."<sup>415</sup>

As we can see, St. Eliseus begins his preaching activity from the land of the Maskuts, to whom he gives a "taste of Salvation," while the mission of St. Grigoris ends on the land of the Maskuts, who remain unaffected by the "Salvation." But this is not the main point. In the early 4th century and even before, various efforts were made to preach Christianity, but we can hardly speak of the absolute success of these missions. Christianity could not take root here, although some people holding the reins of power leaned towards it all the same. Movses Kalankatuatsi lists the kings of Albania: "Those who subsequently became the ten kings of Albania bore the following names: Vachagan the Brave, Vache, Urnayr, Vachagan [II], Mrhawan, Satoy, Asay, Esualen, Vache [III], then Vachagan [III] the Pious, king of Albania,"<sup>416</sup> noting that "there were many God-loving and pious folk in their own time who lived

<sup>412</sup> Akopian A.A. K khronologii zaversheniya etnokonsolidatsii udinov i lezgin (period os- lableniya Arabskogo khalifata) [On the Chronology of Completion of Ethnic Consolidation of the Udis and Lezghins (the Period of Weakening of the Arab Caliphate)], p. 139-140.

<sup>413</sup> The Armenian Church celebrates the feast day of St. Grigoris on the 3rd Saturday before the Nativity of Jesus or on the 3rd Sunday of the Vardavar holiday (Transfiguration of Jesus) together with commemoration of other sons and grandsons of Gregory the Illuminator, as well as on Monday after the 5th Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (finding of relics) (Nikonorov Alexy, hieromonk. Grigoris of Albania. *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. XIII. Moscow, 2011. P. 86-87).

<sup>414</sup> Martirosian A.A. Op. Cit., p. 120.

<sup>415</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 54.

<sup>416</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 24.

and passed away.”<sup>417</sup> The word “many” means that there were many others, who did not live a “God-loving life,” i.e. they were not Christians. Like any faith, Christianity was still a matter of personal preference.

### 1.3.7. *King Esualen and Mesrop Mashtots*

Christianity is known to be a written teaching, and it could not but create its own written culture in Albania, which was fully in line with the essence of the Christian Church. The foreign language literature of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century may have been dual-layered: ecclesiastical-Christian and state-civil. It can be assumed that, like neighboring countries, the emerging Christian state of Albania and the nascent Church created their own history and literature as unique acts of self-assertion independent of each other. We will probably never know the names of the first historians of the Albanian Church. Movses Kalankatuatsi regrets it too: “It would be most desirable to have chronological accounts of the events from the reign of Aran down to the present time, but the diversity of the nations of the east and the destruction of books and testaments by fire explain why [this is not possible].”<sup>418</sup>

Zenob Glak,<sup>419</sup> the 4th-century Armenian historian of Syrian origin, relates that a stele was placed on the grave of the soldiers, who had fallen in a clash with the priestly army in the area called Innaknian, carrying a Greek and Syriac inscription written “in Syriac and Hellenic script, Greek and Ishmaelite characters.”<sup>420</sup> This testimony has a symbolic meaning: the official Christian Church commemorated its martyrs with someone else’s alphabet, Greek and Syriac. Hence, it is clear that throughout the 4th century the Christian literature in the Caucasus and especially in Caucasian Albania was created in a non-native language; moreover, the church service was performed in non-native languages for the Albanians. The population of Albania was still very dimly aware of the new faith to which the state had converted: “Only a few who were more or less familiar with Greek or Syriac letters understood the faith. Those who were illiterate — that is, the diverse mass of people, *nakharars*, and peasants — could not understand or remember a word, a morsel, anything, even

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<sup>417</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *History of the Aghuans*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. Long Branch, 2010. Book 1, Chapter 15. P. 18.

<sup>418</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 8, p. 6-7.

<sup>419</sup> Zenob Glak was a Syrian abbot of the Glak Monastery in the early 4th century, who wrote the *History of Taron*, describing the struggle of Christians against pagans in the vast canton of Taron, near Lake Van. Zenob presents himself as a disciple of St. Gregory the Illuminator in his work. The text was published in 1708 (Constantinople) and in 1832 (Venice); translation: Langlois V. *Collection des historiens arméniens*. Vol.1. Paris, 1867.

<sup>420</sup> Zenob Glak. *History of Taron*. Venice, 1832. P. 31 (in Classical Armenian).

if teachers poured faith on them day and night, like a torrential rain from the clouds."<sup>421 422</sup>

Faustus of Byzantium indicates that St. Gregory set up "Greek and Syrian schools" in various places — enough to educate the clergy for a hundred years. And indeed, over the course of the next century the Albanian clergy became acquainted with the mystery of Christian teaching in foreign languages — and held this mystery, sequestered in foreign tongues, for a whole century too.

The influence and historical role of Syrians in Caucasian Albania are another topic. "As for the East," N.V. Pigulevskaya writes, "the Syrians controlled the large and small trade ... They maintained the closest ties with Armenia ... Trade relations provided a fertile ground for Syrian influence all over Transcaucasia."<sup>\*132</sup>

The authors of the famous book *Istoriya Drevnego mira* [The History of the Ancient World] state that the language problem concerned not only the Church but also the nation: "The Sassanids destroyed the Christian churches, forcibly imposing Zoroastrianism ... The literary Albanian language and, most of all, the common koine language never appeared. This was contrasted by the spread of not only Middle Median, but also Middle Persian (at the expense of Sasanian resettlers from the south)."<sup>423</sup>

The territory of the Albanian state may have been partially Hellenized to some extent even in earlier times under the Seleucids. Therefore, the Sassanids realized that the local population's cultural affinity with their western neighbors who shared the Christian faith posed a danger to them, orienting people towards Byzantium. For this reason, they closed the Greek schools throughout the territory under their control, prohibited the use of the Greek language, and confiscated theological texts in Greek from the church. At the same time, every possible effort was made to impose the Persian language, religion, and customs upon them.

The Transcaucasian peoples responded to this ruthless policy of cultural assimilation by inventing their own alphabets, which were destined to play a crucial part in preserving national identity.

The creation of alphabets for the Transcaucasian peoples is associated with the name of the Armenian monk Mesrop Mashtots.

When Mesrop (c. 361-440) was young, he was an official of the Arsacid state. He knew Greek and learned Syriac and Persian while at court. After completing

<sup>421</sup> Quoted from: Martirosian A. A. Op. Cit., p. 33.

<sup>422</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Blizhny Vostok. Vizantiya. Slavyane* [The Middle East. Byzantium. The Slavs], Leningrad, 1976. P. 77.

<sup>423</sup> *Istoriya Drevnego mira* [The History of the Ancient World]. Edited by I.M. Dyakonov, V.D. Neronova, I.S. Svetsitskaya. Vol. III. *Upadok drevnikh obshchestv* [The Decline of Ancient Societies]. Moscow, 1983. P. 213.

military service, he became a monk and went to preach the Gospel in the most abandoned and remote parts of Armenia.

According to the account of Koriun,<sup>424</sup> his biographer and immediate disciple, Mesrop, faced with the threat of Persian assimilation, realized the need to create a writing system for the successful propagation of faith and preservation of national identity. He shared his thoughts with the Armenian catholicos Sahak (c. 348-439). Around 405, Mesrop invented an alphabet of 36 letters that represented all the sounds of the Armenian language. Then Mashtots went to Syunik, finding in his disciple Anania a companion able to disseminate the script and enlighten the people in Syunik. However, that was not the end of it for Metropolitan Anania himself (414-456).<sup>425</sup> The Albanian historian reports that

**after this, at Mesrob's request, [Anania] took Benjamin along with him and went to the land of the Aghuans, to King Esvaghen. Jointly they created letters for the harsh-sounding language of that (Albanian – A. N.) people. He cleansed the remaining idol worship and illuminated the (Albanian – A. N.) land with divine teaching for a second time. He left Benjamin there in charge of translation and schools for the young and then he, Anania, wanted to depart (to Syunik – A. N.). Esvaghen the Aghuanian king ... bestowed upon [Anania] a splendid honor, out of the greatest gratitude. He gave him his own royal banner ... and commanded that it should always accompany the bishops of Siwnik as they circulated about, in memory of the Aghuanian kings.**<sup>426</sup>

Thus, the Syunik metropolitan Anania contributed to spreading the script in Syunik; the same prelate also facilitated the writing reform in neighboring Caucasian Albania, which created its own alphabet distinct from the Armenian one (containing 52 phonemes, rather than the 36 in the Armenian script), carried out translations, and set up schools.

The historian B.A. Arutyunian, relying on Koriun's evidence, points to 422 as the year of Mesrop Mashtots' arrival in Albania.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*. Translated by B. Norehad. New York, 1964.

<sup>425</sup> Based on the list of bishops of the diocese of Syunik. See Grigorian G.M. *Ocherki istorii Syunika IX-XV vv.* [Essays on the History of Syunik in the 9th-15th centuries]. Yerevan, 1990.

<sup>426</sup> Stepannos Orbelean. *History of the State of Sisakan*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. Long Branch, 2012. Chapter 16. P. 29.

<sup>427</sup> Arutyunian B.A. Administrativno-politicheskoye sostoyaniye severo-vostochnykh oblastey tsarstva Velikoy Armenii v 387-451 gg. [The Administrative and Political State of Northeastern Provinces of the Kingdom of Greater Armenia in 387-451]. *K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and



In Chapters XVI-XVII of his work, Koriun describes the activities of Mashtots in Albania as follows: "Then there came and visited them an elderly man, an Albanian named Benjamin. And he [Mesrop] inquired and examined the barbaric diction of the Albanian language, and then through his usual god-given keenness of mind invented an alphabet, which he, through the grace of Christ, successfully organized and put in order."<sup>428</sup> And further:

**And then he bid farewell to them in order to go to the region of the Albanians and arrived in their country, and upon reaching the royal regions, he saw the saintly Bishop of the Albanians whose name was Jeremiah, and their King, whose name was Arsvagh (Esvaghen, Esualen — A. N.), who along with the nobility received [him] in the name of Christ with utter compliance. And then they inquired and he explained the reason for his coming. And they, the two associates, the King and the Bishop, expressed their readiness to adopt the letters and ordered that a large number of youths be gathered from provinces and places in the realm to open schools in suitable places to make provisions for their livelihood.**

**And when this order was actually fulfilled and bore results, Bishop Jeremiah soon began the translation of the divine books, whereby at once in one instant, the barbaric, slothful, and brutal men become well acquainted with the prophets and the apostles, becoming heirs to the gospel, and in no way ignorant of the divine traditions. Moreover, the God-fearing King of the Albanians promptly commanded the satanic and devil worshipping nation to withdraw and to free itself from the old superstitions and to submit to the sweet yoke of Christ.**

**And when they had accomplished it and had done all that was needed and that which he wanted, he was aided in his sacred task of indoctrination, in the region of Baghas,<sup>429</sup> by the saintly Bishop whose name was Moushegh. He then took leave of the Albanian King, the Bishop, and the church. And he named a few of his pupils as overseers over them along with one of the royal priests whose name was Jonathan, who had shown much eagerness for his instruction.**

**And committing them and himself to God's providential mercy, he resumed**

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Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia]. Yerevan, 1991. P. 26.

<sup>428</sup> Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*, Chapter XVI. P. 40.

<sup>429</sup> The region of Baghas is the province of Balasagan in Caucasian Albania, now the territory of the Mughan Plain (it may have extended to Absheron in the north).

### his journey from the regions of Albania to the land of Georgia.<sup>430</sup>

Interestingly, it has been conjectured that the priest Benjamin was sent by the Alans (or even the Huns). The historiography is known to have often mixed the ethnonyms *Alans* and *Albanians*. This is illustrated by a passage regarding the clash of Artashes with the Alans, borrowed by Kalankatuatsi from Khorenatsi.<sup>431</sup> However, the former turned the Alans into the Albanians.<sup>432</sup> The question was thoroughly discussed by A. A. Martirosian in a study dedicated to the Alan script.<sup>433</sup>

The Armenian researchers primarily believe that, according to Movses Kalankatuatsi, Mashtots invented the writing system for only one of 26 Albanian tribes, the Gargareans, and that Mashtots could not have created the cross-national Albanian alphabet. This was allegedly impossible: "Mashtots had to rely on one single language or dialect, and the Albanian script was not able to draw, bond together, unite the other languages of Albania."<sup>434</sup>

Gadzhiev answers the question of what made Movses Khorenatsi and later Movses Kalankatuatsi report that the alphabet had been created for the Gargarean language, rather than Albanian. The researcher holds that, based on information from written sources about the ethnic composition of Caucasian Albania, particularly the Albanians and the Gargareans, they must be recognized as being closely allied tribes, which spoke various dialects (or subdialects) of the same language, but also differed from each other in some way, causing them to have independent ethnonyms.<sup>435</sup>

Dzhafarov convincingly proves in his research on the Albanian script that the writing system was invented at that time

**in a language understandable to most of the population of Albania, which had quite objective prerequisites and reflected the long overdue process of forming a common spiritual culture and ethnic identity. The multilingual nature of population of Albania, 26 tribes described by Strabo that were not related to each other and did not understand each other — these are the realities of pre-state Albania since the beginning of the Iron Age ... The Gargarean dialect of the Uti language, in which the script was created, was**

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<sup>430</sup> Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*, Chapter XVII, p. 41-42.

<sup>431</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*, Book 2, Chapter 50, p. 191-193.

<sup>432</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 8, p. 7.

<sup>433</sup> Martirosian A.A. Op. Cit., p. 163-173.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>435</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. K interpretatsii svedeniya o sozdanii pismennosti Kavkazskoy Albanii [On the Interpretation of Information about Script Creation in Caucasian Albania]. *Albania Caucasica*, No. I. Moscow, 2015. P. 186.

comprehensible both to the population of the right-bank Kura (Uti, Artsakh, Paytakaran) and the essentially Aluanian population of the left bank (Kapalak, Shaki, Yekhni, Bekh, Kambechan, etc.). This is evident at least from the simple fact that the creation of writing in the dialect of the right bank did not reflect the isolation and cultural backwardness of the left-bank Albanian regions. We know from Movses Kalankatuatsi's work that bishops from the left-bank part of Albania — the former capital of Kapalak and Shaki — sometimes became Albanian catholicoi. After being elected, they moved from their left-bank dioceses to the capital of Partaw and spoke with bishops, princes (*nakharars*), feudal nobles (*azats*), and ordinary people (*ramiks*) of the right bank in their native language, understandable to everyone without resorting to the services of translators. This Gargarean language basically turned into Albanian, being the language of the script, church, and state.<sup>436</sup>

Nevertheless, there are historians who generally question whether one person could have invented the writing system for three peoples. Despite the accounts of ancient authors about the formation of not only the Armenian but also the Georgian and Albanian script by Mashtots, the researcher A.G. Perikhanian considers that

the creation of a new writing system serving a particular language cannot be reduced to "letter-making," since this is a large and complicated process, including in the first place the isolation of phonemes of this language and requiring a profound knowledge of both phonetics and structure of the language. But Mashtots did not know either Georgian or Albanian, and Koriun's report of Mashtots collecting information about the sound composition of these languages there, on this spot, should not be given much weight, because the information collected this way cannot be deemed adequate for such an undertaking.<sup>437</sup>

It is also suggested that Mashtots, being the inventor of the Armenian alphabet and having experience in this matter, may have taken part in developing the

<sup>436</sup> Dzhamalov Y.R. *Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost* [The Gargareans and the Aluanian Script], p. 49-50.

<sup>437</sup> Perikhanian A.G. K voprosu o proiskhozhdenii armyanskoy pismennosti [On the Origin of the Armenian Script], *Peredneaziatskiy sbornik* [Western Asia Collection], No. 2. Moscow, 1966. P. 126-127.

Albanian alphabet as a consultant.<sup>438</sup>

With regard to Mashtots' mission, however, we see that he was surrounded by local assistants at every stage of his activities in Albania. The scholar Jean-Pierre Mahé stresses that at first Mashtots created the alphabet together with the Albanian Benjamin, who explained to him the meaning of various words from the Albanian language that he did not know himself. This method did not differ much from that used by modern researchers of Caucasian languages dealing with local speakers.

When the king and the bishop accepted Mashtots' proposal, he opened schools based on the methods already tested in various places, unlike Iberia, where the king preferred a centralized organization: "He ordered all children from all districts and *gavars* of the kingdom to be gathered and handed over to the teachers." Albania, on the contrary, intended to distribute schoolchildren among various settlements.

Yet, while in Byzantium Mashtots spread his teaching himself, in Albania he was completely hidden behind his local assistants, who were well versed in their native tongue.<sup>439</sup>

Gadzhiev has rightly said about Mesrop Mashtots' role in inventing the Caucasian alphabets: "The issue of initiating and leading the creation of the Caucasian Albanian script, which is often emphasized by denying, diminishing, or praising Mashtots' role, should not be at the heart of the problem, overshadowing the very essence of the most important deed in the cultural and ideological life of Caucasian Albania, as well as Mesrop and Benjamin's most active and energetic, central and direct participation in this event."<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>438</sup> Gukasian V.L. O nekotorykh voprosakh istorii albanskoy pismennosti i literatury [On Some Issues of History of the Albanian Script and Literature]. *Izvestiya AN AzSSR* [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR], p. 87-88.

<sup>439</sup> Mahe J.-P. Mesrop Mashtots i albansky alfavit [Mesrop Mashtots and Albanian Alphabet], *Albania Caucasica*, No.I. Moscow, 2015. P. 174.

<sup>440</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. K interpretatsii svedeny o sozdanii pismennosti Kavkazskoy Albanii [On the Interpretation of Information about Script Creation in Caucasian Albania], p. 181.

The Armenian Church is known to have been rigidly nationalized under state pressure. The fight for this began back in the 4th century during the time of Tiridates III and Gregory the Illuminator, and it took a whole century for the church writing to become national. The church in Armenia was nationalized by alienating it from Caesarea, as representing the Orthodox Greek East. The Church of Caucasian Albania had to depart from Vagharshapat.<sup>441</sup> This intention seems to have really existed and been clearly realized. It is evidenced by Movses Kalankatuatsi, who expresses the sentiments of the Albanian state and its church.

The legend of St. Eliseus or some of its individual details may have been created to escape the influence of the Armenian Church, intending to reinforce the idea that the Albanian Church was directly connected to Jerusalem, rather than the Armenian Church. The Albanian historian relates that Eliseus was one of the disciples of Thaddaeus the Apostle, who had been martyred in Armenia. Upon returning to Jerusalem, he was ordained by St. James and came back to Albania. During his journey, as Movses Kalankatuatsi notes, Eliseus deliberately escaped Armenia. Hence, the Albanian Church builds its spiritual foundation on St. Eliseus, who came from Jerusalem and received the apostolic mission from James the Apostle himself, brother of the Lord, and who had nothing to do with Armenia.

We can observe the same trend in Mesrop Mashtots' story narrated by Movses Kalankatuatsi. Mashtots traveled to Jerusalem, returned from there with his disciples and a piece of the Cross of Christ to bless the Albanian Church,<sup>442</sup> and after the death of Mashtots his disciples turned to Jerusalem again, asking for a new leader, "for the true illumination of the lands of the East began in Jerusalem with St. Eliseus."<sup>443</sup>

As can be seen from the analysis of Movses Kalankatuatsi's text and political realities of that time, there was an internal conflict between the Albanian and Armenian Churches, but at the same time there was also an urge to remain allies in order to withstand external threats. The latter prevailed, because national interests were to become an incentive for the church. In the 5th century, Caucasian Albania was ruled by Sasanian Iran and the only religious ally that remained was neighboring Armenia. These two countries had to form a united front of resistance, so there was absolutely no need for Caucasian Albania to feud with Armenia. But in the long run, this alliance led the Albanian Church

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<sup>441</sup> Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin) was the capital of Armenia starting from the 2nd century. Later the city became the main spiritual center of the Armenian Church.

<sup>442</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 54.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 28, p. 56.

to a catastrophe, when the Armenian clergy managed to take advantage of the political situation and subjugate the church of its neighbors.

Movses Kalankatuatsi touches twice on Mashtots' activities: in Chapter 27 of Book One and in Chapter 3 of Book 2. And both of these passages are borrowed from different sources which seem to contradict each other. In Book 1, the author tells stories from the life of Mashtots, which are unknown to Koriun and Movses Khorenatsi. Here is one of them:

After the martyrdom of Grigoris, catholicos of Albania, the harharous people of the eastern regions fell once more into heathen idolatry, and making many vows to the fire temples, brought persecution upon the Christians. One of the first vardapets, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit invented letters for three peoples, namely, the Armenians, Albanians, and Georgians, subsequently went to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage, and returning thence with his disciples and the silver cross plated with gold in which was a piece of the Cross of Christ, he passed through Armenia into the eastern regions to the province of Uti; and he dwelt among marshy places and moss-covered swamps in the place called Gis.

He revived the church and strengthened the Faith and spread the teaching of the gospel to the land of the Utians, the Albanians, the Lpink, the Kaspk, up to the Cholay Pass, and to other foreign tribes whom Alexander of Macedon had captured and settled around the great Mount Caucasus, namely, the Gargark and the Kami- chik Hep-talk (Hephthalites); he reconverted them to the Christian faith and taught them the form of worship which they had learned long ago and had now forgotten. A perfect preacher and apostle to the barbarous mountain tribes, he taught them to write in their own language. Thence he returned and dwelt in the marshes, hiding from the menace of the cruel princes. Hidden there, he daily added to the strength of the Church of God. Then the spirit of error incited the minds of the bestial tyrants, and in their fury they strove to kill him; hut the blessed Mashtots, forewarned by the Holy Ghost, hastily dug a hole of appropriate size, and taking the divine treasure, the Cross of the Lord, he placed it in a box and concealed it in the hole in the ground. Afterwards, his true and faithful disciples, unanimously putting their trust in prayer, agreed to divide into two groups; the first intended to go up into the provinces, while the other, traversing many lands, went to preach the faith. Those who remained at the site of the cross received the martyr's crown within a few days, and at the scene of their martyrdom brilliant signs and wonderful miracles occurred.

These were seen on many occasions by the unbelievers who, learning that

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**these miracles were of God, believed with one accord and were baptized in the faith.<sup>444</sup>**

This is a purely hagiographic tale intended for the first preachers of Christianity. Further, Movses Kalankatuatsi reports that one of the newly converted built a mud-brick chapel over the Cross, collected the relics of the martyrs in a wooden shrine, and placed them in the chapel. An annual pilgrimage to this place began, many sick people were healed there, and a church was built at the site called Gis (Kish).

Here is the second passage:

**In the days when Theodosius the Little was emperor of Greece, Vramshapuh king of Armenia, Yazkert king of Persia, and Esualen king of Albania, the blessed Mes-rob, the worthy and chosen vessel of the Holy Spirit, came to our patriarch Er-emia and King Asualen in Albania, and they voluntarily accepted his teaching in accordance with the divine gifts which had been granted him and through which the Holy Spirit gave an alphabet to the Armenians and Georgians. They were well pleased and gave him chosen youths to teach, and from Siwnik he summoned the interpreter Benjamin whom the young Vasak sent through Bishop Anania. They came to Mesrob, and with their aid he created an alphabet for the guttural, disjointed, barbarous, and harsh language of the Gargaratsik. He left his pupil Yovnatana here as spiritual overseer, appointed priests at the king's court, and returned to Armenia. He travelled to Byzantium to King Theodosius and returning thence journeyed about with his disciples. Hearing that there was still a heathen sect left in Gardman, he returned from Siwnik and approached Khurs, prince of Gardman. With his help he established orthodoxy, and then went to answer the summons of Ashushay, governor (*bdeashkh*<sup>155</sup>) of Georgia, who requested him to do the same work there.**

**At the same time the accursed Nestorius appeared and was cursed by the two hundred at Ephesus. In the first year of King Yazkert the Second's reign, St. Sahak died at the end of the month of Nawasard,<sup>445 446</sup> and six months afterwards the blessed Mesrob died and was laid to rest with the saints in the town of Valarshapat.<sup>447</sup>**

The Albanian historian did not neglect to mention the deaths of Sahak and

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<sup>445</sup> *Bdeashkh* was the ruler of a large borderland province, an aristocrat, the second highest official after the king. *Bdeashkhs* had their own court, army, levied taxes and duties, and even had the right to mint coins.

<sup>446</sup> Navasard (the Armenian New Year) is the first month of the old Armenian calendar. According to the Gregorian calendar, Navasard coincides with August.

<sup>447</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 3, p. 68-69.



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Mashtots in exactly the same expressions as Koriun: “The blessed Sahak ... on the first year of Jazdegerd [II] ... at the end of the month of Navasard ...

expired in Christ... six months after the death of blessed Sahak ... with the same godly life he [Mashtots — A. N.] reached the saintly end of those who have been summoned by Christ."<sup>448</sup>

In terms of traditional ecclesiastical content, the first story is close to the overall spirit and idea of the *History of Albania* itself. Here the author narrates in certain places how Mashtots' Cross was found, i.e. this plot or theme is not accidental in the book and is further developed.

If Movses Kalankatuatsi based his work on the church sources, he could not overlook the legend of Mashtots' apostolic mission in Caucasian Albania, which appears to have been widely circulated at that time. He copied or retold this story exactly as it was created by order of the church and in accordance with its interests. But at the same time, he also used another historical source, Movses Khorenatsi, whose account he was unable to neglect since it concerned Albania directly, and our historian collected everything that was related to his native country.

So what we have here are two images of one historical person. The characteristics of these two Mashtotses differ, but they complement, rather than contradict, each other. The point is that the first source, being a legend, documents traces of Mashtots' activities and those details about him which have survived in folk memory, while the second one recreates the historical reality. Together, they present a coherent picture of Mesrop Mashtots' historical role for Caucasian Albania.

1. It is clear from the first source that Albania knows about Mashtots directly, rather than "through the grapevine." This information does not originate from Koriun, and, interestingly, his name is mentioned here in the form of *Mashtots*, rather than *Mesrop*. The memory in this case does not stray far from its source.
2. Mashtots is recognized by the Albanian Church as a preacher and apostle, who re-established Christianity in Albania and renewed the Albanian Church.
3. This legend is created in the communities aspiring to the independence of the Albanian Church, and Mashtots here embodies the idea. The legend sends him to Jerusalem and brings him back to Albania to continue the work of St. Eliseus.
4. In the story, Mashtots acts as a preaching apostle, rather than an inventor of writing who creates alphabets for three peoples. This is mentioned in passing and, perhaps, only to emphasize who exactly Mashtots was:

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Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*, Chapters XXIV, XXVI, p. 48-49.

“One of the first vardapets, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit invented letters for three peoples.”

It does not matter whether these lines were added by the author of the *History of Albania* himself or not, since they are given in such a form that it becomes obvious: they refer to a well-known fact about “the one who invented letters.” The legend, however, aims to describe Mashtots’ apostolic mission, not the creation of writing.

5. The mention of Mashtots as the inventor of letters for three peoples rules out the suggestion that there could have been some other religious teacher with the same name or that Mashtots only preached in Albania and did not create writing, because the legend is silent about this. But it is not. In addition to the direct reference at the beginning – regardless of whether it was made by the author or not – it also says that Mashtots introduced the highlanders to literature and writing in their own language: “A perfect preacher and apostle to the barbarous mountain tribes, he taught them to write in their own language ..”<sup>449</sup>

As for the Albanian script itself, there have been multiple opinions about it in science for a long time.

For instance, some Armenian scholars have believed the Albanian writing to be Armenian writing created by the Armenian population of the Albanian provinces of Utik, Artsakh, and Gardman.<sup>450</sup>

Researchers with more moderate positions assume that the Albanian script may have existed, but for a very short period, approximately from the 5th to the 7th century. They hold that a single Albanian ethnicity never emerged in the course of history, preventing the development of the Albanian writing system and the formation of the common Albanian literary language.<sup>451</sup>

On the other hand, the Azerbaijani Albanologists have expressed the view that not only was the Albanian script created in the 5th century, but it also produced a wealth of original and translated literature of various genres. However, the Arab conquerors and the Armenian Church destroyed the original written records of Albania during the 7th to 10th centuries (often after translating them into Armenian).<sup>452</sup>

<sup>449</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 55.

<sup>450</sup> Akinian N.A. *Mashtots vardapet* [Mashtots Vardapet], p. 317-819.

<sup>451</sup> Shanidze A.G. Yazyk i pismo kavkazskikh albansev [The Language and Writing of the Caucasian Albanians]. *Vestnik Otdeleniya obshchestvennykh nauk AN GruzSSR* [Bulletin of the Department of Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR], p. 170.

<sup>452</sup> Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX vv.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 97.

The problem was that, for a long time, we knew about the Albanian script only from the scanty accounts of medieval historians and had practically no artifacts to support them.

The search for the extinct Albanian script has been underway since the "30s of the 19th century. During this period, there were many sensational reports about the discovery of Albanian handwritten texts or epigraphical chronicles, but each time the sensation was premature. The text always turned out to be executed by a type of Armenian or Greek writing unknown at the time or to represent a cryptogram. When hope was almost lost, Ilya Abuladze<sup>453</sup> found an Armenian textbook among the Etchmiadzin manuscripts, which listed the Albanian alphabet along with the Armenian, Greek, Hebrew, Georgian, Syriac, and Arabic ones. The effect was so huge that the exact date of the discovery was recorded in the scholarly literature (September 28, 1937), while the Armenian branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR printed the following communication in its periodical *Izvestiya*: "The young Georgian scholar Abuladze, who discovered... the Albanian alphabet, became worthy of eternal glory and reverence." The communication's author compared the scientists still doubting the authenticity of the discovered alphabet with those who suddenly came to light after staying in the dark for so long. Abuladze did not examine the alphabet he had discovered. He just published a report about the discovery of the Albanian alphabet and handed it over to A.G. Shanidze for study.<sup>454</sup>

A new impetus was given to the development of Albanian studies in 1948 to 1952, when several lapidary inscriptions and graffiti were unearthed on the territory of Azerbaijan and Dagestan during archaeological excavations. Today, they are conventionally combined into a corpus of Albanian inscriptions: an inscription on the pedestal of the cross found in Mingechevir, graffiti on two candlesticks, and graffiti on tiles. The whole corpus archeologically dates from the 6th to 9th centuries.

The discovery of two Caucasian Albanian manuscripts in Saint Catherine's

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<sup>453</sup> Abuladze Ilya Vladimirovich (1901-1968) was a Georgian philologist, Armenologist, paleographer, lexicographer, Doctor of Philology (1947), corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (1950), and Honored Worker of Georgian Science (1961). He founded the K. Kekelidze Institute of Manuscripts of the Georgian Academy of Sciences (now the Georgian National Center of Manuscripts) in 1958 and became its first director (1958-1969). I.V. Abuladze mainly conducted research on the Armenian and Georgian philology, Old Georgian language, and ecclesiastical literature.

<sup>454</sup> Shanidze Akaky Gavrilovich (1887-1987) was a Georgian philologist (linguist, literary historian, folklorist), corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (1939), and member of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian SSR (1941). Shanidze was one of the founders of Kartvelology in the 20th century. Shanidze's works were devoted to the synchronic and diachronic study of Kartvelian languages, research and publication of ancient Georgian monuments, Georgian dialectology, and the problem of Caucasian Albania and its writing.

Monastery on the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt), made by Alexidze<sup>455</sup> in 1994 to 1996, was a real sensation for the whole scholarly world. This event was called a turning point in the history of research on Caucasian Albania and the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus. It was preceded by very dramatic circumstances described in the scholarly literature, primarily in the first volume of the international publication of these manuscripts.<sup>456</sup>

On November 30, 1971, there was a fire in the Church of St. George on the territory of Saint Catherine's Monastery. In May 1975, during repair and renovation works, the monks uncovered a sealed crypt beneath the church altar, in which more than 1,100 manuscripts lay hidden. Most manuscripts written on parchment turned out to be Greek, the rest were Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopian, Slavic, and Georgian. Due to the similarity of lettering, the Greek Orthodox monks initially mistook 142 newly revealed manuscripts for the Armenian ones, but upon closer examination of the alphabets, assumed that these could be Georgian as well. The latter suggestion was fully vindicated by Ilia II, the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, who visited the monastery in 1984. Thus, this together with 85 previously known Georgian codices of the library brought the monastery's fund of Georgian manuscripts up to 227 units.

In 1990, the specialists of the K. Kikelidze Institute of Manuscripts of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, led by the Institute Director, Professor Alexidze, were invited to the monastery to catalog and microfilm the Georgian manuscripts. In the short time allotted, the Georgian scholars inventoried the finds, appending the most general descriptions. The identification of so many medieval texts is always a remarkable achievement, and no surprises were expected. However, the specialists detected a barely visible, lower text layer written in an unknown alphabet on one of the Georgian palimpsests of the new Sinai collection under inventory number Sin.Geo. No. 13. Due to poor legibility, this alphabet was initially mistaken for the Ethiopian one.

During the second trip in 1994, the Georgian archaeographers started to restore the individual manuscripts and their collections (codices), read the fragments of Georgian texts on the handwritten pages (destroyed to varying degrees), and identify

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<sup>455</sup> Alexidze Zaza Nikolayevich (1935-2023) was a Georgian historian, Armenologist, and linguist. He was the professor of the Tbilisi University, head of the Department of Armenian Studies, corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, and academician secretary of the Department of Language and Literature of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. He was the Director of the Institute of Manuscripts of the Georgian Academy of Sciences in 1989-2006 and professor of the Tbilisi Theological Academy. He managed the works to search and decipher the Albanian written artefacts for many years.

<sup>456</sup> *The Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of Mt. Sinai*. Vol.I. Edited by Jost Gippert, Wolfgang Schulze, Zaza Alexidze, Jean-Pierre Mahe. Turnhout, 2008. P. XX-XI.

them. On one of the last days of the mission, Alexidze noticed that, at the corners of the pages in one of the palimpsests under inventory number Sin.Geo. No. 55, a lower layer could be clearly seen underneath the upper layer of the Georgian text, with letters stylistically similar to the Armenian and Georgian ones, but not equivalent to any of them. The letters of this alphabet turned out to be identical to those revealed in the lower layer of palimpsest Sin.Geo. No. 13, but, unlike them, were much more legible. According to the researcher himself, it had been caused by the fire: the lower text had begun to appear from underneath the upper one due to the thermal effect on the parchment and “fossilization.” After comparing the unknown scripts with all known alphabets, including the Albanian alphabet from the Matenadaran and the Albanian epigraphs from Azerbaijan, the researcher identified the texts as Caucasian Albanian. To do so, he had to work without any special equipment except for a lamp, trying to make out the text in dim light while isolating the maximum number of alphabetical characters and their combinations. Such work was carried out during Alexidze’s trip in 1996. The scholar has confessed that this trip resulted in his eyesight deteriorating significantly; nevertheless, he received the material that allowed him to start deciphering the Caucasian Albanian text. That was a real scholarly feat in itself. The hard-won material helped clarify the meaning of many letters of the Caucasian Albanian alphabet and confidently establish the most common abbreviations, such as those for “God” and “Jesus Christ.” A year later, the first publication about the Sinai finds came out and caused quite a stir in scholarly circles.<sup>457</sup>

In 2000, as part of a large-scale project of electronic documentation of Caucasian languages, ultraviolet photographs taken at the monastery revealed the manuscripts to be a single codex. This codex was found to contain a text in the Caucasian Albanian language totaling 242 pages, of which 126 pages written in larger letters were the text of the lectionary and 112 pages

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<sup>457</sup> Alexidze Z.N. On the Discovery of Caucasian Albanian Writing. *Festschrift für Fairy von Lilienfeld zum 80. Geburtstag*. Berlin, 1997.

were the Gospel of John. The text on four pages was irretrievably lost. In addition, the lower layer included small fragments of texts in Armenian, Syriac, and Georgian. The obtained images allowed systematic work on cracking the code of the Caucasian Albanian text.

The key to deciphering turned out to be the codicology of Georgian and Armenian palimpsests. Since most of the newly discovered Georgian manuscripts were liturgical in nature, it occurred to Alexidze that the Albanian manuscript could also be a lectionary, a collection of annual liturgical readings.<sup>458</sup> The Georgian and Armenian lectionaries had the titles of biblical fragments written in smaller letters. Their verification against the titles of Caucasian Albanian palimpsest Sin. Geo. No. 55 made it possible to transcribe several dozen related titles, identify the names of apostles and evangelists, and ascertain the numerical designations of apostolic epistles and sacred names. By comparing the biblical toponyms and names with corresponding Armenian, Georgian, and Udi words, the specialists succeeded in establishing the meaning of all letters and deciphering a significant part of the manuscript.

Jost Gippert, Wolfgang Schulze, and Jean-Pierre Mahe made considerable efforts to read, translate, and analyze the palimpsests. Gippert and Schulze completed the decipherment of the text started by Alexidze. In addition, V. Schulze compiled a dictionary of Caucasian Albanian morphemes and published a linguistic analysis of the excerpt from the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. In 2004, multispectral photographs of all manuscript pages were taken using special equipment, and the scholars began work on publishing the texts.<sup>459</sup>

Two volumes of the *Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of Mt. Sinai*, edited by J. Gippert, V. Schulze, Z.N. Alexidze, and J.-P. Mahe, were issued as part of the collection *Monumenta Palaeographica Medii Aevi. Series Ibero-Caucasica* in 2008, including a historical essay, researcher comments, grammar description, and dictionary materials.

Alexidze, the discoverer of the Albanian palimpsests, draws the following conclusions based on the study of the uncovered artifacts:

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<sup>458</sup> Alexidze Z.N. Discovery and Decipherment of Caucasian Albanian Writing. *Bulletin of the Georgian Academy of Sciences*, No. 175/1. Tbilisi, 2007. P. 161-167.

<sup>459</sup> Maysak T.A. K publikatsii kavkazsko-albanskikh palimpsestov iz Sinayskogo monastyrya [On the Publication of Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests from the Sinai Monastery]. *Voprosy yazykoznaniya* [Topics in the Study of Language], No. 6, 2010. P. 90-91.

Today there can be no doubt that the Albanian script did exist — it was not nipped in the bud — and there was an advanced writing system in Albanian represented by the original Albanian script.

The discovered text is technically at the same high level as its contemporary Armenian and Georgian ones. The Albanian text is written in a beautiful uncial script, by a confident and experienced hand, in two columns, decorated with initial letters, featuring dividers and titlos. Textual glosses or references to paragraphs are added in small uncial letters in the margin. The titles are highlighted in larger letters than the font of the text itself. All things considered, the Albanian script is every bit as good as the Armenian and Georgian scripts of the same period and type.<sup>460</sup>

Now there is no question what was meant by the Albanian language in the historical sources: it was a language recorded in the Albanian palimpsests and dominating the liturgical and partly administrative spheres of life of Albania in the 5th-8th centuries. At the same time, the researchers emphasize that “nothing is known about other languages of Caucasian Albania,” although we can confidently assert that at least two language groups were spread there, including “the indigenous East Caucasian and Middle Persian languages closely related to Parthian ..”,<sup>461</sup> According to Alikberov, “after the Sasanian annexation of Albania, as well as in the preceding period, when the influence of Sasanian Iran on the Caucasus was particularly strong, Middle Persian was the most important language among lingua francas, as evidenced by many facts.”<sup>462</sup> Based on the study of gem seals of the Albanian king Esualen and the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan, as well as the dynastic ties of the Albanian Arsacids and Sassanids, Gadzhiyev says that Middle Persian language and writing played a significant role “both among the Albanian nobility and among the highest clergy of the country.”<sup>463</sup>

### 1.3.8. Albanian King Vache II

We can derive some information about the personality of the Albanian king

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<sup>460</sup> Alexidze Z.N. Chto mozhet rasskazat ob istorli tserkvi Kavkazskoy Albanii obnaruzhenny na Sinayskoy gore gruzino-albansky palimpsest [What Can the Georgian-Albanian Palimpsest Discovered on Mount Sinai Say about the History of the Church of Caucasian Albania]. *The History of Caucasus: the Scientific-Public Almanac*, No. 2. Baku, 2002. P. 15-26.

<sup>461</sup> *The Caucasian Albanian Palimpsests of Mt. Sinai*, Vol. I, p. 11-65.

<sup>462</sup> Alikberov A.K. Narody i yazyki Kavkazskoy Albanii. O yazykovom kontinuumе kak alternative koyne. Yazyk pismennosi i “yazyk bazara” [The Peoples and Languages of Caucasian Albania. On the Language Continuum as an Alternative to Koine. The Written Language and the “Bazaar Language”]. *Albania Caucasica*, No.I. Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 86-87.

<sup>463</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. *Gemma-pechat tsarya Albanii Asvarena* [The Gem Seal of the Albanian King Asvagen], p. 118.



Vache II from the Albanian historian's work. His description can be found in Chapters 10 and 11 of Book 1 of the *History of Albania*.

According to Bishop Makar Barkhudarian,<sup>464</sup> the reign of King Vache began in 444.<sup>465</sup> As it appears from the accounts of Movses Kalankatuatsi and Elishe, Vache was the son of the Albanian king Esualen by the Sasanian princess, daughter or sister of Shahanshah Yazdegerd II (439-457). His reign coincided with the period when the Albanian people waged a fierce struggle for their independence to freely profess Christianity with the Persians. There were many popular uprisings against the Sassanids in Caucasian Albania during that time.

Yazdegerd II, unlike his father, was hostile to the people of other faiths. The shahanshah is said to have arranged debates to familiarize himself with the common religions, but this only strengthened his desire to make Zoroastrianism the only religion in Iran. He also read the Gospel, but declared everything written in it to be a lie and began to oppress the Christians.<sup>466</sup> Therefore, the contemporary historian Elishe wrote about the king with hatred: "But him Satan made his accomplice, and spewing out all his accumulated venom filled him like a quiver with poisonous arrows. He began to wax haughty in his impiety; by his roaring he blew winds to the four corners of the earth; he made those who believed in Christ to appear as his enemies and opponents; and he tormented and oppressed them by his turbulent conduct"<sup>467</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi reports that initially King Vache was brought up in the Christian faith and considered himself a Christian, but then Yazdegerd II made him adopt the religion of the Persians: "In accordance with the national tradition he had previously been a Christian, but the lawless Yazkert (Yazdegerd — A. N.) had forced him to become a Magian."<sup>468</sup>

The vicissitudes of life for the Albanian king certainly fit into the general political context in the Caucasus. Starting from the 5th century, the Sassanids did everything they could to deprive the Albanian people of their sense of national

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<sup>464</sup> Makar Barkhudarian, bishop (1832-1906) was a historian, philologist, ethnographer, teacher, writer, and famous religious figure. Bishop Makar was engaged in ecclesiastical and educational work for many years, but also made a valuable contribution to literature and science. His most important historical and geographical books are *the History of the Alu- ank Country*, *the Aluank Country and Its Neighbors*, and *Artsakh*. Barkhudarian's last work, published in Baku in 1895, resulted from the author's painstaking and meticulous efforts to comprehensively and thoroughly study and describe all settlements, monasteries, churches, fortresses, bridges, lapidary inscriptions, and manuscripts in his native land.

<sup>465</sup> Barkhudarian M. *The Aghuank Region and Its Neighbors*. Tiflis, 1893. P. 75.

<sup>466</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 119.

<sup>467</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 1, p. 60-61.

<sup>468</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 9.

identity. They first attempted to weaken the church, realizing that it represented the only force capable of uniting the nation. We find almost no information in the sources about the heads of the Albanian Church until the mid-6th century, which suggests that since “the majority of Christians in Persia belonged to the Syriac culture,”<sup>469</sup> the Persian court promoted the Syriac clergy to the Albanian Church’s episcopal sees, which the Persians could better control.

In 449, Yazdegerd II issued a decree, ordering the Transcaucasian peoples to convert to Zoroastrianism and introducing cruel punishments for those who would persist in professing Christianity: “Let every nation and language under my authority abandon each one’s erring religion and only cleave to the worship of the sun, offering sacrifices and calling it god, and serving the fire.”<sup>470</sup> In addition to all this, let them fulfill the religion of magism and be negligent in nothing.”<sup>471</sup> Following the announcement of the decree, the people rose in revolt. As a result, the Transcaucasian countries waged an ongoing guerrilla war with the Sassanids for thirty-five years (until 484). The new Armenian catholicos Hovsep (Joseph) I Vayotsdzortsi (Ogotsimtsi) (444-451), disciple and successor of Sahak, gathered bishops and *nakharars* in Artashat in 449. Together they made up a document that proclaimed the superiority of Christianity over Zoroastrianism; they declared their submission to the king, but categorically rejected any religious dictate: “From this faith no one can shake us, neither angels nor men, neither sword nor fire nor water, nor any kind of cruel torture.”<sup>472</sup> “All these bishops and many chorepiscopi and honorable priests from many places, and the holy clergy of the church, with one accord and in unison, gathered in the capital city of Artashat, in concert

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<sup>469</sup> Guaita G.Op. Cit., p. 82.

<sup>470</sup> Speaking of the Zoroastrian religion, Elishe especially focuses on the rituals associated with fire worship. The cult of temple fires was widespread throughout the Iranian world and acquired a special significance under the Sassanids. The Christians’ refusal to worship fire was viewed as an audacious challenge to the official religion of Iran.

<sup>471</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 2, p. 71.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, p. 92.

with the greatest princes and all the people of the land, and wrote an answer to the letter.<sup>473</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi seems to retell these events in Chapter 2 of Book Two of the *History of Albania* from Elishe's account. In fact, the church clergy and representatives of noble families confirmed their loyalty to Iran, but at the same time declared their commitment to the Christian faith. However, Yazdegerd summoned a number of prominent princes to Ctesiphon and made them renounce Christianity and adopt Zoroastrianism, threatening otherwise to take away their rights to own *terutyuns* (hereditary lands) and hold public office. Many pretended to convert, while the Albanians, along with other Christian peoples of the Caucasus, unanimously rejected the apostates upon their return home: soldiers and servants did not obey their orders, relatives disowned them. The described events caused a revolt in 451, leading to the Battle of Avarayr fought by the army of Transcaucasian peoples under Vardan Mamikonian against the Persians. The battle ended in failure for the Caucasians, but after thirty-five years of guerilla warfare, the parties agreed to sign the Treaty of Nvarsak in 484: the Sassanids pledged not to force anyone into changing their religion, while King Balash (484-488) declared tolerance for the Christian faith and officially recognized the church.<sup>474</sup>

Returning to the Albanian king, we believe that Vache II's rejection of Christianity was ostensible, as his beliefs did not change at all. He probably had to do it to reduce the pressure on his country from Persians. After the death of Yazdegerd II in 457, King Vache publicly renounced Zoroastrianism under the influence of growing popular discontent. Having abandoned the religion of the magi, Vache converted his mother and wife to Christianity.

Movses Kalankatuatsi recounts how the peace, which temporarily came to the Persian state, was broken when the Albanian king Vache refused to submit after the enthronement of Sassanid Peroz I (459-484), i.e. after 459. Vache opened the Chor passes (Derbent gates) and led in the Maskut forces, then allied himself to the eleven mountain kings (leaders), opposed the Persians, and defeated them.<sup>475</sup>

The Persians repeatedly tried to enter into negotiations with Vache to no avail. Then they summoned one of the hordes of the Khaylandurs, the Caucasian Huns, forced the Derbent pass, rallied a large number of Huns,

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<sup>473</sup> Ibid., Chapter 2, p. 82.

<sup>474</sup> Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 201-216.

<sup>485</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 9.

and with their help began a long struggle with the Albanians, forcing them to yield. The war devastated most of Caucasian Albania, brought a lot of grief and severe suffering to the population, but did not shake its courage in the struggle for independence and the right to profess the Christian faith.<sup>476</sup> Elishe describes these events as follows:

**Although profound peace had been brought to the land of the Aryans, the king of Albania did not wish to submit, but breached the Pass of Chor and brought through to this side the troops of the Massagetae. Uniting with the eleven kings of the mountains, he waged war against the Aryan army and inflicted much damage on the royal forces. Although they sent letters of entreaty two and three times, they were unable to bring him to terms. But in writing and by messages he blamed them for the pointless devastation of Armenia. He reminded them of the death of the nobles and the sufferings of the prisoners: "In return for so much devotion and service," he said, "instead of granting their lives you killed them. It would be better for me to endure their tortures than to abandon Christianity." When they saw that they had not been able to bring him to terms either by force or by kind treatment, they had much treasure taken to the land of the Khaylandurk; they opened the Pass of the Alans,<sup>477</sup> brought through a numerous force of Huns, and warred for a year with the Albanian king. Although his troops were dispersed and scattered away from him, not only were they unable to subject him but terrible afflictions befell them, some through the war and others by painful disease. So long did the blockade last that the greater part of the country was ravaged, yet no one vacillated or deserted him.<sup>478</sup>**

Realizing that victory could not be won, Peroz asked Vache to let his sister and niece, who had been coerced into adopting Christianity in Albania, return to him in Persia while promising in exchange to leave the Albanian king's country: "'Send my sister and my sister's child back to me, since they were originally Magians, and it was you who made them Christians; then your kingdom shall be yours.'<sup>479</sup> Vache satisfied the request of his foe exhausted by the long fight.

Vache himself was eager to wash away the sin of even feigned renunciation and thought "it better to die in agony than to live in apostasy." At first, Vache wanted to

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<sup>476</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 214.

<sup>477</sup> The Pass of the Alans is the Darial Gorge.

<sup>478</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 7, p. 242-243.

<sup>479</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 10.

die an honorable warrior's death with a sword in his hands, defending the motherland and the church from the enemy. After Peroz gave up his intention to subjugate Caucasian Albania and Vache released his mother and wife back to Persia, the Albanian king decided to retire from state affairs:

**The blessed man was not fighting for his domains, however, but for his religion. He had his mother and his wife brought to him and then surrendered the whole country, while he himself took the Gospel and prepared to depart. When King Peroz heard of this, he repented and threw all the blame on his father; he set his seal to sincere promises and sent them to him, saying: "I shall do whatever you say, only do not depart from your country." But he agreed to accept only his personal property, the thousand families (*erd*<sup>480</sup>) he had received from his father; these he accepted from the king and dwelt within them in the company of monks. Thus did he live free from care in the paths of God, forgetting that he had ever been king. Such was his life.<sup>481</sup>**

King Vache II abdicated in 463.<sup>482</sup>

The Albanian historian cites a letter from the Armenian catholicos Giwt I Arahezatsi<sup>483</sup> (461-471) sent to King Vache after his abdication from the throne. This long letter is a real panegyric to the "blessed" king Vache, as Movses Kalankatuatsi calls him. He writes:

**You have seen not only the earth, but the Great One of heaven. You have abandoned the temporary and assumed the eternal. You have renounced the gilded kingship, and behold! there is in store for you the crown which no hand has wrought and which you shall receive from the holy hands of Christ. "He who for the sake of the gospel abandons father, mother, sisters and brothers and all his possessions shall receive a hundredfold here and everlasting life in the kingdom**

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<sup>480</sup> *Erd* is an estate owned by a peasant family.

<sup>481</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 10, p. 10.

<sup>482</sup> Dzhaforov Y.R. *Gunny i Azerbaydzhan* [The Huns and Azerbaijan], p. 53.

<sup>483</sup> Before becoming the catholicos of Armenians, he was a Vanand bishop. He participated in the Council of Shahapivan in 444 and the Council of Artashat in 499. Giwt became a catholicos with the support of Armenian *nakharars* and Atrormizd, the Persian *marzpan* of Armenia. He carried out church reforms, initiated the liberation of Armenian *nakharars* from Persian captivity, and fought against the Nestorians. In 471, he was invited to Persia and removed from ecclesiastical office. He died in 478.

which passes not away" [Matt. xix. 29]. It is easier for a poor man to do this, but for a man who is a king like you it is impossible; should any man do what you have done, it would be found incredible by men, amazing by angels, and comprehensible only to God, who left the numberless hosts of angels to come in the mean shape of a man. Your feat is comparable to this. He became the Life and Salvation of the entire world, while you have thrown open the gate of salvation for the whole world and your native land. The Faith was preserved, churches flourished, martyrs' chapels were unmolested, priests remained in their priesthoods, offerings on their altars, prophets in their lections, apostles in their comforting, psalmists in their blessing, virgins in their virginity, monks in their chastity, and everyone in his station. The fame of your virtue has spread from the east to Cadiz, from the south to the north. Your martyr's name is written on a golden tablet in the Book of Life in Heaven, together with those of the apostles, protomartyrs, patriarchs, and bishops. Be watchful, O wondrous one, who have become worthy of such great things and have risen to such great heights. Remain firmly anchored to Hope and inseparable from Charity; be steadfast in the True Faith, so that the Dragon of Death may not sweep his tail over our lives. For whilst you were still a child you vanquished him, and now you are a grown man, I know that you trample underfoot all his evil schemes. My mind loves you so much that if I wrote it down in words, I should expend much parchment. Many times have I come to you on account of your love, and now by my own intercession and that of the whole holy body of the church I commend you to the Holy Ghost. The Lord be with you. Amen.<sup>484</sup>

The circumstances of the reign of the Albanian king Vache reveal the complex nature of relationships between the Persian monarchy and the Albanian royal house, despite the family ties that bound them. Incidentally, these ties were not strong and were strained in the political struggle. Nevertheless, although Albania was in vassal status, the Persians had to reckon with the strategic position of their vassal, giving rise to political intrigues. The abdication of the Albanian king Vache was one of the consequences of these intrigues. The Albanian literary tradition presented Vache as a wise politician and a humble Christian. In the eyes of his people, he became an example of selfless service to the motherland and of commitment to gospel ideals.

There is currently a Lak village called Vachi in the territory of Dagestan in the Kulinsky District in the valley of the Hunnik River. Local residents claim that the village was founded nearly 1,500 years ago and named after the

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<sup>484</sup>

Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 11, p. 15.

Albanian king Vache.<sup>485</sup> It may have been the ancestral estate and site of the hermit exploits of the penultimate Albanian king from the Arsacid dynasty.

As for the attitude of Shahanshah Peroz to the Christians, information about it is controversial. For instance, Bishop Sebeos writes: "In the years of Peroz king of Persia there took place a suppression of all the privileges and rituals and usages of Christianity. Such severe tribulation of persecution and contempt assailed the princes, that they cast from themselves the yoke of servitude."<sup>486</sup> However, S.B. Dashkov holds that, unlike his father and grandfather, Peroz did not oppress the Christians – quite the contrary, he trusted them. Thus, the shahanshah directed Bishop Barsauma of Nisibis to oversee the border troops and take part in the commission's work to mark the boundary between Iran and Byzantium. It would not have been possible if the shah had been hostile to all Christians.<sup>487</sup> Moreover, two councils (Beth Lapat and Seleucia-Ctesiphon) were held in Persia in 484 during the reign of Peroz with his permission.<sup>488</sup>

Regarding the general religious situation in the region under the Albanian king Vache II, it should be noted that the political chaos of the 5th century undoubtedly affected the religion as well. In the Roman Empire, for example, the final victory of Christianity did not put an end to religious turmoil. From time to time, new doctrines were introduced, then became heresies once rejected by most bishops. Sometimes heretics persisted, provoking mutual persecution, and their firmness led them to martyrdom. Eventually, Christians fought Christians as strongly as they had fought the pagans.

In 428, a priest called Nestorius became the Archbishop of Constantinople, which consequently made him the eminent hierarch of the Eastern Roman Empire. He believed that Christ had two natures: human and divine.<sup>489</sup> His doctrine provoked resistance. The council of bishops in 431 condemned the Nestorian view, but nevertheless it continued to spread and received especially strong support from the theological school in Edessa, in northwestern

Mesopotamia. Now, the Nestorian heresy took the form of a nationalistic rebellion.

The Orthodox Christians of the Roman Empire worshipped God in Latin and

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<sup>485</sup> Lavrov L.I. *Einografiya Kavkaza* [The Ethnography of the Caucasus], Leningrad, 1982. P. 106.

<sup>486</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 8, p. 3-4.

<sup>487</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey – Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 124-125.

<sup>488</sup> Labourt J. *Le christianisme dans l'empire Perse: sous la dynastie Sassanide (224-632)*. Paris, 1904. P. 129-143.

<sup>489</sup> The doctrine of Nestorius is considered heretical by the Orthodox Church, because he taught that God and man in Jesus Christ were two completely separate and independently existing natures, i.e. only flesh could be born from the flesh, and God as a pure Spirit could not be born by a woman, because the creation could not give birth to the Creator.

Greek, but their culture was mainly Greek. In Edessa, the Greek influence was rather weak, while the native Syriac traditions were much more pronounced.

There were also some nationalistic tendencies among the Persian Christians. For a century and a quarter, the Christians of Persia faithfully endured persecution, but the Persian Church did not use Greek, and it was not very happy about living completely under the thumb of the Greek-Latin Church of Rome. If the Persian Church had made it clear that it was not just a puppet of the Roman Church, it would no longer have been treated as a “fifth column” and their persecution could have been mitigated.

Faced with persecution by the Roman Christians, the Nestorians of Edessa slipped across the border when they realized that the Christians of Persia were sympathetic to them. The Persian kings, such as Peroz, were well aware that the Christian heretics persecuted in Rome would be loyal to Persia. Therefore, he encouraged the Nestorians as much as possible. The Persian Christians found it very easy to join Nestorianism and did so. The Persian Church became completely Nestorian in 484.

The same strategy was successfully used in the vassal states of Persia: Caucasian Albania and Armenia. It can be deduced from the general analysis that both countries became partially Nestorian.

The first recorded evidence of Christianity in Adurbadagan<sup>490</sup> can be found in the acts of the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon convened in 420 by Yahballaha I (415-420), the Grand Metropolitan of the Church of the East, upon arrival of the embassy of Emperor Theodosius II in Persia.<sup>491</sup> This mention, as the Nestorianism researcher S.Y. Kasumova believes, suggests the existence of long-standing Christian traditions in the northern regions of the Sasanian Empire, which made it possible to set up dioceses subordinate to the Persian Church of the East.<sup>492</sup> The vicegerency of Adurbadagan — including parts of historical Media, Iberia, Armenia, and Caucasian Albania — was created later as a result of the administrative and territorial reform of Shahanshah Khosrow I Anushirvan (531-579). The actual structure of the Christian Church in the Sasanian state, however, was already formed at the First Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, convoked in 410 by Grand Metropolitan Isaac (399-410), and it had to correspond administratively to the borders of Persia. Therefore, the primates

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<sup>490</sup> Adurbadagan/Atropatene was a historical province and ancient state in the northwest of Iran that roughly corresponded to the present-day Iranian Azerbaijan and southeastern regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan (south of the Kura and Aras).

<sup>491</sup> Synodicon Orientale. Recueil des synodes nestoriens. Edited by J. B. Chabot. *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*. Paris, 1902. P. 276.

<sup>492</sup> Kasumova S.Y. *Khristianstvo v Azerbaydzhane v rannem Srednevekovye* [Christianity in Azerbaijan in the Early Middle Ages], Baku, 2005. P. 25.



of the Persian Church of the East could regard Caucasian Albania as their canonical territory.

The later *Concise Collection of Synodical Canons* by Metropolitan Abdisho of Nisibis, which was allegedly based on the “historical reality”<sup>493</sup> reflected in the documents of the Council of 410, presented a list of episcopal sees, whose heads had or did not have the right to elect the primate of the Persian Church of the East. This list mentioned the archiepiscopal see of Aran (Albania), which was not entitled to vote at the election.<sup>494</sup>

Thus, we can assume that in the 5th century the Nestorian element was already beginning to play a role in the church life of Caucasian Albania.

### 1.3.9. Albanian King Vachagan III the Pious

When King Vache II went into isolation in 463, the royal authority in Caucasian Albania was abolished. The Persian governor, *marzpan*,<sup>495</sup> began to rule the country. The marzpan administration lasted in Albania for thirty years.

The unsuccessful wars of the Persian king Peroz with the Hephthalites, punitive expeditions against the Albanians, an increased tax burden, restrictions on the hereditary privileges of the *nakhharars*, and attempts to eradicate the Christian faith among the Albanians all set the stage for a new uprising. The revolt of the Transcaucasian countries continued until 484. Constantly fighting against the rebellious Albanians, Armenians, and Iberians, the Persians were also defeated by the Hephthalites. Shahanshah Peroz was slain, and the Hephthalites broke through into Persia in 484. This made the already exhausted Persian troops withdraw from Transcaucasia. Sassanid Balash (484-488), son of Yazdegerd II, ascended the throne in Persia. The difficult

<sup>493</sup> Bolotov V.V. *Iz istorii tserkvi Siro-Persidskoy* [From the History of the Syriac-Persian Church]. St. Petersburg, 1901. P. 28.

<sup>494</sup> Synodicon Orientate, p. 619.

<sup>495</sup> *Marzpan* was the governor (vicero) of a *marzpanate* (small province) in the Sasanian state, administratively belonging to the *kust* (large province), who was not only a civil servant, but also a military commander; he led the troops formed within his *marzpanate* during wars.

political and economic situation prevailing in Persia forced Balash to end the policy of religious persecution pursued by his predecessors and make peace with the peoples of Transcaucasia. After the so-called Treaty of Nvarsak, signed between Persia and the Transcaucasian countries in 484, royal authority was restored in Caucasian Albania.<sup>496</sup>

Vachagan III (487-510), the last member of the Arsacid dynasty, who was the nephew of King Vache II, became the king of Albania in 487: "Then the land of Albania renounced its native royalty and accepted Vachagan from the royal family of Persia, a man great in valour and wise and thoughtful, tall and handsome in build, the son of Yazkert and brother of King Vache of Albania; and they took him and made him king at the hands of Valarshak, king of Persia."<sup>497</sup> Essentially, Vachagan became the shah of Albania because he was a brother to the sons of Yazdegerd II, Shahs Hormizd III, Peroz, and Balash.

The reign of King Vachagan III is covered in 11 chapters of Book One of the *History of Albania*, from Chapter 15 to 26. His rule lasted 23 years and marked a period of political, cultural, and religious revival of Caucasian Albania.

The Albanian historian rightly notes that about other Albanian kings "we have no [information] such as we have about the pious Vachagan, king of the Aghuans, who uncovered the blessed and divine hidden treasure [relics]."<sup>498</sup>

According to the history account, Vachagan III was forced by the Persian king to accept the Magian religion before his enthronement. Vachagan III, however, remained a Christian by belief, and "in secret he would constantly rise for prayers and fasts and the confession of Christ."<sup>499</sup> Kalankatuatsi informs us that after a rumor had reached Albania about the Persian king's decree allowing for religious freedom, Vachagan III proclaimed that he was a Christian and repented his previous outward renunciation of Christian faith:

**King Valarshak of Persia commanded that everyone should keep to his own laws and that none should be forced to convert to the Magian creed. When he heard this, the pious and godly King Vachagan turned again to the Church of God with heartfelt joy, and with many prayers and tears he confessed the eternal and ineffable Trinity, and besought and entreated the bishops and hermits and all the monks to join him in penitence and prayer in order to conciliate the all-merciful Lord. He himself was diligent in fasts**

<sup>496</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 192-193.

<sup>497</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 17, p. 27-28.

<sup>498</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *History of the Aghuans*, Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 18.

<sup>509</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 16, p. 25.

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**and prayer and charity to the poor.<sup>500</sup>**

The story of Vachagan III's apostasy and repentance resembles a similar episode from the life of King Vache II, who preceded him on the throne. It is likely that both kings used to profess Zoroastrianism but later chose the Christian faith in order to unite their state in the bosom of the church and in opposition to Persia.

The reign of Vachagan III, nicknamed the Pious, witnessed a political, cultural, and religious revival of Albania. The king considered it a priority to achieve religious unity in the country. He directed all his efforts to making Christianity the universal religion of the Albanian Kingdom. Accordingly, Vachagan III began a fierce and uncompromising struggle against both fire worship and various pagan sects.

Kalankatuatsi reports that the Albanian king at first forced all the *nakharars* of Caucasian Albania to adopt Christianity: "He rejoiced not so much in his kingship as in the obedient conformance of all the nobles of his kingdom to the will of the church, in accordance with its redeeming commandments to the effect that whosoever should lead a soul from the path of error and teach it the ways of righteousness should save his own soul from death and atone for the multitude of his own sins."<sup>501</sup> Then Vachagan III "laid down punishments and fines to be imposed upon whomsoever should set up an altar or fashion an idol or worship unclean gods or should not keep wholly and firmly to the precepts of Christianity He warned the witches, sorcerers, and heathen priests a first and again a second time that if any of them were found perpetrating the said evils, they would be brought to the royal court and chastised by means of cruel chains and whips; and subsequently punishing many witches, sorcerers, and heathen priests, strangling some, banishing some and reducing others to slavery he admonished and baptized many and made them learn the way to knowledge of God."<sup>502</sup>

The historian also states that the Albanian king made sure to send priests to different villages of his country He may have chosen the worthy ones himself. And it is quite possible that his choice often fell on the former religious figures of pagan cults, who were ready to spread the Christian faith

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 17, p. 28.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., p. 28-29.

among the population of Albania: . . . in many places he established bishops and priests and supervisors."<sup>503</sup>

It was not just a matter of issuing royal decrees to combat the former beliefs. Through special investigations, Vachagan III found certain sects and wiped them out. One of these, whose followers practiced human sacrifices, was called the "finger-cutters."

"He began to investigate the wicked sect of finger-cutters, for both are murderous sects ... These were seized by the king and removed from the world in dire torment. Others also he purged from the kingdom of the Albanians like a brave and virtuous husbandman."<sup>504</sup>

Vachagan III paid a lot of attention to the education and upbringing of children. To this end, he opened schools in various regions of the country. The king himself liked to visit the children studying there and ask them about what they had been taught:

**Vachagan, crowned by God, commanded that the sons of the witches, sorcerers, heathen priests, finger-cutters, and poisoners be assembled and placed into schools be given religious instruction and taught the Christian way of life in order to confirm the heathen tribes of their fathers in the faith of the Trinity and true worship of God. He ordered all the boys to gather together in his private village called Rustak, established grants, and placed a headmaster over them, and commanded them to study Christianity.**

**When he went into the village to perform a service of commemoration for the saints, he would sit in the school, gather the sons of the sorcerers and heathen priests around him, and command the crowd which encircled him ... to read aloud together. And he was happier than a man who had uncovered a rich booty.<sup>505</sup>**

Thus, according to the Albanian historian's account, Vachagan III made every effort to consolidate the Albanian people and strengthen the state. He considered it necessary to religiously unite the people in the bosom of one church. Like other Christian enlighteners of different times, the Albanian king understood the need to raise the educational level of the population and fight against various types of (primarily religious) separatism in order to achieve such a lofty goal. As we can see, Vachagan III was constantly fighting multiple pagan cults, which in their isolation

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>504</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 18, p. 30-32.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., p. 29-30.

had acquired extremist overtones: human sacrifice, ritual killing, physical violence.

Vachagan realized the importance of educating a new generation of Albanians. Children from different parts of the state received training in the schools established by him. They were to become scholars and teachers, translators and copyists of books, clergymen and missionaries, as well as royal court officials. The Albanian king knew perfectly well what the future of his country should be.

Vachagan III also concluded that to strengthen the Christian religion, it was required to create places of worship in different parts of the country and visibly manifest the divine presence among Albanians. Such visible signs could be the remains of holy martyrs. Therefore, the king considered it a priority to search for Christian relics and glorify them.

The first to be found were partial relics of the righteous Zacharias and the great martyr Pantaleon, which were said to have been brought to Albania by Bishop Grigoris. This was followed by the discovery of relics of the holy martyr Grigoris himself. Movses Kalankatuatsi's descriptions of the search and circumstances of finding the relics are, in fact, the first examples of Albanian hagiographic literature compiled either by the author of the *History of Albania* himself or by his predecessors, whose work he literarily reworked.

Recounting the discovery of the relics of St. Zacharias and Pantaleon, Kalankatuatsi reports that in Haku,<sup>506</sup> where the relics of the blessed martyrs from Tsri lay, "a man of splendid and glorious appearance and a youth likewise of shining and awe-inspiring form" revealed themselves at night in a vision to the priest (named Yakob) of the monastery, telling him to go to Tsri and instruct the local *nakharar* Khochkorik<sup>507 508</sup> to remove the remnants of the saints from the ground. This vision repeated three times, so Yakob decided to do what he had been told. The same thing happened with Khochkorik and one of the clergymen close to him. The historian relates that an awe-inspiring light appeared before them in the temple, after which they spent the whole night in vigils and prayers. That morning, the participants in the unusual events unearthed a reliquary with the inscription "I, Grigoris, brought these saints, namely, Zacharias, father of John, and the blessed Pantaleon, who was martyred in the town of Nicomedia."<sup>518</sup> They removed the saints' relics, washed them, and anointed them with holy chrism. Khochkorik sealed the reliquary with his own hand, went to the Albanian king Vachagan the Pious, and informed him of everything that had happened. The king assembled the bishops, monks, and hermits and performed a memorial service for the saints, generously

<sup>506</sup> the location is unknown.

<sup>507</sup> Khochkorik was the son of the Albanian king Esualen by a concubine.

<sup>508</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 19, p. 35.

bestowing alms upon the poor. He clad the bishops and priests in valuable garments and sent Manase,<sup>509</sup> his devoted chaplain, along with other ministers to carry the discovered relics of the martyrs. "On the way to where the saints lay, the king and queen went on foot followed by many servants and accompanied by the Cross and incense and many flowers, and a countless multitude of people; and the king blessed and glorified Jesus Christ the true Lord through the virtuous and holy martyrs. He adorned the reliquary of the saints with various royal garments and gold and silver and precious jewels."<sup>510</sup> Vachagan III kept the discovered shrine in the royal house and appointed priests to hold regular worship services.

According to the hagiography, the hitherto childless king was granted a child by heaven as a gift for the glorification of the saints. The Albanian historian reports that the king, surrounded by many monks, often prayed to be given a son in front of the reliquary, holding the relics of the saints of God. His prayer was answered. Vachagan named his son Pantaleon after the valiant martyr.

The pious king also commemorated the first primate of the Albanian Church, St. Grigoris, martyred in the Vatnean field near the Caspian coast. His relics had been transferred and buried in Amaras in the church built by his holy grandfather, Gregory the Illuminator. However, the burial site of Grigoris had not been specifically marked out of fear that the relics might be desecrated. Over the years, this place had been lost to human memory. Vachagan III made it a priority to find the relics of the first Albanian saint, Grigoris. The circumstances associated with their discovery are described in Chapters 20 and 21 of Movses Kalankatuatsi's work.

The king sent special letters to gather all Albanian bishops, as well as many *nakharars*, priests, and monks in his royal village called Diwtakan. The relics of St. Gregory the Illuminator and the holy martyrs Gayane and Hripsime were brought here from Armenia at the request of Vachagan III. Services were continuously held in front of these shrines. The king and all those assembled imposed a strict fast upon themselves. A few days later, the court priest Matte heard a mysterious voice in a dream in a light sleep during the morning service in the temple, which told him to look for St. Grigoris' relics at the eastern wall of the Amaras temple. St. Grigoris also appeared to the Arazhank deacon Yovel in a vision and pointed to the place where his relics were hidden. The king set out with a large number of the assembly to Amaras. He stopped at every temple on the way to perform services there. During the journey, both the king himself and many of those who were with him saw a holy

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<sup>509</sup> In Chapter 26 of Book 1 of the *History of Albania*, Movses Kalankatuatsi refers to Manase as the Bishop of Kapalay (Qabala). It is likely that Manase was ordained bishop shortly after the events described.

<sup>520</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 19, p. 35.

man in a white episcopal robe that concealed traces of his torture and beatings. It was Grigoris, the first martyr of the Albanian Church.

Movses Kalankatuatsi shares various curious facts about the finding of St. Grigoris' relics:

On the morrow, during the morning service, everyone assembled at the site of the wonderful cross, erected the king's tent over it, and placed a screen round the tent some distance away. Outside the screen stood the assembly of bishops and their disciples, the deacons holding a cross in their hands, the priests the gospel on their breasts, and the clerks censers containing divers incenses in their hands; and the earth echoed to the harmonious singing of psalms and hymns of praise to the ineffable Trinity. The virtuous king, stripping and taking spade in hand, began to dig manfully, while the virtuous and devout queen, going down into the pit in her royal robes, carried the earth away; the bishops and priests and the nobles and their wives, all dressed in their fine robes, carried the earth outside with great zeal.

(...) The discovery of the saint's relics was announced to the whole assembly, and the crowd pressed towards the relics and were on the point of trampling down both screen and tent when the king came out and with some difficulty restrained them. When the tomb was opened and the relics came to light, a strange, sweet fragrance issued forth, enveloped all with the scent of many incenses and bemused them for several hours. The king and all who were with him were much amazed, and together they glorified the giver of such awe-inspiring, goodly things. The king sat on the earth near the tomb and ordered divers precious court vessels to be brought thither, and he placed the casket on his knees and worshipped in great awe. The priests brought the relics and placed them all in the casket which the king held on his knees. They also discovered two glass bottles with the relics of the saint, in one of which was the blood of Zacharias and in the other, relics of St. Pantaleon; removing them all, the assembly worshipped them until evening when, sealing them with the royal seal, the king ordered them to be guarded carefully until morning.

(...) The next day the king ordered his cloak to be spread on the ground and golden dishes and sweet wine to be fetched; he commanded the relics to be washed

**therein and laid on his cloak in the sun ... The king ordered each of the bishops to be given part of the relics to share out among their dioceses, and the larger part was to be left in Amaras; the other parts he carefully stored in divers vessels sealed with the royal seal. He ordered a chapel to be constructed above the tomb, to be quickly completed and named the chapel of St. Grigoris.<sup>511</sup>**

We can see from the historian's description that King Vachagan III was notable not only for his political judgment, but also for his personal piety. Vachagan III's reign became an era of political, cultural, and religious revival for Caucasian Albania. In order to achieve religious unity in the country and transform Christianity into a universal state religion, the king persecuted and eradicated Zoroastrianism and traditional pagan cults. Vachagan III restored the destroyed temples and monasteries and built the new ones, took care of replenishing the clergy ranks, and set up Christian schools. Striving to consolidate the statehood of Albania and recognizing the great political and ideological potential of the Albanian Church, which was able to resist the alien religious-political influences and the assimilation policy of foreign forces, Vachagan III found it necessary to strengthen the foundations of the church that had been undermined during the Persian rule and economically reinforce it. For this purpose, he convened probably the first independent Local Council of the Albanian Church in 488.

Vachagan III was undoubtedly an outstanding ruler of the Albanian state. His reign favored the development of Christianity in Albania and the rise of the Albanian Church, while he went down in history under the name *Pious*.

Movses Kalankatuatsi speaks of King Vachagan III as follows: "To no king before him, to none of his ancestors had such wonderful gifts been given ... I do not consider [King Vachagan — A. N.] less praiseworthy than the Emperor Constantine, emperor of the west, or the Arsacid Trdat who brought salvation to Greater Armenia."<sup>512</sup> King Vachagan ruled until 510.

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Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 23, p. 44-46.

522 Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 23, p. 46-47.



### 1.3.10. The Council of Aluen<sup>513</sup>

The Albanian king Vachagan III the Pious seemed to understand how valuable it was for the church to teach, govern, and profess. The statesman was most interested in its abilities and not theological issues. However, the effectiveness of the church in this regard was largely based on the uniformity of its organization and its economic stability. The king realized that never before had there been such an educational body that would extend its influence throughout society and various spheres of life.

Wishing to see his country Christian, the church strong, and the clergy educated, Vachagan III convened the first national council of the Albanian Church in the history of Caucasian Albania, called the *Council of Aluen*.

The nominal reason for the decision to convene the council were the so-called “disagreements” between the clergy and the laity. Movses Kalankatuatsi informs that, in the reign of Vachagan III, a dispute arose among the laymen and the bishops, priests and chorepiscopi, *azats*<sup>514</sup> and *ramiks*.<sup>515</sup> “And the king decided to convoke a large council at Aluen on the thirteenth day of the month of Mareri,”<sup>516</sup> i.e. May. The council took place in the king’s summer residence Aluen, located near Partaw (Barda), in 488.

Yet, there is a difference of opinion upon the date of the council’s convocation. For instance, Buniyatov,<sup>517</sup> Mamedova,<sup>518</sup> Gadzhiyev,<sup>519</sup> Patkanov,<sup>520</sup>

<sup>513</sup> Nikonorov Andrei V. (Archimandrite Alexy). Canons of the King of Caucasian Albania Vachagan III: circumstances of adoption and legal parallels. *Theology: Theory and Practice*, 2024, vol. 3, no. 1. P. 58-78.

<sup>514</sup> *Azats* were the lowest noble class. They were always mentioned in the sources after the *nakharars*, large feudal lords. These were the vassals of large feudal lords exempt from taxes and levies, an independent class of the population of Albania. The word *azat* was derived from Pahlavi *azat* (Persian: *azad*).

<sup>515</sup> *Ramiks* were the lowest class, the main producing segment of the people. According to H. Hubschmann, this word was derived from Parthian *ramok* that corresponded to New Persian *ram* or *rama* translated as “the lowest social stratum of the population” in the sense of “crowd, mass.” *Ramiks* were generally called commoners — both *shinakans* and urban population — artisans, i.e. all those who did not belong to the *azat* class, nobility or clergy.

<sup>516</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50.

<sup>517</sup> Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX w.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 52.

<sup>518</sup> Mamedova F.D. Eshche raz o datirovke Aguevskikh kanonov [Once More on the Dating of the Aghuen Canons]. *Izvestiya AN AzSSR* [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR], No. 3. Baku, 1973. P. 78.

<sup>519</sup> Gadzhiyev M. S. K izucheniyu prava Kavkazskoy Albanii [On the Study of Law of Caucasian Albania]. *Problemy istorii, filologii, kultury* [The Problems of History, Philology, and Culture], No. 16/1. Moscow-Magnitogorsk, 2006. P. 246.

<sup>520</sup> Movses Kaghanatvatsi. *Istoriya agvan* [History of the Aghuans], p. 310.

Yeremian,<sup>521</sup> and others traditionally date it to 488. S.K. Ovanesian<sup>522</sup> believes Vachagan II's activities to have been mistakenly attributed to Vachagan III the Pious and holds that the Council of Aluen could have been convened between 372 and 387. B.A. Ulubabian,<sup>523</sup> however, does not agree. He emphasizes that since the list of participants of the Council of Aluen includes Shuphalishoy, archbishop of Partaw, and Mate, priest of Partaw, whose historicity may not be denied on any ground, the Council of Aluen could have been convened only after 459 – the first year of the reign of Shahanshah Peroz, who, according to Movses Kalankatuatsi, commanded the city of Partaw (originally called Perozapat) be built.<sup>524</sup> Akinian attributes the date of the council to the period of 415 to 459.<sup>525</sup> R.B. Geyushev on the other hand thinks that the Council of Aluen could not have been held earlier than 493.<sup>526</sup>

Historians have not preserved any details of the council for us, whereas the Albanian historian only mentions its composition and sets out 21 ordinances.

Movses Kalankatuatsi lists the following council participants:

- Vachagan, king of Albania;
- Shuphalishoy, archbishop of Partaw;
- Manase, bishop of Kapalay;
- Yunan (Jonah), bishop of Hashu;
- Pod (Photios), bishop of Uti;<sup>527</sup>
- bishop Anania;
- bishop Sahak;
- Shmawon (Simeon), chorepiscopus of Tsri;
- Yovsep, priest of Kalankatuk;<sup>528</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> Yeremian S.T. *Ekonomika i sotsialnyy stroy Albanii III-VII vv.* [The Economy and Social System of Albania in the 3rd-7th centuries], p. 307-310.

<sup>522</sup> Ovanesian S.K. *Kanony Aguenskoġo uchreditelnogo sobraniya i ikh svyaz s kanonami Ashtishata* [The Canons of the Council of Aluen and Their Connection with the Ashtishat Canons]. *Istoriko-filologicheskiy zhurnal AN ArmSSR* [Historical and Philological Journal of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR], No. 4. Yerevan, 1967. P. 266.

<sup>523</sup> Ulubabian B.A. *Eshche raz o vremeni sozyva Aguenskoġo sobora* [Once More on the Time of Convening the Council of Aluen]. *Vestnik obshchestvennykh nauk AN ArmSSR* [Bulletin of the Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR], No. 6. Yerevan, 1969. P. 52.

<sup>524</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 25.

<sup>525</sup> Akinian N.A. *Movses Daskhurantsi, Named Kalankatuatsi, and His History of Aluank*, p. 72-73.

<sup>526</sup> Geyushev R.B. *Khristianstvo v Kavkazskoy Albanii* [Christianity in Caucasian Albania], p. 39.

<sup>527</sup> This bishop is not mentioned in K.P. Patkanov's translation at all.

<sup>528</sup> this is the first mention of the village of Kalankatuk in the *History of Albania*, located at a distance of 9 *farsakhs* (approximately 52 km) from the modern city of Barda, on the banks of the Terter River. Kalankatuk corresponds to Qalgatus or Qalangatus mentioned by Is-takhri. According to Markwart, Qalangatus lay on the way from Dvin to Partaw and further, on the bank of the Terter River, near the village of Diwtakan (Katokhikasar).

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- Mate, priest of Partaw;
  - Tomay, priest of the royal court;
  - Poghos, priest of Gayeguch;
  - Mate, priest of Darahoch;
  - Abikaz, priest of Bed;
  - Urbatayr, priest of Manushay;
  - Yovel, priest;
  - Parmide, priest;
  - Yakob, priest;
  - freemen and heads of clans of Artsakh, Bakur, head of clan of Kalankatuk, and many others.<sup>529</sup>

It appears from this account that, apart from the king himself who seems to have presided over the council, seven bishops, clergymen, many princes, and the people's elders took part in the council meetings.

Shuphalishoy, archbishop of the Albanian capital Partaw, was designated as the senior among clergymen. Smbatian, translator of Movses Kalankat- uatsi's work, believes that "there was neither the rank of patriarch nor the rank of archbishop in the Armenian Church until the beginning of the 7th century, whereas the head of the church was simply called catholicos or epis- coposapet (chief bishop), therefore any reference to the archbishop's dignity in this case should be considered an anachronism."<sup>530</sup> Moreover, the translator is convinced that "there are many distortions in the preamble of the council's ordinances, with both personal and geographical names being distorted, so it cannot be relied upon without risk of error."<sup>531</sup> If the latter statement seems to be true, we cannot fully agree with the former one. The church hierarchs had already been generally divided into different ranks according to the significance of their sees by the 5th century.

In addition to the head of the Albanian Church, the historian names five diocesan bishops and one chorepiscopus. And if earlier we saw it as an anachronism that Shuphalishoy was referred to as the archbishop of "Par- taw"<sup>532</sup> (since, based on the Albanian author's account, the patriarchal see is widely regarded to have moved

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<sup>529</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 51- 52;

Movses Daskhurantsi. *History of the Aghuans*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 40.

<sup>530</sup> Smbatian S.V. Op. Cit., p. 413.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Nikonorov Alexy, hegumen. *Istoriya Tserkvi Kavkazskoy Albaniipo Moiseyu Kalankatuyskomu* [History of the Church of Caucasian Albania according to Movses Kalankatuatsi], Moscow, 2021. P. 138.

to Partaw only in 552), now we find Dzha- farov to be right in saying that

**Partaw was already the capital of the Aluanian Kingdom in the early 5th century. It was Partaw to which Mesrop Mashtots came and it was here that he helped to invent the original Aluanian script in the "20s of the 5th century... This, in turn, suggests that the political, economic, and cultural center of the Aluanian Kingdom was transferred from the foothills of the Greater Caucasus, from the former capital of Kabalaka (present-day Qabala) on the left-bank Kura to its right-bank part, to the Gargarean steppe, at least as early as the end of the 4th century (apparently in 387), which fundamentally differs from a strongly held view in scholarly literature. The city of Partaw itself was certainly built not by "order" of the Sasanian shah Peroz (459-484), as reported by Kalankatuatsi<sup>533</sup> and believed by the researchers unable to understand his controversial reference. This city had been founded at least several centuries before Peroz, most probably during the Parthian rule. The etymology of Partaw (Arabic: *Barda*) is rather transparent and literally means "Parthian."<sup>534</sup>**

As for the chorepiscopus of the Albanian Church mentioned among the council participants (Patkanov lists three in his translation), it should be noted that there were quite a lot of chorepiscopi (bishops of villages and *gavars*) in the Eastern Churches until the mid-4th century, and they enjoyed full status as bishops. Subsequently, their rights were gradually curtailed, and they completely submitted to the city bishops in the end. The chorepiscopus institution was practically abolished by the 6th century.

The chorepiscopus listed as one of the participants of the Council of Al- uen arrived from the city of Tsri. The researcher Dzhaifarov<sup>535</sup> once observed that a fortress city called Tsri was referenced only by the Albanian historian

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<sup>533</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 25.

<sup>534</sup> Dzhaifarov Y. R. Gargary i alvanskaya pismennost. K voprosu vozniknoveniya etnoyazyko- voy obshchnosti [The Gargareans and the Aluanian Script: On the Occurrence of the Ethnolinguistic Unity], p. 48.

<sup>535</sup> Dzhaifarov Y.R. Gorod Tsri i strana chilbov v "Istorii alban" Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo [The City of Tsri and the Land of the Chilbs in the History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi], p. 65-80.

Movses Kalankatuatsi. Judging by his reports, this city had some special status and played a prominent role in the political and religious events of Caucasian Albania in the 4th-5th centuries. The city of Tsri was first mentioned in a story about the activities of the holy martyr Grigoris, who built a church there and deposited partial relics of the martyrs in it.<sup>536</sup> Then Grigoris left a priest called Daniel in the church as a minister and, together with his disciples, went to the “country of Maskutk,” where he was captured and tortured to death.<sup>537</sup>

The land of the Maskutk (Maskuts) is once again mentioned by the author of the *History of Albania* in connection with the city of Tsri. According to him, a certain Persian magian tried to desecrate the church in the city of Tsri, but died in great agony. This event was purportedly witnessed by “Yunan, archbishop of the Honk, who came from the country of the Maskutk.” The country of the Maskuts is known to have been located on the Caspian plain south of Derbent. Meanwhile, Movses Kalankatuatsi also mentions the city of Tsri in connection with the land of the Chilbk (Chilbs). The Chilbs, on the other hand, are said to have lived north of the Kura, in the foothills of the Greater Caucasus. Based on data provided by Elishe, Faustus of Byzantium, and Movses Kalankatuatsi, Dzhafarov concludes that the exact location of the “land of the Lpink” and the “land of the Chilbk” cannot be determined. It is only clear that the Lpins and the Chilbs occupied the territory adjacent to Caucasian Albania in the northeast, closer to the mountainous part of Southern Dagestan, and lived next to the tribes listed by Elishe.

In the opinion of some researchers, the ordinances of the Council of Aluen played a “crucial role in establishing the independence of the Albanian Church,” which was able to resist the assimilatory policy of foreign powers, as well as played roles in reinforcing the church’s positions, destroying the remnants of pagan beliefs, creating the financial base of the clergy, and strengthening their legal and economic privileges.<sup>538</sup> But we would not exaggerate the importance of the Council of Aluen and its “crucial role in establishing the independence of the Albanian Church.” As we can see, this council dealt with a rather limited range of issues and did not cover those topics that were typically discussed by the Local Councils of the Eastern Churches (for example, the canonical position of the church, its *sui iuris*, the authorities of the local church, the administrative organization of dioceses and their canonical

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<sup>536</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 22.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 235.

boundaries, elections and consecrations of bishops and primates, etc.).<sup>539</sup> The canons of the Council of Aluen did not even touch upon questions of dogma. These regulations also came down to us as part of the *Collection of Canons of the Armenian Church*<sup>540</sup> under a separate group titled *the Canons of the Alu- ank King Vachagan*.

The Albanian historian cites the ordinances of the Council of Aluen, devoting the entire Chapter 26 of his Book One to them:<sup>541</sup>

1. Village priests are to pay homage to their bishop twice a year and are to learn the spiritual rules from him; and in accordance with the rule, they shall bring him a yearly gift.
2. When they are ordained, a priest must give four *drams*<sup>542</sup> and a deacon two.
3. A noble and a member of the royal family shall in the course of his life give with his own hand for his soul a horse, saddled and harnessed, and whatever else he can afford. If he should not give this in his lifetime, his family shall give it after his death.
4. This shall be the rule concerning the fruits<sup>543</sup> [of the earth to be given] to the priest by the people.

He who is rich<sup>544</sup> shall give 4 bushels (*griv*)<sup>545</sup> of wheat, 6 of barley, and 16 jugs<sup>546</sup> of sweet [wine];<sup>547</sup> the poor man shall give half a loaf of bread and as much wine as he can; and nothing shall be taken from him who possesses no field or vineyard. Those who for the sake of their soul give in excess of this do well; as Paul says, "*he who sows abundantly, shall reap abundantly*" [Gal. vi. 7]. He who has sheep in his household shall give one sheep, three fleeces,<sup>548</sup> and one cheese; (he who has horses, one foal; and he who has cattle, one calf).

<sup>539</sup> Salachas D. *Istituzioni di diritto canonico delle Chiese cattoliche orientali* Bologna, 1993, Naples, 2003. P. 54 and further.

<sup>540</sup> Tigranian S.F. *Drevnearmyanskaya kniga kanonov* [The Old Armenian Book of Canons], Petrograd, 1918; Shirinian M.B., Muradian G. *The Armenian Collection of the Ecclesiastical Canons. Khristiansky Vostok* [The Christian East], new series. Vol. 1 (7), 1999. P. 124-154.

<sup>541</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 51-54.

<sup>542</sup> *Dram* is a monetary unit (Pahlavi: *dram*, Persian: *diram*, derived from Greek). It was a unit of mass in ancient Greece equal to 3.4 grams. According to Anania Shirakatsi, *dram* is one fourth of a *sater* or one eightieth of a *liter*.

<sup>543</sup> Fruits: *ptul* "a tithe of agricultural products (fruits and cereals)."

<sup>544</sup> Rich: *tuani* "a wealthy peasant," according to N.G. Adontz, derived from Pahlavi *tuani* and Persian *tuvana* "strong, powerful."

<sup>545</sup> *Griv* is a dry measure. It is calculated to be 9.7 kg.

<sup>546</sup> Jug: *pas* "a liquid measure." 1 pas is 10 xests, and 1 xest is 532 g. Therefore, 1 pas is approximately 5.5 liters.

<sup>547</sup> Wine: *kaltsu*.

<sup>548</sup> Fleece: *gzat* "wool, fur in general," derived from Syrian *gezzeda*. This context indicates that *gzat* meant a certain amount of wool, whose weight was not established.

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5. A noble or villager<sup>549</sup> or other layman shall not omit to give one offering per annum in commemoration of the dead, as much as he can afford; one shall not deprive the dead of a share of their gain. If the dead man had horses, one shall give to the church one horse which he would desire; if he had cattle, one ox which he would desire.
  6. Should an abbot or any monk misbehave in the monastery and be discovered, he shall be reviled and expelled and his property<sup>550</sup> confiscated by the church.
  7. If the fathers in one monastery be many and their congregation small, and the congregation of another monastery be large and the fathers few in number, some of [the offerings of] the large congregation are to be taken and given to the monastery in which the fathers are many.
  8. Any Christian who quarrels and sheds blood is to be brought before the bishop and punished in accordance with the laws.
  9. A priest who ministers to a large village shall not minister to another. Should two small hamlets<sup>551</sup> be close to one another, one priest may minister to them. A priest may be a shepherd for as many as he is able to lead.
  10. A man may not marry a woman related to him in the third degree; he may not marry his brother's wife.
  11. He who abandons his wife without cause, or lives with a woman outside wedlock, or is lawless or a murderer or one who consults wizards, is to be bound, brought to the royal court, and put to a cruel death.
  12. Of those who mourn for the dead, let the head of the household and the *gusans*<sup>552</sup> be bound, brought to the royal court, and punished; and let not their families dare to lament afterwards.
  13. The priest and the congregation are to punish him who eats carrion or eats meat during Lent or works on Sundays and does not go to church.
  14. He who eats meat on the Wednesday and Friday before Lent is to fast for one week; and should someone go to the priest and declare that the man is not complying with this, the elder of the village is to seize an ox belonging to the man and give it to the priest.
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<sup>549</sup> Villager: *shinakan* "the main peasant population of medieval Caucasian Albania." *Shi- nakans* paid taxes to the feudal lords in contrast to the privileged feudal classes, *azats* and clergymen, who were exempt from them.

<sup>550</sup> Property: *khostak*. This word is questionable. K.P. Patkanov translates it as follows: "...and his son taken by the church."

<sup>551</sup> Hamlet: *agarak*.

<sup>552</sup> *Gusan* is a folk singer and storyteller. *Gusans* in Albania moved from one area to another and recited the legends and tales, songs and poems, sometimes their own works to the accompaniment of various musical instruments.

15. Should a layman accuse a priest or a deacon and they confess to the charge, the bishop is to judge them, and they shall repent in solitude. Should they not confess, however, and that which the others say against them is manifestly true, they are to be punished in accordance with the canons and driven from the village. If the crime be not evident, the priest is to be commanded to celebrate a Mass, which shall be taken as his oath.
16. Should a priest be accused of a crime by his fellows and pupils and they themselves be trustworthy, the priest is to stand before the altar and his accusers before the congregation, and he shall be taken from the sanctuary and driven from the village. Should his pupils bear a grudge against him and it be known to the congregation that they have quarreled, the priest is to celebrate a Mass and the congregation is to drive the others out and curse them. If they confess and say "*We have spoken falsely*," they are to be made to repent and are not to be driven from the monastery. Should they hereafter cause any mischief, however, they are to be punished in accordance with the canons.
17. Further, the bishops and priests complained to the king about nobles who, they said, built two or three churches or monasteries in one village, and the nobles made an agreement before the king; it was considered fitting by the king, the bishops, and the nobles that the churches which had been built should remain, and that the produce and income<sup>553</sup> of these should be given to the *Vsam* church.
18. And the nobles who pay tithes are to give half to the principal (*bun*) Church and half to their own church.
19. On Sundays both master and servant are to go to the *Vsam* Church to pray and offer memorial services in the church. A stranger<sup>554</sup> must pay soul-scot to the church.
20. Nobles, in so far as concerns their estates, are not to presume to dismiss or appoint a priest without the bishop's consent; the bishop, however, may dismiss and appoint priests without consulting them. Should a priest be threatened by the nobles or the congregation, he is not to leave without the bishop's consent.
21. If a noble constructs an altar in his church or places relics therein or makes an offering, he shall do it as far as possible with the permission of the bishop. He who obeys these canons shall be blessed, and whoever does not shall be expelled from the Church and shall pay a fine to the bishop proportionate to his

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<sup>553</sup> Income: *khas* "a tax of livestock products and sacrifices offered to God."

<sup>554</sup> Stranger: *anashkarik* "alien, stranger," i.e. an alien from other places who settled somewhere. This word is also attested by other authors such as Agathangelos and Elishe. King Tiridates, angered by St. Gregory's refusal to present offerings of crowns to the altar of the pagan goddess Anahit, told him: "You have come and joined as a stranger and foreigner (*anashkarik* — A. N.)..." (see Agathangelos. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 3, §50, p. 63).



resources; after he has paid the amount of the fines as prescribed by the canons, he shall be blessed.

Mamedova divides the Council's canons into four groups:<sup>555</sup>

1. Canons pertaining to clerics, their relationships, rights, and obligations.
2. Canons governing the relationships between the clergy and the secular elites.
3. Canons governing the relationships between the clergy and the laity.
4. Canons of purely legal nature.

Canons 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 15, and 16 belong to the first group, Canons 3, 17, 18, 20, and 21 to the second group, Canons 3, 4, 5, 17, 18, and 19 to the third group, and finally Canons 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 to the fourth group. Mamedova devotes an entire section of her research *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i al-bany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians] to the detailed analysis of the canons.<sup>556</sup>

However, it seems to us more accurate to classify the canons included in the register of the Council of Aluen differently. Let us divide them into five groups:

1. Canons concerning church taxation — 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 17, 18, and 19.
2. Canons related to church administration — 9, 17, 20, and 21.
3. Canons dealing with problems in parishes and monasteries and indicating the requirements and sanctions — 6, 7, 8, 15, 16, and 21.
4. Canons of moral relevance (as opposed to pagan customs) — 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14.
5. The canon authorizing a bishop to investigate the criminal cases of Christians — 8.

The narrow scope of the canons of the Council of Aluen is due to the fact that the Albanian Church had already accepted the general dogmatic and legal standards by the time of the council.<sup>567</sup> In the first place, these were the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition of the Church, as well as other documents of the ancient undivided Church: the Didache (1st-2nd centuries), the Didascalia Apostolorum (230), the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (215—218), the Apostolic Canons (360-380), the decrees of the first three Ecumenical Councils, namely Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431), the canons of six Eastern Local Councils, namely Ancyra (314), Neo-Caesarea (between 314 and 325), Gangra (c. 340), Antioch (341), Laodicea (365), and Serdica (c. 343). Undoubtedly, the Albanian Church had also followed the

<sup>555</sup> Mamedova F.D. "Istoriya alban" Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo kak istochnik po obshchestvennoy stroye rannesrednevekovoy Albanii [The History of the Albanians by Moyses Kalankatuatsi as a Source on the Social System of the Early Medieval Albania], p. 160-161.

<sup>556</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i al-bany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 571-583.

canonical resolutions of the Armenian Church by that time, including those of the Council of Ashtishat (354-356), Sahak the Parthian (387-439), and the Council of Shahapivan (446/7). The use of "other" canons is indicated by the text of the Council of Aluen resolutions itself: "... in accordance with the rule, they shall bring him (the bishop – A. N.) a yearly gift" (Canon 1); "any Christian... is to be brought before the bishop and punished in accordance with the laws" (Canon 8); "... they are to be punished in accordance with the canons and driven from the village" (Canon 15); "... should they hereafter cause any mischief, however, they are to be punished in accordance with the canons" (Canon 16); "... he has paid the amount of the fines as prescribed by the canons..." (Canon 21).

The ordinances of the Council of Aluen do not address any dogmatic or canonical topics that were important and relevant to the Christian world of the time and were discussed at the Ecumenical and Local Councils of the Eastern Churches, as well as in the canonical epistles of the teachers and fathers of the Ancient Church, which clearly proves that the Albanian Church was well acquainted with these rules and epistles.

Sources say that Bishop Aristaces, son and successor of Gregory the Illuminator, took part in the work of the First Ecumenical Council. According to Agathangelos, he carried the canons of the council, to which St. Gregory made additions himself afterwards.<sup>568</sup> The canons of the Third Ecumenical Council are reported to have been brought to the Caucasus by the translators

<sup>567</sup> Salachas D.Op. Cit., p. 17-24.

<sup>548</sup> Agathangelos. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 14, §885, p. 417.

Ghewond, Koriun, and Eznik of Kolb in 436 or 437. Moreover, Koriun informs in the *Life of Mashtots* that they also brought the canons of Nicaea with them. The researchers refer to them not only as canons previously delivered by Bishop Aristaces, but also as a collection of resolutions of the six Eastern Local Councils.<sup>557</sup>

In the 5th century, the Albanian Church actively participated in the country's political processes and, in fact, oversaw its civil and cultural life. During this period, the Albanian script was invented, and representatives of the Caucasian peoples were sent for training to the largest centers of learning and culture at the time. Upon return, they brought back not only acquired knowledge but many important literary texts, including the canonical collections of the Eastern Church and the works of the Holy Fathers.

The historian concludes the enumeration of the conciliar rules as follows:

**This agreement was made by the bishops and priests and nobles in the presence of the king. May the king and queen and their son be blessed by the bishops and priests and church, and may all the participants in this council be blessed. These ordinances were signed by Mucik, the king's chancellor (*hramanatar*), Mirharik, steward (*hazarapet*), the heads of clans (*azgapetk*) Marut, Tirazd, Sprakos, Lama, Bakur, Ratan, Arshes, Vardan the Brave, lord of Gardman, Khurs, Bermusan, Khosken, Piwrog, patriarch (*nahapet*), and all the nobles of Albania. As confirmation of this writ the seal of Vachagan, king of Albania, was affixed.**<sup>558</sup>

Also worthy of note at the beginning of the record of conciliar resolutions is the list of bishops who did not affix their seals thereto, as they were sealed by the secular elites.

The need to convene the Council of Aluen is likely to have arisen from the various abuses (mainly of a financial nature) committed by the Albanian feudal lords. This is demonstrated by the overall characteristics of the canons adopted at the council. The 5th-century historian Elishe writes in this regard as follows:

**Where one hundred *dahekan*s<sup>559</sup> should have been levied, twice as much was taken. Even bishops and priests were taxed; not only were the inhabited lands**

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<sup>557</sup> Vardanian N., Shirinian M.E. *Kniga kanonov* [The Book of Canons]. *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. XXXVI. Moscow, 2014. P. 77-80.

<sup>558</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 54.

<sup>571</sup> *Dahekan* (from Old Persian) was a gold coin, which should have contained 4.53 grams of pure gold in the 7th century.

**taxed, but even the ruins. Who is able to speak of the burden of these taxes, imposts, tribute, and duties on mountains, fields, and forests? They did not take as becomes the royal dignity but plundered like brigands to the point that they themselves were extremely surprised as to where all these riches could be coming from...**<sup>560</sup>

The council's ordinances undoubtedly concerned those issues that divided the clergy and the laity. The general nature of the decisions taken suggests that most issues were resolved in favor of the Albanian Church. The canons aligned the annual offerings of "the fruits to the priest by the people"; distributed the tithes collected by the *azats* in favor of the Church; assigned the civil and criminal proceedings to the bishop; prohibited the pagan custom of mourning for the dead; banned marriage between relatives, divorce without cause, and living with a woman outside wedlock (violation of this decree was punished as a murder); forbade the *azats* to appoint or dismiss a priest in their estates without the bishop's consent; and required the population to go to Sunday worship services in the church.<sup>561</sup>

Parallels can be drawn between the resolutions of the Council of Aluen held in 488 and those of the Council of Shahapivan,<sup>562</sup> the closest one in time, which took place in 446/7.

Ovanesian also compares the Aluen canons with the ordinances of the Council of Ashtishat of 356 and concludes that the former are based on the decisions of the Council of Ashtishat.<sup>563</sup> He also believes the Aluen canons were adopted during the reign of Vachagan II (rather than that of Vachagan III) between 372 and 387.

Smbatian is of the opinion that the Aluen canons relied on the resolutions of the Council of Shahapivan, as well as the canons of the Armenian catholicos Sahak the Parthian.<sup>564</sup> Mamedova expresses the view that the Ashtishat and Shahapivan canons had a minor impact on those of the Aluen.<sup>565</sup>

<sup>560</sup> Egishe. *Voyna armyan protiv persov* [The War of the Armenians against the Persians], Translated from Classical Armenian by E.M. Dillen. Yerevan, 1884. P. 26-27.

<sup>561</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 296.

<sup>562</sup> The Canons of the Council of Shahapivan. Translated by V.S. Hovhanessian. *Revue des études arméniennes*, Vol. 37. Leuven, 2017. P. 73-95.

<sup>563</sup> Ovanesian S. K. Kanony Aguenskiego uchreditelnogo sobraniya i ikh svyaz s kanonami Ashtishata [The Canons of the Council of Aluen and Their Connection with the Ashtishat Canons], p. 266-274.

<sup>564</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Aluank Country], p. 190.

<sup>565</sup> Mamedova F.D. "Istoriya alban" *Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo kak istochnik po obshchestvennoy stroye rannesrednevekovoy Albanii* [The History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi as a Source on the Social System of the Early Medieval Albania], p. 69.

We deem it appropriate to conduct a comparative analysis of the decisions taken by the Councils of Shahapivan and Aluen.

Regarding marriage between close relatives, Canon 10 of the Council of Aluen states, "A man may not marry a woman related to him in the third degree; he may not marry his brother's wife."

Canon 13 of the Council of Shahapivan:

**Let no one touch a sister or a sister's daughter or a brother's daughter or an aunt or whoever belongs to his people until the fourth degree and take her as a wife ... If someone blesses the marriage of such people or goes to the wedding, he becomes a participant in their evil works and must be removed from the order of the clerks. And, if a bishop or an elder is found in this counsel, let him be removed from his throne and his priesthood, and let him not approach the order of the clerks ... If they do not turn back from their defiled marriage, let him who blessed the marriage and the clergy who were present at the sacrament be deposed from their throne and their priesthood. The same canon will apply whether for a nobleman or a peasant.**

Regarding adultery and fornication, Canon 11 of the Council of Aluen says this: "He who abandons his wife without cause, or lives with a woman outside wedlock ... is to be bound, brought to the royal court, and put to a cruel death."

Canon 3 of the Council of Shahapivan:

**If anyone who has a wife fornicates and does not keep the purity of the sacrament of marriage ... thus, whoever has received the blessed and delightful life from God by the glory of the holy church, and then strikes it with his foot and makes the blessed marriage that God has given him, a doormat by defilement, by falling into fornication and adultery ... let the chiefs rebuke such a person, by caning and beneficially counseling him. And let him be removed from the church and pay a fine to the church, which should be distributed to the needy. If he is a nobleman and cannot be caned, his fine and penance must be increased – two hundred drams distributed to the needy and two years of penance. Let him not return to the same defilement again. Afterwards, he will be permitted to enter the church and mingle with his friends. But if he is a peasant, he must be caned. He must pay a fine of one hundred drams to the church, which will be distributed to the poor. And after one year of staying away from defilement, he will be permitted to enter the church and mingle with his friends.**

As we can see, the crime was punished by death in the former case and by fine and excommunication for one or two years in the latter case (depending on the class of the sinner).

The same Canon 11 of the Council of Aluen prescribes similar sanctions against those who practice witchcraft and fortune-telling: "He who is lawless or a murderer or one who consults wizards is to be bound, brought to the royal court, and put to a cruel death."

Canons 8 and 9 of the Council of Shahapivan:

**If a man or a woman are found to be engaged in sorcery or in apostasy or in other evil works, and do not turn to repentance and penance, they must be stoned according to the order of the Scriptures. However, if they confess, let them spend the rest of their life in penance — twelve years at the doors [of the church] with the catechumens and three years with the penitents. Always examine their steps in being merciful and having pity on the poor. And let them spend their money on the needy, to earn the salvation of their souls. By frequent tears they will receive their viaticum.**

**Those who go to soothsayers and diviners must pay a fine of two hundred drams if they are noblemen. And if they are peasants, let them be caned fifteen times and pay a fine of one hundred drams, which will be given to the needy. After three years of penance, they can be brought back into communion.**

As we can see, the Shahapivan canons distinguish between sorcery, soothsaying, and divination, with the former being considered a more serious sin.

The pagan tradition of mourning for the dead is refuted by Canon 12 of the Council of Aluen: "Of those who mourn for the dead, let the head of the household and the *gusans* be bound, brought to the royal court, and punished; and let not their families dare to lament afterwards."

The same tradition is described in Canon 11 of the Council of Shahapivan:

**[This canon concerns] those who lament and cry hopelessly after the dead, instead of giving a hopeful and blessed farewell... Thus, if a noblemen or peasant act against the canons of the Apostles and lament, let them be anathematized, both the initiator of the lament and those lamenting. For one year they will not enter the church. Furthermore, they will pay a fine of one hundred drams if noblemen and fifty drams if peasants. Let the money be distributed to the poor. For, they have angered God and troubled the soul of the departed. By paying this money to the poor, God may be reconciled [with**

them], and the soul of the departed may rest. More specifically, if the deceased person had not requested a lamentation, but his family did, let the person requesting the lamentation and the people lamenting be removed from the blessing of the church, as we mentioned [earlier]. And the family may not receive the Eucharist for the departed one, because they are excommunicated. However, let the elders and the clerks of the church offer the Eucharist, by their own initiative, in the name of the deceased one, as if requested by a worthy person. When the family returns to order, they can ask the church to remember the name [of the deceased] in the Holy Mystery [Eucharist] so that the soul may rest in peace. However, if the deceased during his lifetime had requested them to lament, then the fines prescribed by the canons must be doubled. The family and the lamenters must bear the penalty prescribed. However, let no one offer the Eucharist for the deceased and make no remembrance of him. Let them not remember his name because of his hopelessness [concerning life after death].

Canon 15 of the Council of Aluen pertains to charges against the clergy:

Should a layman accuse a priest or a deacon and they confess to the charge, the bishop is to judge them, and they shall repent in solitude. Should they not confess, however, and that which the others say against them is manifestly true, they are to be punished in accordance with the canons and driven from the village. If the crime be not evident, the priest is to be commanded to celebrate a Mass, which shall be taken as his oath.

The same is covered by Canon 2 of the Council of Shahapivan:

If a priest is found in defilement or fornication or in other evil acts, and his deeds are exposed by witnesses, let him not serve the priesthood. He must pay a fine of three hundred drams, which should be distributed among the poor, and he will stand in the rank of the acolytes. And if while in the rank of the acolytes he is found in the same defilement, let him be expelled from his order and from the rank of the acolytes until he returns to the true path through penance. And by observing his path, the bishop may allow him to stand with the acolytes ... If a married elder is found in defilement or in fornication or in other evil acts, and these are proven by witnesses, let his priesthood be annulled and let him be removed from the portion (*bazin*) of the church. He will pay a fine of three hundred drams, which will be distributed to the needy. The same canon applies for elders and deacons.

**They will be assigned to the military ranks [*karg*] and [pay] the royal taxes, and they may not mix with the clerks.**

Canon 21, the last of the Council of Aluen, finds parallels in the canons of the Council of Shahapivan and concerns the foundation of temples and the cult of relics: "If a noble constructs an altar in his church or places relics therein or makes an offering, he shall do it as far as possible with the permission of the bishop. He who obeys these canons shall be blessed, and whoever does not shall be expelled from the church and shall pay a fine to the bishop proportionate to his resources; after he has paid the amount of the fines as prescribed by the canons, he shall be blessed."

Canon 17 of the Council of Shahapivan:

**Let no one who wants to deposit the relics of a martyr do so without the permission of the bishop of the country. Let no one commemorate the memory of a martyr or a council without the orders of the bishop. And if someone brings [the relics of] a martyr from a holy place, let him bring them to the bishop with witnesses and letters from the bishops of the area from which he brought [the relics]. Let him place them wherever is appropriate, with the permission of the bishop of his area. Let him who wants to erect a table for the mystery of the Lord [Eucharist] not do so without the permission of the bishop. However, every year on the day of the anniversary of the bringing of the relics, they may commemorate in a big celebration the name of the martyr whose relics were brought. Be careful concerning honor and holiness, so that the anger of the holy martyrs who suffered for the sake of Christ will not be incurred. [Otherwise,] wrath will befall upon the world instead of intercession.**

More severe sanctions — as compared to other regulations — for certain violations of the canons can be explained by the necessity for radical measures to raise the Christian consciousness of the masses and fight the remnants of pagan customs among them. Church historian Bolotov is credited with the following statement: "What is useful for the church is canonical." The Church's actual benefit or need is expressed in Canon 13 of the Council of Shahapivan: "And if someone argues asking why [penalties] in the Nicene canons are not as harsh, [it is] because no one was expecting that evil works

and crimes of such great magnitude would happen in the world. Otherwise, as early as that time, they would have cut off the evil roots of destruction." We may seek the sources of specific canonical issues that were considered by the Council of Aluen. We have previously divided the Aluen canons into 5 categories, from which



necessary parallels can be drawn.

Thus, the Group 1 canons concerning church taxation and maintenance of the clergy are derived from the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which prescribes that the church community support the priesthood: “Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:13-14). Apostolic Canon 41 reiterates Paul the Apostle’s thought and grants bishops and all clerics in general the right to receive allowance from their flock:

**We ordain that the bishop have authority over the goods of the Church: for if he is to be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more are temporal possessions to be entrusted to him. He is therefore to administer them all of his own authority, and supply those who need, through the presbyters and deacons, in the fear of God, and with all reverence. He may also, if need be, take what is required for his own necessary wants, and for the brethren to whom he has to show hospitality, so that he may not be in any want. For the law of God has ordained, that they who wait at the altar should be nourished of the altar. Neither does any soldier bear arms against an enemy at his own cost.**

Apostolic Canon 4 mentions another source of clergy support: “Let all other fruits be sent home as first-fruits for the bishops and presbyters.”

Canon 2 of the Council of Aluen arouses the suspicion that it legalizes simony.<sup>566</sup> The sin of simony during ordination to the priesthood, according to the canons, eliminates the operation of grace and makes consecration invalid. Apostolic Canon 29: “If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, shall obtain possession of that dignity by money, let both him and the person who ordained him be deposed, and also altogether cut off from all communion, as Simon Magus was by me Peter.” However, it is known from church history that the payment of a fee to the treasury of the bishop’s house was at various times considered a condition for ordination, as stated in the canon of the Council of Aluen. Such a reprehensible practice appears to have sometimes caused accusations of simony, but in the strict sense of the word, it is not the case as long as the ordination decision itself is not dependent on the amount of the fee, which remains the same for all candidates for the priesthood. At any rate,

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<sup>566</sup> Simony is the sale and purchase of church offices and dignities. In a broad sense, simony is the sale of grace of the Holy Spirit. The term is named after Simon Magus of Samaria, who tried to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit from Peter and John the Apostles or, in other words, to buy the priesthood with money (Acts 8:17-24).

Archpriest Vladislav Tsy-pin, an expert in church law, holds that this conclusion follows from the ecclesiastical judicial practice of the past.<sup>567</sup>

As for the Group 2 canons of the Council of Aluen related to church administration, equivalents cannot be found either in the resolutions of councils (excluding the Armenian ones) of the time or in the rules of church fathers and teachers.

The Group 3 canons of the Council of Aluen dealing with problems in parishes and monasteries seem to be mostly based on local legal traditions.

Aluen Canon 6 is directed against sacrilege.<sup>568</sup> This rule guarantees the inviolability of all property belonging to the church or, in a narrow sense, to the monastery. Apostolic Canon 72: "If any clergyman or layman takes away wax or oil from the holy Church, let him be excommunicated, and let him restore a fifth part more than he took." Canon 61 of St. Basil the Great: "Anyone who has stolen anything, provided he has repented of his own accord and has accused himself of the theft, shall be excluded from the communion of the Holy Elements for one year only. But if he was detected, two years."

As for Aluen Canons 15 and 16, they are based on the First Epistle to Timothy: "Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses" (1 Timothy 5:19). The matter of charges against the clergy was discussed in more detail at the Council of Chalcedon.

The Group 4 canons of the Council of Aluen associated with moral behavior can be explained in relation to the church-wide canons.

For instance, Canon 10 prohibits marriage between close relatives. In the Book of Leviticus, the Lord directly speaks to people through his prophet Moses and forbids marriages in the third degree (Leviticus 18:1-30). These rules were fully accepted by the Christian Church. Moreover, the Christian bans on intermarriage became even stricter. In addition to bans imposed by the Book of Leviticus, it was forbidden to marry a wife's sister after the wife's death (2nd degree), which was not mentioned in the Old Testament Law, and forbidden to marry a niece (3rd degree). This was stated by the Apostolic Canons, Local Councils, and the Canons of the Holy Fathers: Canon 19 of the Holy Apostles; Canon 2 of the Council of Neo-Caesarea; Canons 23, 27, 67, 68, 75, 76, 78, 79, and 87 of Basil the Great.

Aluen Canon 11 punishes lawless people, wizards, and murderers with death.

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<sup>567</sup> Tsy-pin Vladislav, archpriest. *Kurs tserkovnogo prava* [The Course of Church Law]. Klin, 2004. P. 193.

<sup>568</sup> Sacrilege in this context is the stealing of sacred things, something belonging to the church. It is derived from Latin words *sacer* "sacred" and *legere* "to steal" and denotes a property crime aimed at the sacred possessions of the Church, theft. In a broad sense, sacrilege is the defilement or desecration of a shrine.

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Apostolic Canon 48: "If any layman put away his wife and marry another, or one who has been divorced by another man, let him be excommunicated." The same is described in Canon 77 of Basil the Great:

**A man, however, who abandons his legally wedded wife, and marries another woman, according to the Lord's decision, is liable to the judgment of adultery (Matt. 19:9). But it has been ruled and regulated by our Fathers that such persons are to weep for a year, listen on the side for two years, kneel for three years, in the seventh year co-stand together with the faithful, and then be deemed worthy to participate in the offering, provided they repent with remorseful tears.**

The rules of the Fathers referenced by St. Basil include, apart from the Apostolic Canon above, Canon 20 of the Council of Ancyra, Canon 115 of the Council of Carthage, and Canon 15 of Timothy of Alexandria.

Canon 24 of the Council of Ancyra also condemns divination: "They who practice divination, and follow the customs of the heathen, or who take men to their houses for the invention of sorceries, or for lustrations, fall under the canon of five years penance." The same is described in Canon 83 of Basil the Great: "Those resorting to divination and continuing the usages of the heathen nations, or admitting certain persons into their homes with the view of discovering sorceries and purification, let them fall under the canon of six years, one year weeping, and one year listening, and three years kneeling, and one year standing among the faithful, then they shall be accepted." In Canon 65, however, St. Basil speaks of those practicing incantation to the detriment of people and equates their penance with that of murderers, while Canon 83 concerns those believing the wizards and not devising evil against others.

Apostolic Canon 66 relates to murderers: "If any clergyman shall strike anyone in a contest, and kill him with one blow, let him be deposed for his violence. If a layman shall do so, let him be excommunicated." The same is described in Canon 11 of Basil the Great: "As for one that has committed an involuntary murder, he has fulfilled the requirements of justice by a term of eleven years. For it is plain that in the case of the ones assaulted we may

observe the rules of Moses (Exod. 21:18-19) ..." We can see that the Aluen canons prescribe much tougher sanctions for those falling under the Canon 11 charges and require the use of secular officials as punishers, unlike the church practice of Byzantium.

Aluen Canon 12 goes against the tradition of mourning over the deceased. It should be noted that all Eastern peoples had more or less stable forms of "mourning for the dead," namely family or public mourning, which could last from several days to several weeks. As a rule, when a loved one died, their relatives hired professional wailers to mourn them. The Christian tradition, however, holds that the hope of resurrection after death must overcome the hopelessness of funeral weeping. Aristides, one of the 2nd-century church writers, says in his *Apology*: "If any righteous person of their number passes away from the world they rejoice and give thanks to God, and they follow his body, as if he were moving from one place to another."<sup>569</sup> When pagan customs related to mourning began to penetrate Christianity later, the ban on wailer services was already accompanied by the threat of excommunication, since crying for the dead and mourning were "incompatible with the hope of resurrection and cast doubt on the Christian belief."<sup>570</sup>

Aluen Canon 13 that prohibits eating "filthy food" and breaking the Holy Lent is derived from Apostolic Canons 63 and 69: "If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, or any one of the sacerdotal order, shall eat flesh, with the blood of the life thereof, or anything killed by beasts, or that dies of itself, let him be deposed. For the law has forbidden this. If he be a layman, let him be excommunicated"; "If any bishop, presbyter, or deacon, or reader, or singer, does not fast the holy Quadregesimal fast of Easter, or the fourth day, or the day of Preparation, let him be deposed, unless he be hindered by some bodily infirmity. If he be a layman, let him be excommunicated." The ban on eating dead meat was transferred from the Old Testament law: "If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches its carcass will be unclean till evening. Anyone who eats some of its carcass must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening. Anyone who picks up the carcass must wash their clothes, and they will be unclean till evening" (Leviticus 11:39-40).

Working on Sundays is indirectly prohibited by Canon 29 of the Council of Laodicea: "Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, rest

<sup>569</sup> Aristides. *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians*. Edited with an introduction and translation by J.R. Harris. Cambridge, 1893. Chapter XV. P. 49.

<sup>570</sup> Ioann Zlatoust, saint. *Tvorennya* [Works]. St. Petersburg, 1906. Vol. XII. Book 2. Slovo o tom chto ne dolzhno oplakivat umershikh [Sermon against Mourning for the Dead], P. 871-877.

ing then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.”

Canon 8, which we have assigned to Group 5 as being of particular importance and which authorizes a bishop to investigate the criminal cases of Christians, indicates that the judiciary was part of the ecclesiastical hierarchical authority in the Albanian Church. It is obvious that the church represents human society, which, like any social organism, may face controversies; the church members — sinful people — may commit crimes against the commandments of God, may violate church regulations; therefore, there is always room for the earthly church to exercise judicial authority over its children. Depending on the relationships between the church and the state, it was the responsibility of the church court at different times in history to consider lawsuits between Christians and even criminal cases, whose trials generally did not correspond to the nature of the ecclesiastical authority.<sup>571</sup>

After the Edict of Milan was issued, the custom of Christians going to their bishops for litigation was officially sanctioned, and the judicial decisions of prelates began to rely on the executive power of the state. In the wake of Constantine the Great, the Albanian king Vachagan the Pious entitled the Christians of Caucasian Albania to bring cases before the bishops’ court, whose verdict was final. The peremptory episcopal court, endowed with official state status by the Council of Aluen, may have undergone various changes over time depending on the political context of the country.

The Byzantine Empire recognized the trial of civil cases of clerics by their bishops as an absolute canonical principle. However, owing to their nature, such matters could also be heard by the state judicial authorities. The analysis of canons of the Council of Aluen shows that only offenses punished by death were handed over to the royal court (Canon 11). The situation was different for the church cases proper, which, though litigious, by their nature could not be submitted to the jurisdiction of non-church judicial bodies. These included clerics’ lawsuits to distribute ecclesiastical revenues, issues of monastery and parish jurisdiction, questions associated with parish discipline, etc. By signing the resolutions of the Council of Aluen, King Vachagan confirmed that jurisdiction in these matters belonged exclusively to the Albanian Church, but such confirmation on his part was not a concession, only acknowledgment of the Church’s inalienable right reflected in the canons and historical tradition of other Eastern Churches.

By convening the Council of Aluen, Vachagan III, as noted by Mamedova, accomplished several goals. On the one hand, this council contributed to establishing the economic independence of the Albanian Church; on the other hand, the king used the conciliar ordinances to succeed in strengthening state power, curbing the self-willed feudal lords (*azats*), equating clerics with secular elites, governing the taxable class relations between the nobility and the clergy, and achieving the religious unity of all classes, which was necessary to preserve the country's political independence.<sup>572</sup>

### 1.3.11. *Albanian Martyrs for the Faith*

In the last four chapters of his Book One (27, 28, 29, and 30), Movses Kalankatuatsi presents the acts of martyrdom of the Albanian Church, recounting the exploits of some Albanian Christians in the face of persecution for the faith.

Narrating Mesrop Mashtots' activities, the Albanian historian reports that Mashtots, while returning from Jerusalem with his disciples before reaching Armenia, settled down in the province of Uti, in the place called Gis, i.e. where St. Eliseus had founded the first church. Mashtots "resumed" the preaching of the Gospel in this place, as well as in the neighboring Albanian regions:

**He revived the Church and strengthened the Faith and spread the teaching of the gospel to the land of the Utians, the Albanians, the Lpink, the Kaspk, up to the Cholay Pass, and to other foreign tribes whom Alexander of Macedon had captured and settled around the great Mount Caucasus, namely, the Gargark and the Kamichik Heptalk (Hephthalites); he reconverted them to the Christian faith and taught them the form of worship which they had learned long ago and had now forgotten.**<sup>573</sup>

Mashtots seems to have spent a long time there, secretly supporting the local Christians. Mashtots sent some of his disciples to preach the Gospel in various provinces, while others remained to keep the relic, a piece of the Cross of the Lord, which Mashtots had brought from Jerusalem and con

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Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 194.

Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 54-55.

cealed in a special reliquary near the temple. Later, the disciples staying in Gis were martyred, and someone who saw the signs over the place where the bodies of the saints lay built a chapel and put the remains of the martyrs in it, taking an oath to commemorate them annually.

Then Movses Kalankatuatsi describes the fate of Mashtots' disciples sent by him to the various regions of Albania: "His disciples in the provinces of Albania gathered together at the instigation of the Holy Spirit and were eager to do good works," and therefore made for Jerusalem. The travelers from Albania met the Bishop of Jerusalem and told him about Mesrop's preaching in Albania and the conversion of many people to Christ. Mashtots' disciples stayed in Jerusalem for some time and were received with great joy. They were joined there by "three men, pious priests, whose leader was Athanasius," all of whom probably wanted to accompany them. Kalankatuatsi relates that the Albanians begged these priests to go with them to Albania "that they might be given leading places in their country." The Bishop of Jerusalem sent Mashtots' disciples back home with gold and silver ornaments and relics of various saints of the Lord for the needs of the Albanian Church.

Interestingly and importantly, the priests, whom the Albanians asked to go with them, accompanied them on the way to Albania with the blessing of the Bishop of Jerusalem. The historian does not provide any details, but it can be concluded from context that the clergymen were invited to occupy the episcopal sees.

Let us elaborate a bit on this passage to see how the Albanian historian or his sources view these events and understand their meaning. We know that Mesrop Mashtots died around 444. Kalankatuatsi himself indicates that the events took place shortly after his death: "A short time after the death of St. Mashtots .."<sup>586</sup> It is doubtful that the events could have taken place after 451, for the Council of Chalcedon, which was convened that year, divided the Orthodox Church from the Caucasian Christians forever.

Jerusalem witnessed fascinating events during this period. In 420, Juvenal became the Bishop of Jerusalem. This man had incredible energy and one desire: to turn Jerusalem into a pearl of Christianity. He realized that if Jerusalem became a patriarchal city, it would flourish even more. For this purpose, Juvenal began to call himself patriarch, but faced no further sanctions. Moreover, Juvenal, who together with the Holy Fathers condemned the Nestorian heresy at the Third Ecumenical Council, received the special attention of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450), who issued a decree to transfer to

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<sup>586</sup>  
<sup>585</sup>

Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 28, p. 56.

him authority over the Palestinian, Phoenician, and Arabian dioceses.<sup>575</sup> In 449, he became an official patriarch appointed by the emperor. This political step, however, required ecclesiastical recognition, which was given only at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, when the Bishop of Jerusalem received the status of archbishop or patriarch (though these names had not yet been legalized) from the Church.<sup>576</sup>

Throughout all these years, Bishop Juvenal was tirelessly assisted by Eudocia, wife of Emperor Theodosius II. Eudocia's contribution to developing holy places was so great that the inhabitants of Palestine nicknamed her "the second Helen." The empress visited Jerusalem several times, donated large sums of money, and engaged in generous charity work. This woman founded a lot of temples and beautified the already existing ones. She built a residence for the Bishop of Jerusalem, a hotel for pilgrims, and a large number of charitable institutions in Jerusalem, the cradle of Christianity. Eudocia also took care of the inner life of the Church, which by that time had been disturbed by the Monophysite heresy rising on the ruins of Nestorianism.<sup>577</sup> The amount of money donated by Eudocia to churches, monasteries, hospitals, the old, the infirm, and the poor was beyond comprehension.<sup>578</sup>

Given what was happening in the Holy Land during this period, it is easy to imagine the Albanian pilgrims visiting Jerusalem. They were well received and generously rewarded.

The Jerusalem theme in Movses Kalankatuatsi's account also arises due to great interest in the holy places demonstrated in the mid-5th century and, most importantly, due to the rise of Jerusalem and the fall of Caesarea.

It is no coincidence that the Albanian historian mentions the Cross of the Lord, with which he begins his story. After all, it was around this time (starting in 438) that people from all over the Mediterranean and beyond started to flock to the main Christian shrine, the Cross, thanks to the activities of Empress Eudocia. Long queues lined up in Jerusalem every morning to see and kiss the relic. High-ranking pilgrims — princes, royal ambassadors, bishops, abbots of monasteries — requested the Patriarch of Jerusalem to give them a piece of the Tree of Life as a special blessing for

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<sup>575</sup> Shterenshis M. *Istoriya goroda Iyerusalima* [The History of the City of Jerusalem]. Herzliya, 2006. P. 137.

<sup>576</sup> Bolotov V.V. *Lektsii po istorii Drevney Tserkvi* [Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church], Vol. 3, p. 201-204.

<sup>577</sup> Kulakovskiy Y.A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium], Vol.I. St. Petersburg, 2003. P. 240; Velichko A.M. *Istoriya vizantiyskikh imperatorov* [The History of the Byzantine Emperors]. Moscow, 2017. Vol. I. P. 311.

<sup>578</sup> Velichko A.M. *Istoriya vizantiyskikh imperatorov* [The History of the Byzantine Emperors], Vol. I, p. 322.



their native country, city, diocese, or abode. That is how a piece of the Cross could have made its way into Caucasian Albania.

Jerusalem is well known to have provided relics to the whole Christian world for the entire Byzantine period. Fake shrines began to appear exactly at this point in time. Usually we recall fake relics from the Crusader period, but the business was started by the Byzantines themselves, and to be fair, this profitable industry made the residents of Jerusalem much richer. It was during this period, and not earlier, that “a piece of the relics of the great martyr Pantaleon and a vessel containing the blood of the righteous Zacharias” probably got into Albania. Later, their appearance in Albania will be attributed to the time of St. Grigoris, but the statement seems doubtful. It is also unlikely that these relics were genuine (during the life and death of St. Zacharias, Father of John the Baptist, no one would have imagined collecting his blood).

The historian tells of the subsequent fate of travelers from Jerusalem, relating that, having come to Albania, some of them settled in a cave on the Star Hill near the Tartar River, while the rest stayed on the other side of the river at the edge of the forest called Chlakh. The time of Easter celebration was approaching. An armed detachment of one of the North Caucasian tribes attacked Albania, “reached the province of Artsakh at the beginning of Easter,” and captured the Christians hiding in the forest. The Christians were martyred.<sup>591</sup>

We can learn some relevant facts from Movses Kalankatuatsi’s narrative. First, the scene can be distinguished quite clearly: the Albanian province of Artsakh, the *gavar* of Mec Kueank, the Terter River, i.e. the northern part of present-day Nagorno-Karabakh. Second, there is a direct reference to the time of the year: according to Christian tradition, the forty-day fast precedes Easter, which is usually celebrated in April.

The holy martyr Taguhi suffered death at the same time. Her name is literally translated as “queen” (the Greek equivalent: “Vasilisa”), which can be not only a proper name but also a name indicative of noble origin, such as, for example, “princess.” She is described by Movses Kalankatuatsi as follows:

**[There was among these captives] a woman called Taguhi, one of the local noblewomen of the province of Uti from the village of Bagink, an exceedingly rich woman who frequented the missionaries from Jerusalem. Seeing her among the prisoners, the general of the Honk was inflamed with a diabolical and lascivious passion, for she was very beautiful. Deciding to take her to wife, he ordered her to**

be guarded carefully. His men completed the day's raids and heaped all the loot and booty together, while his brothers-in-arms slew many...

The general of the Honk camped there that night with his army, and towards evening the general commanding the Tubal force ordered the blessed Taguhi to be fetched that he might satiate his lewd desires upon her. Armed with the power of the Lord, however, she scorned him, resisted and mocked the filthy barbarian. *"God forbid," she said, "that I should yield my chaste virginity to a son of a dog a swinish heathen, or that I should for fear of torture be afraid to die and change this worthless life for one which passeth not away!"* **And raising her hands to God, she said:** *"Lord of Lords, God of Gods, and King of Kings, do not put me to shame who place my trust in Thee. Keep me pure and righteous in this present danger. As Thou gavest me rebirth in the font of light, that I might know Thee, so now make me free from sin in faith and holiness, and cause the light of Thy truth to shine into the hearts of these unfeeling barbarians, that they also may recognize Thee as the one true God."* **When the lawless mob heard this they went and told their prince, for there was an interpreter among them who listened to her whole speech. The tyrant, filled with furious rage, flew into a passion in his snarling and growling bestiality, and commanded her to be killed amid terrible tortures if she would not come to him in honor and respect, and his servants went and urged her to submit to the will of their prince. When they were unable to persuade the unassailable Taguhi, they bound her hands behind her back, dragged her by the hair, tore her face with cruel thorns from the thickets in the plains, and together lacerated the body of the saint; then they cut off her head. Her struggle was like that of St. Hripsime, and the great Taguhi was crowned with the divine and victorious crown of Christ. The same night, while the infidel prince and his forces enjoyed themselves with sleepless jollities and made merry, a wonderful sign suddenly appeared from the Lord. Everyone clearly observed a strong light to shine from the scene of St. Taguhi's martyrdom. The tattered remains of her clothes, scattered over the tree tops of the forest, shone like stars, and for a long time the starry light shone above the holy martyrs. When they saw this, the people called the place Astel Blur ("Star Hill"), as it is known to this day. The prince was amazed by these miracles of good tidings, and in great fear he ordered the priests of God to be summoned before him. Learning from them the path of salvation, he believed in the living God and ordered the relics of the saints to be gathered together, wrapped in clean linen, and buried upon the hill. There they made an offering of sheep and goats and celebrated divine service**

**with great ceremony in commemoration of their martyrs.<sup>592</sup>**

The Albanian historian writes about what became of the Tubal commander (Hunnic prince), baptized under the Christian name of Theophilus, who ordered Mashtots' disciples, the Jerusalem priests, and the noble virgin Taguhi to be martyred:

**After the light of truth had entered the heart of the godly prince Theophilus he ordered the prisoners to be released, and on Easter morning he set out with his priests and many other believers and the Agiostratosean army, arrived in the province of Uti, dismounted, and encamped near the quay of the pontoon bridge on the banks of the river Kur. The great king of Rosmosock returned with his armies after his raids with great droves of prisoners and immense booty, and crossing the Kur from the east, camped opposite them. In his idolatrous error, he ordered sacrifices to be made to his gods in sacred feasts. When the Christian Theophilus and the Agiostratosean army saw this, they offered gifts to God in accordance with the precepts of the Christian faith, and with the blessing of the holy priests they placed the sign of the cross upon their banners. When the bestial, lawless barbarian king saw this, he was possessed with demoniac frenzy and angrily commanded the holy general Theophilus to be brought before him with thirty men. At first he addressed them with soft words, and then in anger. "You who are dear to our kingdom on account of your victories and valor," he said, "have been greatly honored by us; you, being of higher rank than all the others, were honored with the leadership of one third of my army. Why, then, have you abandoned the noble gods of your race who gave us victory in our raids? Rebelling with your soldiers you worship a god of whom we know nothing, and if you will not make sacrifices to our gods, you and your soldiers will be punished and put to death."**

**The confessor of Christ, the brave general Theophilus, answered and said to the king: "Knowledge of the condition of man is the source of virtue, and virtue, with excellent works, is the mother of godliness. If, to enhance His glory, our nature was united with that of Christ by His birth [and received] the gift of light whereby to know and recognize God, creator of heaven and earth, one united Holy Trinity, who in His benevolence wishes to keep us free from the harm of worthless idols, how can you take this heavenly grace from us, or compare your passing glory with that of God, or hope by your threats to frighten us into choosing this temporal life, to make us abandon God and worship dumb objects?" The king roared in indignation and great wrath and ordered the holy general Theophilus and his companions and the two priests to be put to a painful death. Confessing the faith on the field of martyrdom, they valiantly fought their heroic battle and received from Christ**

**the victor's crown. Thus were the holy confessor and the thirty soldiers translated to their heavenly abode.**

When the blessed Moses and Anerologes, the sons of the sainted general Theophilus, together with the Agiostratosean force and other believers, saw this, they urged on their horses and fled before the lawless king, holding it better to be persecuted for Christ's sake than to live a guilty life of impiety. They considered disgrace for the sake of Christ more important than the great treasures of their fathers. They fled south and came to a very high peak of a great mountain which overlooks the numerous provinces of the country. Band after band was dispatched at the command of the merciless king, and the forces of the Honk pursued and overtook them on the summit of the mountain, where they attempted with many entreaties to reconvert them to idol-worship and obedience to the king. When they were unable to persuade them, they put them to the sword. Thus Moses ended his life with his blessed brother and all the godly Agiostratosean force, receiving from Christ the martyr's crown, shining in splendid radiance from the tops of the northern mountains, and entering the immortal abode with all the saints.<sup>579</sup>

Trever believes that the events described by the historian occurred in the early 4th century, namely in 531, when there was a large invasion by North Caucasian peoples into the countries of Transcaucasia.<sup>580</sup> But since Mashtots' disciples are mentioned in the text, this fact may indicate that the events took place more precisely in the mid-5th century,<sup>581</sup> especially as the sources are practically silent about what happened in Caucasian Albania during this period.

Trever also notes that the ethnic terms *Rosmosoks* and *Tubals*, encountered only in this text, cannot be properly interpreted. It seems most likely they were tribal names and that the raid in question was organized and led by these little-known tribes, which may have belonged to the multilingual and diverse Albanian union and allied with the Huns (Hons) for this specific campaign.

The name of St. Taguhi is also referenced in the legend of Bartholomew the Apostle's preaching in the territory of Transcaucasia. This name was given to the sister of the Albanian (Albakian, Arepanian, Atropatenian -?) ruler Sanatruck, who was converted to Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle.<sup>582</sup> Tagu- hi,

<sup>579</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 30, p. 58-60.

<sup>580</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 226.

<sup>581</sup> Y.R. Dzhaferov agrees with this point of view and dates the event to 466 (Dzhafarov Y.R. *Gunny i Azerbaydzhan* [The Huns and Azerbaijan], p. 52).

<sup>582</sup> Khudabashev A.M. *Obozreniye Armenii, v geograficheskoy, istoricheskoy i literaturnoy otnosheniyyakh* [Overview of Armenia in Geographical, Historical and Literary Terms]. St. Petersburg, 1859. P. 97-98.

Sanatruk ... perhaps we find here various oral traditions dating back to different centuries and overlapping each other.

The chapters from Movses Kalankatuatsi's *History of Albania* filled with hagiographie detail are of great interest because they give a very general yet clear idea of the fate of many Albanian Christians who chose to be put to death rather than renounce their faith in Christ. This fact is the best evidence that the Gospel teaching was no longer taken lightly by the Albanians in the 5th century and that it went to the very heart of life and beliefs of these people. From this account we learn about the martyrdom of the indigenous Albanians: Mesrop Mashtots' disciples, who received the martyr's crown in Gis and the Chlakh forest (in Artsakh); three priests from Jerusalem, one of whom was named Athanasius; the noble maiden Taguhi; the commander Theophilus with thirty soldiers and a host of priests; and princes Moses and Anerologes, together with the Agiostratosean force.

### 1.3.12. *The Council of Chalcedon in the Fortunes of Christianity in Transcaucasia*

The Council of Chalcedon was convoked in 451, the year that the confrontation between the Christian peoples of Transcaucasia and Mazdean Persia reached a crescendo resulting in the Battle of Avarayr. This Fourth Ecumenical Council did not include the representatives of the Caucasian Churches, since the peoples of Transcaucasia were fighting for their right to profess the Christian faith at the time.<sup>583</sup> When informed of the decisions taken by the Council of Chalcedon, the Albanian, Armenian, and Georgian theologians refused to recognize them, seeing the doctrine of two natures of Christ as the revival of Nestorianism.

The Transcaucasian peoples had treated Nestorianism as the principal heresy but treated Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>584</sup> in contrast, as a pillar of Orthodoxy, ever since they

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<sup>583</sup> Guaita G.Op. Cit., p. 88-90.

<sup>584</sup> Cyril of Alexandria (375/380-444) was the Archbishop of Alexandria, theologian, Christian saint, nephew and disciple of Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria. He received classical and theological education and was well versed in the Holy Scripture and the writings of the church fathers. When Cyril was young, he spent about 5 years in the monasteries of the Nitrian Desert near Alexandria. In 412, he was elevated to the see of Alexandria. Starting from 429, Cyril held theological debates against the heresy of Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople. The name of Cyril of Alexandria is associated in church history with the beginning of the era of Christological disputes between the Orthodox, Nestorians, and Monophysites. His theology, centered around the concept of One Incarnate Nature of God the Word, provided a basis for understanding the person of Christ in the Orthodox and Monophysite doctrines. However, some expressions of St. Cyril were misinterpreted by his "strict" followers, who concluded that Christ had only one nature and broke away from the church after the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

were indirectly involved in the Nestorian disputes. The Council of Chalcedon did not condemn Nestorius strongly enough, in a way, because it did not condemn by name his teachers, who had long been anathematized in Transcaucasia (back in 435!). The Transcaucasian countries gradually – through Syria – became infected with all the prejudices against the Chalcedonians, not to mention the fact that subtle theological terms could not be adequately translated from Greek.<sup>585</sup>

The Local Council of 491, which gathered the representatives of the Armenian, Albanian, and Georgian Churches in the Armenian capital of Vagharshapat, adopted the *Henotikon*<sup>586</sup> of Emperor Zeno (474-491) and condemned both Nestorius and Eutyches.<sup>587</sup> The same council also rejected the Chalcedonian decrees as purportedly affirming “two persons.” The resolution of the Council of Vagharshapat reads as follows: “We, Armenians and Greeks, Georgians and Aghuans, professing the one true faith bequeathed to us by the Holy Fathers at the three Ecumenical Councils, deny such blasphemies (i.e. that there are two separate persons in Christ) and unanimously anathematize all that.”<sup>588</sup>

This council marked a historic divide between the Greek Orthodox and Gregorian confessions for all ages.<sup>589</sup>

However, the Christians of Transcaucasia did not immediately reject the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. They expressed their position only in the 6th

<sup>585</sup> Kartashev A.V. *Vselenskiye sobory* [The Ecumenical Councils]. St. Petersburg, 2002. P. 400- 401.

<sup>586</sup> In 482, at the suggestion of Acacius, Bishop of Constantinople, Emperor Zeno issued the famous *Act of Union*, or *Henotikon*, which was addressed to the bishops, all clerics, and Christians of Alexandria, Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis and aimed to bridge the gap between the Monophysites and supporters of the Council of Chalcedon. The *Henotikon* condemned the heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches and affirmed the true humanity and deity of Christ, as adopted by the first three Ecumenical Councils. However, it avoided any definitive statement on whether Christ had one or two natures. It left out all the controversial formulas, which were not clear to everyone, from the definitions approved in Chalcedon. Church historians admit that the *Henotikon* was essentially an Orthodox document, but turned out to be the betrayal of pure Orthodoxy in this historical setting.

<sup>587</sup> Eutyches (c. 370-after 454) was the archimandrite of Constantinople and abbot of the monastery in Eudoma, a suburb in the southwest of Constantinople. Eutyches is known as the originator of the heresy named Eutychianism after him. Monophysitism, an alternative name for this heresy reflecting its meaning, came into use at the end of the 7th century. Eutychianism (Monophysitism) is generally regarded as a belief claiming that there is only one divine nature in Christ and thereby seeing Him only as God, not as Man. Eutyches was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 448 and anathematized as a heresiarch by all historical Christian confessions following both the Chalcedonian theological tradition and non-Chalcedonian traditions.

<sup>588</sup> Kartashev A.V. Op. Cit., p. 401.

<sup>589</sup> Nikonorov Alexy, hieromonk. *Istoriya khristianstva v Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The History of Christianity in Caucasian Albania], p. 122-123.

century, at last finalizing and legitimizing their opposition to its provisions in the first decades of the 8th century.

### 1.3.13. 6th Century: The Break with Ecumenical Orthodoxy

In 506, the Armenian catholicos Babgen Utmsetsi (490-516) convoked a council in the city of Dvin in Eastern Armenia, which was attended by representatives of the Armenian, Albanian, and Georgian Churches. It was historically called the First Council of Dvin. This council reservedly condemned the dogmatic “innovations” of the Orthodox East.<sup>590</sup>

It should be pointed out that several councils were convened in Dvin in the 6th century, therefore they are differently numbered and dated by the historians.

The famous historian A.V. Kartashev thinks that the council held in Dvin in 527 further exacerbated the divide between the Eastern and Caucasian Churches.<sup>591</sup> According to him, this council decided to acknowledge one nature in Christ. In order to better express the idea of this unity, the council ruled to celebrate Christmas and Epiphany on the same day, January 6<sup>592</sup> with the same doctrinal purpose and under the influence of the new Monophysite teaching of Julian of Halicarnassus<sup>593</sup> on the incorruptibility of Christ’s body, it decreed to use only unleavened bread and wine without admixture of water for the sacrament of the Eucharist. The council also prescribed that the Monophysite phrase “who was crucified for us” should be added to the Trisagion.

Catholicos Gregory VII (1294-1306) subsequently wrote about this council: “It is known throughout the East that ten bishops at the Council of Dvin changed almost the entire law, which had remained undisturbed for us since Blessed Gregory.”<sup>594</sup>

As opposed to the Council of Chalcedon, the Council of Dvin assigned the title

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<sup>590</sup> Bozoian A.A., Yuzbashian K.N. *Armyanskaya apostolskaya tserkov* [The Armenian Apostolic Church], *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. III. Moscow, 2001. P. 334.

<sup>591</sup> Kartashev A.V. *Op. Cit.*, p. 402. It may well be that the author does not determine the date of the council quite correctly and refers to the First Council of Dvin held in 505/6.

<sup>592</sup> This is due to the fact that Christ is both God and Man at the same time. Christmas affirms human nature, whereas Epiphany affirms divine nature.

<sup>593</sup> Julian of Halicarnassus (died after 518) was the Bishop of Halicarnassus, church figure, and writer. He supported the Miaphysitic Christological view in the Byzantine Church and was expelled from the see for his anti-Chalcedonian position during the persecution of the Chalcedonian emperor Justin I. His name is associated with the Julianism doctrine that occurred among the Miaphysites and gave rise to the Aphthartodocetism sect.

<sup>594</sup> Kartashev A.V. *Op. Cit.*, p. 402.



of patriarch to the Armenian and Albanian catholicoi, although some researchers believe that the patriarchal titles of catholicoi were assigned at the Second Council of Dvin. The Second Council of Dvin took place in 554/555.

The Second Council of Dvin rejected and condemned the Chalcedonian resolutions and the *Tome*<sup>595</sup> of Leo<sup>596</sup> for the umpteenth time.

The fathers of the Council proclaimed:

**.. .we curse all the ancient and modern heretics: namely, Paul of Samosata, Mani,**

**Marcion, the filthy Nestorius, Theodoret, the evil and vain Council of Chalcedon,**

**and the Jewish letter of Leo which impudently presumed to attribute two natures**

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<sup>595</sup> *Epistola Dogmatica*, also known as the *Tome of Leo*, was a famous letter sent by Pope Leo I to Archbishop Flavian of Constantinople in 449, in which Pope Leo I outlined his doctrine of two natures of Christ. Leo I's letter was read at the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon. The provisions set out in this letter formed the basis for the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon. The Armenian Church viewed the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon as a new manifestation of Nestorian heresy, did not recognize them, and unequivocally dissociated itself from the council. Later, the Armenian Church vehemently fought against any signs of Chalcedonism throughout its history. Although the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon were formally rejected on the ground that the Armenian clergymen considered the Creed adopted by the council to be a deviation from the definitions of the church fathers approved at the three previous Ecumenical Councils, the real reason behind it was the Byzantine Empire's too obvious and undisguised expansion in the East to subjugate the peoples of the East professing Christianity through religious ideology. This danger was well understood by the Armenian clergy, therefore the Armenian Church stubbornly resisted the encroachment of the Greek Church for centuries.

<sup>596</sup> Leo the Great, the Pope of Rome (440-461), was the father and teacher of the church. Leo the Great's theological, ecclesiastical, and political views on the Monophysite dispute were reflected in the acts of the Council of Chalcedon; of special importance were the statements of papal legates, who represented the Roman see's position at the council.

(*jbnutiwn*) and two persons (*dem*) to the one Christ God and to assert that the Holy Virgin did not give birth to God, but to a mere man like ourselves, a temple of the Word of God.

There are others who affirm that while the Lord Christ was on earth, He was not in heaven, and that while He was on the cross, He was not on the throne of glory, and that while He was in the tomb, He was not at the right hand of the Father. God curses those who think thus, and we curse all who believe and accept it.<sup>597</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi left information about the Creed, professed by the Caucasian Churches in the 6th century, in his *History of Albania*. Its text is contained in the letter from the Armenian catholicos Yovhannes II Gabel-eantsi (557-574) to the Albanian catholicos Abas (552-596):

We confess one God, the Almighty Father, creator of all things, and the one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, begotten of the Father, very God of very God, by whom all things [were made], and in the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, worshipped and glorified with the Father and Son, the Holy Trinity, associates in creation and equal, of one perfect nature, watching with power and glory over all things which are.

And finally the eternal Word of God, being God, became perfect and unchanged Man, born incarnate of the Holy Virgin, neither separated from his nature nor parted from his fleshliness, but remaining I AM, the same immutable God incarnate not partially, but wholly, not a duality, but an indivisible unity. It was not the Father who became incarnate, but the Son; it was not the Holy Spirit which became solid flesh, but the Only-begotten of the Father, although this came to pass through the will of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit; but by substance (*goyutiwn-ovoia*) only the Word God.

Thus is the Holy Nativity understood: the Infinite itself was wrapped in swaddling clothes that we might clad ourselves in incorruptibility; He was laid in a manger that we might lay aside our bestiality; He was glorified by the angels that we might sing with them; He received gifts from the Magi that we might cause the Faith to bear fruit; He was fed with milk that we might acquire freedom from sin; He grew perfect in body that we might achieve the perfection of Christ; He submitted voluntarily to torments that we might be saved from the torments of sin; He was crucified that we might be worthy of

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Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 74.

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**the fruit of Life; He died that by His death Death too might die; He was laid  
in the tomb that he might shatter the locks of Hell; He rose on the third day  
that He might lead us to life; He ascended**

**into Heaven and sat on the right hand of the Father that we also might be ranged on the right hand; He will come again to judge the quick and the dead, and there is no end to His kingdom.<sup>598</sup>**

The Council of Chalcedon, which took place a little more than fifty years after the partition of the Roman Empire and twenty-five years before the final fall of Rome and the formation of the Byzantine Empire, made Constantinople the center of imperial and religious power by asserting the primacy of the empire's new capital and downplaying the importance of ancient patriarchates such as Antioch and Alexandria.

As a result, the new Council of Dvin, which was held in the reign of Justinian (527-565), denied Chalcedon's formulation much more decisively than before and took a firm stand against Constantinople. In contrast to the ecclesiastical and administrative reforms of Chalcedon, the Fathers of the Council of Dvin carried out their own reform:

"During Justinian's reign, ... all places where an apostle had died declared themselves to be autonomous episcopal sees. Here too, following them, they declared the *katoghikos* of the Armenians, Abraham, a patriarch, [the *katoghikos*] of the Aghuans, an archbishop, and [the *katoghikos*] of the Iberians/Georgians, a metropolitan."<sup>599</sup>

By the end of the 6th century, Byzantium had enhanced its political influence in Armenia, gradually displacing the Persian influence. There was the second partition of Armenia between Persia and Byzantium in 591 under Emperor Maurice (582-602), with their mutual boundary shifting to the east. Consequently, most of the Armenian territory came under the control of Byzantium. Meanwhile, the Greeks resumed attempts to assimilate the Armenian Church, and Emperor Maurice sought to put in Armenia an anti-catholicos who would recognize the Council of Chalcedon. The regions of Syunik and Vaspurakan remained with Persia.<sup>600</sup>

The Albanian historian Movses Kalankatuatsi sheds some light on the curious circumstances that were happening in Syunik at this time:

"During this schism of the patriarchate, however, the people of Siwnik scorned it (i.e. the Armenian Catholicoses — A. N.) and submitted to neither side following the command of their bishop, the virtuous Petros, who, when he died, instructed his diocese to accept consecration and the holy chrism from the Albanians."<sup>601</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 73-74.

<sup>599</sup> Stepannos Orbelean. *History of the State of Sisakan*, Chapter 26, p. 57.

<sup>600</sup> Adontz N.G. Op. Cit., p. 343.

<sup>601</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 48, p. 176.

It should be noted that the confrontation of the Syunik metropolis continued for quite a long time, from the late 6th century to the mid-7th century: “Vrtanes was accordingly consecrated bishop by Zakaria,<sup>602</sup> the holy patriarch of Albania, and Siwnik received the oil from the Albanians year after year until the opposition came to an end.”<sup>603</sup>

The Syunik see may have been looking for an ally in the archbishop of Albania for a reason. After all, the region, like Albania, was fully dependent on only the Sasanian power at that point. But does this passage suggest that the Albanian Church had no canonical communion with the Armenian Church during the period described? It is not clear. The Armenian Church was divided between two thrones and engaged in internal strife. The people of Syunik made a decision prompted by circumstance and formed an alliance with the archbishop of Albania. Moreover, many researchers refute the opinion that Syunik was an Armenian region.<sup>604</sup> Undoubtedly, there was a time when it was conquered and belonged to the Armenian Kingdom, but nevertheless it retained its linguistic and cultural identity.<sup>605</sup> Mamedova draws attention to the fact that Syunik was listed in the sources and epigraphy as an independent political unit among the Caucasian countries.<sup>606</sup>

In 591, according to Bishop Sebeos, “prince of the land of Siwnik ... rebelled and seceded from the Armenians. He requested Khosrov, king of Persia, that they might move the *divan* of the land of Siwnik from Dvin to the city of Paytakaran, and that he might set that city in the census of Atrpatakan, so that the name of Armenians would no longer be applied to them. And the order was carried out.”<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>602</sup> this refers to the Albanian archbishop Zakaria I (629-644).

<sup>603</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 48, p. 176.

<sup>604</sup> Dzhavakhov I.A. *Istoriya tserkovnogo razryva mezhdu Gruziiyey i Armeniyei v nachale VII v.* [The History of the Schism between Georgia and Armenia in the Early 7th Century]. St. Petersburg, 1908. P. 436; Buniatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX w.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 78, 92-93, 100; Hubschmann H. *Die Altarmenische Ortsnamen*. Strasbourg, 1914 (reprint of 2019). P. 216.

<sup>605</sup> Adontz N.G. *Dionisy Frakiyskiy i armyanskiye tolkovateli* [Dionysius Thrax and the Armenian Interpreters]. Petrograd, 1915. P. 187.

<sup>606</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i alban* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 264-265.

<sup>607</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 8, p. 6.

## II.1. OVERVIEW OF BOOK TWO OF THE HISTORY OF ALBANIA

Book Two of the *History of Albania* contains a wealth of detail on Albanian history in the 6th-8th centuries. This section describes the Persian-Byzantine and Persian-Arab wars and presents the history of the Mihranid family, whose rule was established over Albania after the fall of the Albanian Arsacids and included the reign of Juansher and Varaz-Trdat of the Mihranids. It also depicts the activity of the Albanian catholicos Viroy during the invasion and conquest of the country by the Khazars. In this part, the author provides valuable evidence of the Albanian clergy's missionary preaching among the Huns (Khazars). Here we can also find examples of the epistolary and poetic genres. Book Two is augmented by two final chapters representing a list of temples that serve as Christian shrines in Palestine, as well as a list of monasteries founded by the Albanians in the Holy Land.

Book Two of Movses Kalankatuatsi's work is divided into fifty-two chapters. The titles of the chapters correspond to their content.

1. Introduction. The attested genealogies of Armenian princes.
2. The Persian king Yazdegerd and the Armenian general Vardan Mamikonian.
3. The educational activities of Mesrop Mashtots and the Albanian king Esualen in Albania.
4. The transfer of the patriarchal throne from Cholay to Partaw.
5. The discovery of the martyr relics on Dizapayt Hill.
6. The vision of Vehik.
7. A letter from Yohvannes, catholicos of Armenia, to Abas, catholicos of Albania.
8. The persecution of heretics.
9. The invasion of the Barbarian peoples.
10. The rule of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius.
11. The Persian-Byzantine wars.
12. The northern armies arrive to help Heraclius.
13. The murder of Khosrow.
14. The Albanian catholicos Viroy.
15. Concerning the disasters in Albanian lands.
16. Concerning the victory over the enemy.
17. The genealogy of the Mihranid family.
18. The feats of the Albanian prince Juansher.
19. Juansher's alliance with Byzantium.
20. Juansher's letter to Constantine, emperor of Byzantium.

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21. Constantine's decree.
  22. Constantine's arrival in Persia.
  23. The Khazar invasion of Albania.
  24. The building of the temple in Gardman.
  25. Juansher's prayer.
  26. Juansher's marriage. Alliance with the Huns.
  27. Juansher's reception by the caliph in Damascus.
  28. The second journey of Juansher to Damascus.
  29. The vision of the hermit Israyel. The discovery of the Cross at Gis.
  30. A letter from Armenian bishops Dawit and Yovel to the Albanians.
  31. The reply of the Albanian catholicos Ukhtanes to the letter of the Armenian bishops.
  32. The consanguineous marriages of Albanian princes.
  33. Concerning St. Israyel.
  34. The death of Juansher.
  35. Elegy on the death of Juansher.
  36. The enthronement of Varaz-Trdat.
  37. The death of Dawit, bishop of Mec Kueank, and consecration of Israyel.
  38. The journey of Bishop Israyel to the country of Ayrarat.
  39. The journey of Bishop Israyel to the Huns.
  40. The missionary activities among the Huns.
  41. The conversion of the Huns.
  42. The request of Alp-Ilituer, prince of the Huns, in order that Bishop Israyel might remain with them.
  43. The return of Israyel to Albania.
  44. A letter from the Huns about Israyel to the Armenian catholicos.
  45. The reply of the catholicos to Alp-Ilituer.
  46. The question concerning images and pictures.
  47. Concerning the Council of Chalcedon.
  48. Concerning the nine church grades.
  49. The reply given by the Armenians to the letter of Mkhitar, bishop of Amaras.
  50. Concerning the Artsakh hermit Yovsep and his journey to Jerusalem.
  51. Concerning the churches in Jerusalem.
  52. Concerning the monasteries built by the Albanians in Jerusalem.

Analyzing the content of the chapters making up Book Two of the *History of Albania*, we can conclude that Kalankatuatsi provides a thoroughly detailed description of historical events — events in which he himself seems to have been involved. The sections devoted to political and ecclesiastical history occupy

more than three quarters of the total volume. This part of Kalankatuatsi's *History of Albania* can be generally called his own creation. It demonstrates the author's individual style, consistency in presentation, common stylistic devices, and references to the Holy Scripture.

The chapters in Book Two can be conventionally divided into the following thematic sections by content:

- political history;
- ecclesiastical history;
- liturgical and canonical documents;
- hagiographic stories;
- epistolary genre;
- Juansher's prayer;
- Dawtak's song;
- list of temples and monasteries in the Holy Land.

Thus, the political history of Albania and neighboring countries is contained in Chapters 1,2, 9,10,11,12,13,15,16,17,18,19,22,23,26,27,28, 32, 34,36,37, and 39.

Information on the history of the Albanian Church can be derived from Chapters 3,4, 5, 8,10,14,24,29, 33, 37, 38, 39,40,41, 42,43,47, and 48.

Chapters 7, 46, 47, and 48 may be regarded as liturgical and canonical documents attesting the confession of the Albanian Church.

Hagiographic stories can be found in Chapters 5,6,14,29,33, and 50.

Chapters 15, 20, 21, 30, 31, 44, 45, and 49 include examples of the epistolary genre.

Chapters 25,35,51, and 52 stand out, comprising the prayer of the Albanian prince Juansher, the funeral song of his poet Dawtak<sup>608</sup> — the so-called *Elegy on the Death of Juansher* — and a list of temples and monasteries in Jerusalem.

The chronological framework of Book Two covers the period from 552 to 703-711.

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<sup>608</sup> Dawtak Kertog was a 7th century lyric poet. Movses Kalankatuatsi's work *History of Albania* indicates that he was the court poet of the Albanian prince Juansher (642-680). Dawtak Kertog's *Elegy on the Death of the Great Prince Juansher* is written in the Armenian poetic meter, an acrostic of 36 stanzas by the number of letters in the Armenian alphabet. The elegy is included in Kalankatuatsi's said work and constitutes the first secular poem in Transcaucasia. The style of this piece suggests that Dawtak Kertog was familiar with the Greek art.



## **II.2. THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA FROM THE MID-6TH CENTURY TO THE EARLY 8TH CENTURY**

The 6th century in the history of the peoples of Transcaucasia was marked by a variety of new historical factors, including the events in the two great neighboring powers of Persia and Byzantium (which continued to compete for global domination) and the emergence of a new state entity, the Khazar Kingdom, in the lower Volga region and northern Dagestan north of the Caucasian Ridge.

In the period under review, Caucasian Albania was politically dependent on Persia, therefore it was affected by the same political processes as the Sassanid state. During the long, prosperous, and generally constructive reign of Khosrow I (531-579), there were two important events outside Persia which had an enormous impact on the future of the empire and the entire Middle East, but passed almost unnoticed at that time.

First, a new nomadic people came from Central Asia to the northeastern border of Persia. These new nomads, called the Turks, were first reported in the Persian documents in 560.

The Persians welcomed the appearance of the Turks as a chance to finally put an end to the Hephthalites, who were in decline. The Persians and the Turks formed an alliance against the Hephthalites, who were defeated and virtually disappeared from history. The territory of present-day Afghanistan was included in the Persian possessions once again. This, nevertheless, made the Turks the new neighbors of Persia, and they were no more convenient than the Hephthalites in this capacity. It was the Byzantine Empire's turn to make alliances with them, while Persia found itself between the upper and the nether millstone.

Still, the Persian shahanshahs comforted themselves with the hope that the Turks would be just another horde of nomads who came and went. No one in the days of Khosrow I Anushirvan could predict that the Turks were something bigger and that they would dominate the East over time.

The second event, which shook the world during the reign of Khosrow I, was even less regarded at the time. Indeed, it evoked no response and remained unknown to anyone outside a remote town in Arabia. But even in this town no one could imagine the consequences of this event. The town was called Mecca, where Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim ibn Abd Manaf was born around 570.

### *II.2.1. The Byzantine-Persian Wars*

Movses Kalankatuatsi fully devotes Chapters 10,11,12, and 13 of Book Two of his work to the description of political events from the second half of the 6th century to the early 7th century.

Hormizd IV (579-590), son and heir of Khosrow I, ascended the Persian throne in 579. He continued his father's policy of tolerance towards Christians, who were steadily growing in number and influence.<sup>609</sup> Such tolerance still provoked the restrained fury of Zoroastrian clergy. According to at-Tabari, responding once to the concerns of magians, the shahanshah said that "just as our royal throne cannot stand on its two front legs without the two back ones, our kingdom cannot stand or endure firmly if we cause the Christians and adherents of other faiths, who differ in belief from ourselves, to become hostile to us. So renounce this desire to persecute the Christians and become assiduous in good works."<sup>610</sup> The Council of the Nestorian Church of the East, held in 585, glorified the shah: "Especially he showed an abundance of mercy and a lot of love for our people of Christians, slaves, and subjects of his rule."<sup>611</sup>

The angry Zoroastrians were helpless against strong Khosrow I, but his less capable son proved to be an easier target for the religious and political opposition.

The Zoroastrian clergy used the general Bahram Chobin, *marzpan* of Armenia and Azerbaijan,<sup>612</sup> to accomplish the job. He had won several victories over the Turks in recent years, but had lost a battle with the Byzantines and had been immediately removed from his post by Hormizd as a result. He was thirsty for revenge and easy to persuade into assassinating the king. Khosrow II, son of Hormizd, became a new king in 589.<sup>613</sup>

However, the victorious general Bahram Chobin felt as if he were the arbiter of royal destinies and decided to become a king himself, although he did not belong to the Sassanids. Sources say that the new shah Bahram VI (590- 591) was from the Mihranid family of Parthian origin. Khosrow II (590-628), deposed from the throne and certain of imminent death, managed to escape, fleeing to the camp of Persia's greatest enemy, Constantinople.<sup>614</sup>

Constantinople was ruled at that time by Emperor Maurice (582-602), who would have welcomed a respite from the fight against Persia, as new hordes of Avar nomads had penetrated the Balkan Peninsula and threatened the empire's European

<sup>609</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 154.

<sup>610</sup> at-Tabari. *The History*. Vol.V. Translated by C.E. Bosworth. New York, 1999. P. 298.

<sup>611</sup> Quoted from: Pigulevskaya N.V. *Vizantiya i Iran na rubezhe VI-VII w.* [Byzantium and Iran at the Turn of the 6th-7th centuries]. Moscow-Leningrad, 1946. P. 237.

<sup>612</sup> Gumilev L.N. *Podvig Bakhrama Chubiny* [The Feat of Bahram Chobin], Leningrad, 1962. P. 20.

<sup>613</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 156-157.

<sup>614</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 10, p. 14-18.

provinces. It seemed to Maurice that if he won the gratitude of the young prince by restoring him to the throne, a period of peace would ensue. He sent an army to the East and succeeded. In 591, to the cheers of a Persian population outraged by the presence of a non-Sasanian king, Khosrow II returned to the throne. Bahram Chobin fled to the Turks, whom he had defeated only a few years before and who now dealt with the man himself.<sup>615</sup>

Emperor Maurice happened to be right. Khosrow II did show unusual gratitude for monarchs. Upon his accession, Shahanshah Khosrow II announced a number of privileges for the Christians of his empire, wore his Byzantine garments embroidered with crosses, and had his meal blessed by a Nestorian bishop, to the displeasure of *mobeds*.<sup>616</sup>

As long as Maurice was on the throne, Persia kept the peace. But then the situation suddenly changed. The Byzantine army on the Danube, commanded by a rude and ill-educated soldier named Phocas, seemed tired of fighting the strong Avars. In 602, the troops mutinied, marched on Constantinople, and proclaimed Phocas their emperor (602-610). Maurice and his sons were torn to pieces by the soldiers.<sup>617</sup>

When this news reached Khosrow II, he immediately declared that the debt of gratitude to the emperor — who had been so shamefully killed — and all laws of justice called for a march on Constantinople in order to avenge Maurice.<sup>618</sup> Preparing for the campaign, he secured his rear by eliminating the Arab kingdom of Al-Hirah, whose Nestorianism gave him the necessary pretext. After all, he could claim that the Christians of Al-Hirah would unite with the Byzantine Christians against him. Then Khosrow II led his armies to the west. He occupied the whole of northwestern Mesopotamia with hardly any difficulty and penetrated the eastern part of Asia Minor.

By that time, it had become clear that Phocas was not only a cruel and ignorant ruler, but also a completely incompetent commander. He could neither organize an effective resistance against the advancing Persians nor handle the Avars. When the inhabitants of Constantinople saw the Persians coming from the east and the Avars approaching from the north, they panicked. Then they rebelled, killed Phocas, and proclaimed another general their emperor, this time Heraclius (610-641).<sup>619</sup>

If Khosrow II had been consistent, Phocas' death should have satisfied him and ended the war. The Persian monarch, however, was riding the crest of a wave where

<sup>615</sup> at-Tabari. *The History*, p. 315-316.

<sup>616</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 165.

<sup>617</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Imperatory Vizantii* [The Emperors of Byzantium]. Moscow, 1996. P. 58-59.

<sup>618</sup> at-Tabari. *The History*, p. 317-318.

<sup>619</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Imperatory Vizantii* [The Emperors of Byzantium], p. 59-62.

everything worked in his favor. Unexpected victories turned his head. Even if he had been sincere at first, seeing the war as an act of righteous vengeance, now it became an unabashed conquest.

The Byzantine provinces were undoubtedly begging to be conquered. The Nestorian heresy was followed by other sects spreading throughout the empire, and Syria and Egypt became the strongholds of Monophysitism. The Monophysites even penetrated Persia, gradually ousting the Nestorians.

Many Syrians and Egyptians could not ignore the fact that the Orthodox Christians dominating the Church of Constantinople were intolerant of deviations from their orthodoxy, while the Persians tolerated (albeit selectively) the Christian heresies. Therefore, Khosrow II met almost no resistance in these provinces. He took Antioch in 611, occupied Damascus in 614, and captured Jerusalem in 615.<sup>620</sup>

The conquest of Jerusalem was a particularly hard blow for the Byzantines. The very source, the cradle of Christianity, the land that knew the tread of Jesus fell into the hands of the pagan horde. Worse, Khosrow II safely took away from Jerusalem the true Cross on which Christ was believed to have been crucified. But the Persian monarch did not stop there. In 615, he entered Egypt and held the entire province for a year. In 617, the whole Asia Minor was already under his control, and the Persian army encamped in Chalcedon, a suburb of Constantinople, separated from it only by the Bosphorus Strait. Khosrow was just a mile of water away from Constantinople itself.

For a few glorious years, Persia stood on the dizzying heights of utter triumph. Khosrow II managed to do what none of the Sassanids had achieved in four centuries. In fact, he restored the empire of Darius I and called himself Parviz (the Victorious), a title that he certainly deserved.

Constantinople seemed to be finished. The Persians stood on the Bosphorus, the Avars were behind the walls. Only Emperor Heraclius did not despair. He relentlessly tried to reorganize the army and prepare a counterattack. Heraclius had one powerful weapon that Persia could not match: the control of the sea. He used the church's resources (reluctantly provided on the brink of total disaster) to outfit a fleet.<sup>621</sup> In 622, he embarked his army, abandoned the capital besieged by the Avars and Persians, and sailed into the heart of the enemy. There was a time three and a half centuries ago when the Persians occupied Asia Minor, and Odaenathus of Palmyra<sup>622</sup> made them flee by striking at their rear. Heraclius planned to do the same.

<sup>620</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*. An English translation, with introduction and notes, by H. Turtledove. Philadelphia, 1982. A. D. 614-615, p. 11.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., A. D. 613, p. 13.

<sup>622</sup> Lucius Septimius Odaenathus (260-267) was the first ruler of the Kingdom of Palmyra in the 3rd century CE. In 260, he defeated Shapur I. In 262-267, he won a series of victories over the

He crossed the Black Sea to Armenia, passed through Albania, wintered there,<sup>623</sup> and devastated inner Persia for several years as the new Alexander. In the end, Khosrow II had to withdraw his army from the front lines against his will and bet everything on winning the decisive battle.

In 627, the two armies met near Nineveh. Under the inspired leadership of Heraclius, who, according to stories (perhaps exaggerated), showed the valor of a true hero, the Byzantines gained an advantage and smashed the enemy's army. At night, its remnants hastily retreated. Then Heraclius, like the new Trajan, led his army through Mesopotamia, avenging the devastation of Asia Minor by the Persians. He came to the very walls of Ctesiphon.<sup>624</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi details the consequences of the Persian-Byzantine wars for Caucasian Albania:

**...at the beginning of the thirty-seventh year [of Khosrov], the king of the north sent the promised army, appointing his nephew, whom they call Shat in honor of his princely rank among them, as its leader. He came and raided all the regions of Albania and part of Atrpatakan, putting many Christians and heathens to the sword. Who can estimate the number of those whom he took prisoner?<sup>625</sup>**

The great game of Khosrow was played and lost. The ancient empire of Darius was conquered again, held for five years, and lost. The Persian magnates, utterly disheartened by this terrible turn of fortune, did not wish to continue the war. When Khosrow II showed no signs of striving for peace, even given the siege of Ctesiphon, they first imprisoned him and then executed "the terrible hunter, the lion of the east, at whose very roar distant peoples trembled and nearby peoples melted like wax"<sup>626</sup> in 628. Thus died Khosrow II, his moment of triumph past.

The news of Khosrow II's death reached Heraclius in Gandzak (administrative center of Atropatene) on March 11, 628 — ten days after the execution. The Persians were ready for peace on the terms proposed by Heraclius. The emperor ruthlessly ordered them to clear every inch of the occupied territories and coerced them into handing over the True Cross. In 629, amid impressive ceremonies, the emperor

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Persians, commanding the Palmyra and Roman armies.

<sup>623</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, A. D. 622-623, p. 17.

<sup>624</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Imperatory Vizantii* [The Emperors of Byzantium], p. 65.

<sup>625</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 12, p. 87-88.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 2, Chapter 13, p. 90.

oversaw its restoration in Jerusalem.

## II.2.2. Mazdakism

Among major social phenomena affecting the countries of Transcaucasia was the Mazdakite religion of Iran and social movements in Byzantium that found their way into both Transcaucasia and the Near East in the form of religious differences between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians.

Like Eastern Christianity, Zoroastrianism also nurtured heresies. One of them was the Mani doctrine (c. 215-276), mentioned above. During the decades of Persia's struggle with the Hephthalites, a new heresy appeared, inspired by a Zoroastrian priest (*mobed*) named Mazdak ("50s of the 5th century — 528/529). He taught a form of Manichaeism and preached an ascetic and "communal" way of life, denouncing the selfish proprietary interests of the nobles and rigid domination by the clergy. Naturally, this aroused a fierce hostility from those powerful forces.

There is a large amount of scholarly literature on Mazdakism,<sup>627</sup> but no accurate information has been thus far obtained regarding this movement. The Mazdakite sources themselves (if any) were destroyed, and any references to Mazdak were removed from all Sasanian chronicles. Researchers have to content themselves with narratives by outspoken detractors of this religion scattered among the works of Arab and Persian chroniclers.<sup>628</sup>

The eponym of the movement itself comes from the name of the preacher — Mazdak, son of Bamdad — who declared himself a prophet and demanded not only that the Zoroastrian religion be "purified" but that a new and just social order be established. Mazdak proposed a new interpretation for the corpus of sacred Zoroastrian texts, the *Avesta*. From his perspective, although a supreme god existed, the creation and fate of the world were at the mercy of two demiurges promoting

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<sup>627</sup> Sundermann W. Mazdak und die mazdakitischen Volksaufstände. *Das Altertum*. Berlin, 1977. Band 23. P. 245-249; Sundermann W. Cosmogony and Cosmology. IV. In the Mazdakite Religion. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011; Shaki M. The Social Doctrine of Mazdak in the Light of Middle Persian Evidence. *Archiv Orientalni*. Praha, 1978. Vol. 46. P. 289-306; Shaki M. The Cosmogonical and Cosmological Teachings of Mazdak. *Papers in Honour of Prof. M. Boyce*. Leiden, 1985. Vol. 2. P. 527-543; Yarshater E. Mazdakism. *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 1983. Vol. 3. Pt. 2. P. 991-1024; Altheim E, Stiehl R. Mazdak und Porphyrios. *La nouvelle Clio* 5, 1953. P. 356-376; Christensen A. *Le règne du roi Kawadh I et le communisme mazdakite*. Copenhagen, 1925; Klima O. Mazdak. *Geschichte einer sozialen Bewegung im sassanidischen Persien*. Prague, 1957. P. 183-231.

<sup>628</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 130.

good or evil.<sup>629</sup>

The Persian king Kavad I (488-496, 498-531), whose reign brought an end to the period of anarchy, felt a strong sympathy for Mazdakism. This sympathy could have been caused either by a sincere faith in the preacher's ethical principles or by the common conviction of all monarchs that everything undermining the power of nobles and clergymen was advantageous to their own political authority.<sup>630</sup>

But Mazdakism, like almost all Puritan movements, tended to be intolerant on both a small and large scale. Promoters of the new faith denounced the little joys of life as readily and fiercely as they did its major crimes. The result was that most people eventually declined to rid the world of injustice if it meant denying themselves every simple pleasure. Social instability increased, since peasants began to seize land from the nobility and refused to pay taxes or perform duties under the influence of Mazdak.<sup>631</sup> Now, paradoxically, magnates and priests found the population they oppressed to be leaning towards them. They could therefore impose their views on the king quite easily: the shahanshah was deposed and restored to the throne only after he promised to remain a faithful Zoroastrian.<sup>632</sup>

When Kavad died, his older son, a known follower of Mazdak, was barred from the throne. Instead, his younger son, Khosrow I, was appointed king in 531. He immediately condemned Mazdak and his main followers to death and made certain their writings were destroyed. The cult did not completely die out but lost all of its influence.

Yet this religious peasant movement, which lasted about forty years (488-529), could not but affect the lives of the peoples of Transcaucasia in some way. Only one of the ancient authors, Movses Khorenatsi, who wrote in the late 5th and early 6th centuries, i.e. at the height of the Mazdakite movement, made remarks that, as indirect as they are, historians argue<sup>633</sup> are related to these events. The author depicts the social decline after the fall of the Arsacid dynasty and the "patriarchy" of St. Gregory's family, gives a derogatory description of teachers of the faith, monks, bishops, disciples, people, soldiers, princes, and judges, and then suddenly ends with the words: "In addition to all this there are tumults on every side, according to the

<sup>629</sup> Kryukova V.Y. *Mazdakizm* [Mazdakism], *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [the Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. XLII. Moscow, 2017. P. 305-307.

<sup>630</sup> Ivanov M.S. *Ocherk istorii Irana* [An Essay on the History of Iran]. Moscow, 1952, p. 30.

<sup>631</sup> at-Tabari. *The History*, p. 132.

<sup>632</sup> Semenov V.F. Iran v III – VII vekakh [Iran in the 3rd-7th centuries], *Istoriya Srednikh vekov* [Medieval History]. Moscow, 1975. Chapter XI.

<sup>633</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. – VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE], p. 220.

saying: "There is no peace for the impious.""<sup>634</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi reports that the Albanian catholicos Abas (551- 595) expelled heretics from Albania after receiving a letter of the Armenian catholicos Yovhannes II (533-551) "concerning the confirmation of the faith."<sup>635</sup>

The historian says that "Lord Abas, catholicos of Albania, ... made a thorough inquiry and drove the filthy doctors of the sect from Albania: the hypocrite Tovmas, the psalmist Elia, Bnotn, Ibas, and others like them were exiled to distant lands. Thus was peace established among the clergy through the mercy of Almighty God."<sup>636</sup>

As for the "filthy doctors" expelled from Albania, the characters behind these names were identified and the passage in question interpreted by Trever.<sup>637</sup>

This is evident from the information given by the ancient authors that both Movses Khorenatsi and Movses Kalankatuatsi have treated the Mazdakite movement as almost the greatest disaster that ever befell people. In this regard, attention should be drawn to the assessment of Mazdak's revolutionary movement by the 9th century Arab historian at-Tabari: "Universal calamity overwhelmed the people to an extent they had never before experienced."<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*. Book 3, Chapter 68, p. 353-354.

<sup>635</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 8, p. 75.

<sup>637</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 222.

<sup>638</sup> at-Tabari. *The History*, p. 148.



Assuming Mazdak's teaching raised the masses not only in Iran, but also in the countries of Transcaucasia, its inhabitants are believed to have experienced the movement's consequences, a series of reforms carried out by Khosrow Anushirvan, mainly in the military, administrative, and fiscal areas. He abolished the self-government in these countries, which were henceforth subordinate to the Persian ruler, a *marzpan*, who was in charge of all aspects of life of Transcaucasian peoples. Albania, Iberia, Armenia, and Atropatakan were united into one military and administrative unit, called *northern kust*.

Thus, the authority of the Albanian Arsacids was discontinued, and the Persian *marzpan*s ruled Albania from 510 to 629.

In the mid-6th century, during the reign of Khosrow I Anushirvan in Persia and Justinian I (527-565) in Byzantium, Caucasian Albania again suffered a terrible invasion, this time by the Khazars from the north, who brought countless calamities. This is described in the *History of Albania* very briefly, but expressively: "The land of Albania was captured by the Khazars and churches and gospels destroyed by fire. In the second year of Khosrov, king of kings, when they established the beginning of the Armenian era (551 — A. N.), the throne of the Albanian patriarchate was transferred from the town of Cholay to the capital Partaw on account of the marauding incursions of the enemies of the Cross of Christ."<sup>639</sup> Partaw (present-day Barda), allegedly founded at the behest of the Sassanid king Peroz in the second half of the 5th century and first called Perozapat, appears to have quickly turned into a large city for a period of 60 to 70 years; it was already called a capital by the mid-6th century.

Recounting the transfer of the patriarchal throne from Cholay to Partaw as a result of the Khazar invasion, the Albanian historian specifies the date, namely the second year of the reign of Khosrow, king of kings. If he refers to Khosrow I, the second year of his rule spanned 532 to 533, i.e. the time when the Huns invaded Transcaucasia. If Khosrow II is meant, the second year of his rule spanned 592 to 593, and the patriarchal throne could have been transferred sixty years after the first appearance of the Khazars in the Caucasus.

The raids of the northern tribes had happened before, because the peace treaty of 562 between Khosrow I and Justinian I mentioned the Caspian Gate and a certain Horutson pass or gorge,<sup>640</sup> through which the Persians let the

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<sup>639</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 4, p. 70. *Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 231.

northern nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples go to the countries of Transcaucasia and Byzantium.

The twenty-year war between Persia and Byzantium, which was accompanied by the destruction of cities and villages of Transcaucasia and caused havoc among the population, ended in 591 with a new partition of Armenia. Khosrow II ceded most of Armenia to Maurice (582-602). A part of Iberia (Kartli) to Tbilisi also went to Byzantium. Albania does not seem to have been discussed during the conclusion of this treaty — at least the sources are silent about it.

Armenia under Byzantine control was ruled by the Armenian *nakharars* appointed by Byzantium, who held the Greek titles *patricius* and *curopalates*. At that time, Albania remained in the orbit of Persia; it is possible that, in order to suppress the inclination for restoring independence, the Persians pursued here the same policy as Emperor Maurice with regard to the Armenians, which he recommended to Khosrow II in one of his letters. Maurice wrote this: “They are a perverse and disobedient race ...; they are between us and cause trouble. Now come, I shall gather mine and send them to Thrace; you gather yours and order them to be taken to the east. If they die, our enemies die; if they kill, they kill our enemies; but we shall live in peace. For if they remain in their own land, we shall have no rest.”<sup>641</sup>

Sebeos relates that Maurice sent the Armenians to Thrace and “strongly insisted that the command was carried out.” But then the Armenian princes started to join the Persians, who received them with honor, while the general population, including the Armenian cavalry, had to fight the Avars in Thrace. As for the Albanians and Armenians subordinate to the Persians, they may have been directed against the Hephthalites and Turks in the east and against the Huns and Khazars in the north.<sup>642</sup>

Emperor Maurice’s letter to Khosrow II is a fine example of how Byzantium treated its co-religionists in the Caucasus.

### II.2.3. *The Mihranid Princely Family of Albania*

The Mihranid princely family, which ruled the province of Gardman<sup>557</sup> (present-day Kazakh District), appeared on the historical scene of Caucasian Albania in the late 6th century or in the early 7th century. Movses Kalankat- uatsi describes the rise and reign of this family in Chapters 17 to 36 of Book Two of his *History*.

It is historically known that the policy pursued by the Persian kings in the late 6th — early 7th centuries resulted in the *marzpanate* of Albania — which, apart from

<sup>641</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 15, p. 31.

<sup>642</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 234-237.

other regions on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, also included the provinces of Utik and Artsakh — being split into separate political units controlled by local princely houses, each of which began to act under the name of its own princely house, geographical area, or tribe.<sup>643</sup> <sup>644</sup> The Arab historian al-Baladhuri<sup>645</sup> writes that Khosrow I Anushirvan, seeking to take root on the western shores of the Caspian Sea and in Transcaucasia in general,

**assigned kings, stationed them in different districts, and conferred on each one of them the governorship [made him Shah] of one district. One of these was “Kha- kan al-Jabal” [lord of the mountain] who bore the title “Sahib-as-Sarir” [holder of the throne] and was named Wahrarzan-shah. Another was the king of Filan surnamed Filan-shah. Others were Tabarsaran-shah, the king of al-Lakz — sur- named Jarshan-shah — the king of Maskat (whose kingship has been abolished), the king of Liran — surnamed Liran-shah — and the king of Sharwan called Sharwan-shah.**<sup>646</sup>

According to al-Masʿudi,<sup>647</sup> after erecting defensive works the same king settled different peoples with their kings around them, assigning high ranks and titles to each of them and drawing borders.<sup>648</sup> Thus, certain regions that made up the territory of Albania proper in the past became self-sufficient principalities with different names, headed by their kings or princes while enjoying internal autonomy. These new administrative units, in which Arab historians say the de-ethnicization<sup>649</sup>

<sup>643</sup> Gardman (Girdyman) was one of eight *gavars* of the *ashkharh* of Utik, a feudal estate in Caucasian Albania that covered the interfluvium of the Shamkir and Zayamchay rivers.

<sup>644</sup> Svazian G.S. Rod Mikhranidov v Albanii [The Mikhranid Dynasty in Albania]. *K o s v e s h - c h e n i y u p r o b l e m i s t o r i i i k u l t u r y K a v k a z s k o y A l b a n i i i v o s t o c h n y k h p r o v i n t s y A r m e n i i* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia], p. 79.

<sup>645</sup> Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn Jabir ibn Daud al-Baladhuri (c. 820-892) was an Arab historian, translator, and poet. al-Baladhuri wrote the book *Futuh al-Buldan* (“Conquest of the Countries”). It contains the accurate description of Arab conquests starting from Muhammad’s campaigns to the early 8th century.

<sup>646</sup> al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*. Translated by P.K. Hitti. New York, 1916. Part IV, Chapter I.P. 308-309.

<sup>647</sup> Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Masʿudi (c. 896-956) was an Arab historian, geographer, and traveler. Known as the Herodotus of the Arabs, he was the first Arab historian to combine the historical and geographical observations and general large-scale work.

<sup>648</sup> Karaulov N.A. Svedeniya arabskikh pisateley o Kavkaze, Armenii i Azerbaydzhanе [The Information of Arab Writers on the Caucasus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan]. *Sbornik materi- alov dlya opisaniya mestnostey i piemen Kavkaza* [A Collection of Writings to Describe the Territories and Tribes of the Caucasus], No. 38. Tiflis, 1908. P. 41.

<sup>649</sup> De-ethnicization is the process and result of losing the ethnic tradition. De-ethnicization leads to the disappearance of ethnicity as a systemic whole, although the people composing it may

process also started following the same policy, not only acted under such names as Gilan, Lakz, Liran, Sharvan, Tabarsaran, and others, but often lived their own lives independently from one another. In such circumstances, the previous common name *Albania*, as noted by Svazian, ceased to be used for the former territory.<sup>650</sup>

When the *marzpanate* of Albania split into separate principalities which had been united before, the provinces of Utik and Artsakh became a standalone principality, the principality of the Eranshahiks. This geographical region was the only part of the former *marzpanate* to retain the traditional name *Albania* previously adopted for the *marzpanate*. It was here that the new ruling Mihranid dynasty stepped forward in response to the specified policy of the Persian court.

The work of the Albanian historian Movses Kalankatuatsi is the only source covering the appearance of the Mihranids and their establishment as the “first princes” of Albania, as well as their political and economic activities. Twenty-nine chapters of Book Two of this work are dedicated to the history of the Mihranids, but only one of them, Chapter 17, contains information on the dynasty’s initial history, from its founder Mihr (Mihran) to Prince Juansher. This very chapter reveals the history of Caucasian Albania in the last decade of the 6th century, presenting the origin of Juansher’s ancestors and their rise to power.

According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, the Mihranids immigrated into Albania, fleeing the punishment of Khosrow II Parviz (591-628), who avenged his father’s murder, in which the Mihranid family were involved. The Albanian historian writes this: “Mihran, a kinsman of Khosrov, took flight, united under him certain regions of the country, and passed into Albania taking about 30,000 families with him. He arrived in the province of Uti near the great city of Partaw.”<sup>651</sup> The historian further informs that Mihran “made to enter the land of the Khazars and join these enemies [of Persia],” which is quite understandable given Caucasian Albania was governed by the Persians, and it was not safe to stay there. But Khosrow listened to his dignitaries who warned him that Mihran could stir up a lot of trouble if he joined the enemies of the Persians, and wrote the following letter to him: “My brother, my true brother (*harazat*), do not depart from me in enmity. If you are not content to live with me, make that country which your feet have reached and where this letter finds you your home.”<sup>652</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi further reports that the message reached Mihran in Gardman where he stopped, settled, and built a town called Mihrawan in a beautiful

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continue to exist as part of other ethnic groups by accepting their tradition.

<sup>650</sup> Svazian G.S. Rod Mikhranidov v Albanii [The Mihranid Dynasty in Albania], p. 80.

<sup>651</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 17, p. 107- 108.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

place, then he and his successors gradually took possession of all Albania by treachery aimed at the local princes and “subjected the savage Caucasian people to their rule also.”

There are many unclear and unsaid things in the historian’s story. The only account that can be considered reliable is the story of a new royal or princely dynasty, which appeared in Albania in the early 6th century and subjugated not only the peoples of Albania, but also the “savage Caucasian people,” i.e. some mountainous tribes of northern Albania (highlands of Dagestan). Trever thinks that the Persian *marzpan*s role is uncertain at that time: it is not known whether he continued to govern the country (at least nominally), or this position was abolished.<sup>653</sup> However, as evidenced by Movses Kalankatuatsi recounting the Khazar invasion of South Caucasus countries in 626, the Persian governors still stayed in Partaw.<sup>654</sup>

The Mihranid family of Albania traces its origin to one of the leading families of Ancient Iran who were considered relatives of the ruling Arsacid dynasty. The Mihranids were one of the seven great houses of the Sassanid state.<sup>655</sup> They were first mentioned in the mid-3rd century in a trilingual inscription on the Cube of Zoroaster<sup>656</sup> describing the political, military, and religious activities of Shapur I, the second Sasanian shahanshah of Iran. Procopius of Caesarea argues in his *History of the Wars* that the family name Mehran was a title equivalent to the general.<sup>657</sup> General Bahram VI Chobin, who became a shahanshah in 590, also belonged to this family.<sup>658</sup> Therefore, it seems to make sense that Mihran’s escape to the Khazars could have been associated with the deposition of his influential relative and possibly patron in 591.

Now, as the Albanian historian narrates, Mihran gained a foothold in Gardman in an attempt to seize power, found the right moment, “cunningly inviting twelve of its chieftains, put them to the sword, and took possession of the country.”<sup>659</sup> He was followed by “Armayer, who begat Vard, and Vard begat Vardan the Brave (*Kaj*), who

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653 Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. – VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE – 7th century CE], p. 234-235.

654 Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 12, p. 87-88.

655 Pourshariati Parvaneh. *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire: The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*. London, 2008. P. 44.

656 The Cube of Zoroaster is an architectural structure of the Achaemenid period in the form of a tower, which is located in the archaeological site of Naqsh-e Rostam and dates back to the 5th century BCE. The original name and purpose of the structure are unknown.

657 Procopius. *History of the Wars*, Book I, Chapter XIII, p. 107.

658 Theophylact Simocatta. *The History*. Translated from Greek by M. and M. Whitby. Oxford, 1986. Book 3, Chapter 18, §6,10. P. 101.

659 Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 17, p. 108.

built the fortress of Gardman in three years.”<sup>660</sup> Since the latter commenced the construction of fortresses, it can be assumed that the realms of Gardman did not satisfy him.

Thus, he invited another sixty noble members of the Eranshahik family, and “preparing for them the bread of perdition, he gave it them to eat, and at that feast of their own blood he beheaded sixty men. He spared only Zarmihr Eranshahik, the husband of one of the daughters of his family. In this way they came to rule Albania,” the historian concludes and continues to list the Mihranids following Vardan the Brave: “He (i.e. Vardan the Brave — A. N.) begat a son Vard, and Vard begat Varazman, the princess Shushik and Varaz-Grigor, the first prince of Albania, who was consecrated by Virov, catholicos of Albania. Varaz-Grigor had four sons, namely, Varaz-Perov, Juan-sher, Yezut-Khosrov, and Varazman.”<sup>661</sup>

The history of the Mihranid genealogy presented by Movses Kalankatuatsi became a center of controversy in historiography. The inconsistency of this genealogical record was first noticed by M. Brosset.<sup>662</sup> His idea was echoed by Patkanov,<sup>663</sup> H.H. Manandian,<sup>664</sup> Adontz,<sup>665</sup> Akinian,<sup>666</sup> Trever,<sup>667</sup>

C. J. F. Dowsett,<sup>668</sup> K.L. Tumanov,<sup>669</sup> Bunyatov,<sup>670</sup> and others. They unanimously agree that this genealogical record is a legend invented by the author himself, as the historian details six family members — from Mihran to Prince Juansher (590-642) — as having achieved power for half a century. The dominant view is that the prince was always replaced by the heir apparent on the Albanian princely throne, therefore those accusing Movses Kalankatuatsi of chronological inaccuracy propose to put the date of the Mihranids’ arrival in Albania half a century earlier, finding it impossible for six princes to rule in such a short period. Incidentally, the Albanian historian reports that “the Mihrakan family ... inherited Albania from father to

<sup>660</sup> Ibid.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>662</sup> Movses Kaghanatvatsi. *Istoriya agvan* [History of the Aghuans], p. 341.

<sup>663</sup> Ibid.

<sup>664</sup> Manandian H.H. Op. Cit., p. 13.

<sup>665</sup> Adontz N.G. Issledovaniye Movsesa Kagankatvatsi [The Study of Movses Kaghanatvatsi]. *Anait [Anahit]*, No. 6. Yerevan, 1939. P. 4.

<sup>666</sup> Akinian N.A. *Movses Daskhurantsi, Named Kalankatuatsi, and His History of Aluank*, p. 66.

<sup>667</sup> Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 236.

<sup>668</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 17, p. 107, Note 3.

<sup>669</sup> Toumanoff C. Op. Cit., p. 478-479.

<sup>670</sup> Bunyatov Z.M. Albanica. *Izvestiya AN AzSSR* [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR], No. 4. Baku, 1964. P. 90, Note 27.

son.”<sup>671</sup> However, as noted by the historian Svazian,<sup>672</sup> in spite of this account, it turns out upon careful examination of the order of succession that the authority in this princely house did not always pass to the heir apparent. There were princes on the Albanian princely throne who were not heirs apparent. For instance, Varaz-Trdat I, who succeeded Juansher, was his nephew. Here is information about him: “They [all the princes of Albania led by the great archbishop Eliazar — A. N.] busied themselves with diligent thoughts concerning the government of the land and agreed unanimously to elect a certain senior *nakharrar* who had been honored with the imperial title of ex-consul (*apahiwpat*)<sup>673</sup> and had acquired the rank of patrician. His name was Varaz- Trdat, son of Varaz-Peroz, brother of Juansher.”<sup>674</sup> It should be pointed out that Varaz-Trdat I became the “first prince” of Albania, while his predecessor had sons with the rank of patrician granted by the same Byzantine emperor Constans II (641-668).<sup>675</sup> The other “great prince” of Albania, Varaz-Trdat III, was not an heir apparent either.<sup>676</sup> These examples show that the Mihranids’ hereditary right to the throne was not strictly respected, and the authority often passed to the younger son, rather than to the older one. Thus, Prince Varaz-Grigor and his son Juansher,<sup>677</sup> were the younger sons of their fathers.

Hence, Svazian<sup>678</sup> concludes that succession in the Mihranid family should be viewed not only by direct inheritance, which is indeed not enough for the period assigned to the first Mihranids, but also by offshoots. From this perspective, the rapid succession of princes becomes logical and is justified by political conditions. The Mihranids came to Caucasian Albania to subjugate it and wanted to gain power by denying the rights of the local princely house of Eranshahik, which certainly caused resistance. The Eran- shahiks seem to have made every effort to destroy the new contenders for the throne, who were alien to them both in blood and religion. The Mihranids, on the other hand, did not hesitate to use any means to achieve supremacy over the Eranshahiks — considering the conspiratorial feasts of Mihran and his great-grandson Vardan the Brave, marital relations with the Eranshahiks, etc. In this situation, it is quite natural that the Mihranids produced six generations of rulers in such a short period. It should be borne in mind that the Albanian historian

<sup>671</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 19, p. 214.

<sup>672</sup> Svazian G.S. Rod Mikhranidov v Albanii [The Mihranid Dynasty in Albania], p. 82.

<sup>673</sup> *Apo hypaton* (onto *imaxurv* “former hypatos”) was the title of retired *hypatoi*. This position corresponded to the honorary consul. It was introduced under Emperor Marcian in the mid-5th century.

<sup>674</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 36, p. 149.

<sup>675</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 22, p. 119.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 19, p. 214.

<sup>677</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 17, p. 109.

<sup>678</sup> Svazian G.S. Rod Mikhranidov v Albanii [The Mihranid Dynasty in Albania], p. 82-83.

himself details the life of only two members of the Mihranid family, Mihran and Vardan the Brave. The author writes about both the former, who arrived in Albania and murdered the dignitaries, and the latter, who built a fortress in three years and gave a “disastrous dinner” similar to his great-grandfather’s. As for the rest, he only lists them. If they had stood out in any way or at least ruled longer, Movses Kalankatuatsi would have certainly added more information about them.

In light of the foregoing, it becomes clear that those researchers, who regard the Mihranids’ genealogical record provided by Movses Kalankatuatsi as a legend or personal invention or – accusing him of inaccuracy – change the chronology of events, are wrong.

Let us return to the events in the Caucasus. After the second partition of Armenia and Georgia following the treaty concluded in Ctesiphon in 591,<sup>679</sup> the *gavar* of Gardman in Albania became extremely important due to its location near the border of the Armenian and Georgian lands subordinate to Byzantium. The king of Sasanian Iran faced a new task: how to protect the western borders of the Sasanian Empire from Byzantium’s potential invasions. Under such circumstances, Khosrow II could not rely on the local princes. He needed a more potent force, one religiously and ideologically loyal to Persia and its policy. The Mihranid family was such force. Initially, they managed with cunning to get “shelter” from local princes in the *gavar* of Gardman, purportedly fleeing the retribution of Khosrow II, then started to gradually expand the boundaries of their possessions before completely taking over Albania. Only later did the local princely houses understand this astute policy of the Persian court, which explains one of the reasons for the uprising against the Persians in 603.<sup>680</sup>

After taking root in Gardman and destroying the members of the local *nakharar* house, the Mihranids replaced them. It seemed that in this setting and under the influence of the new dynasty, the *gavar* of Gardman should have undergone an ethnic and religious change. However, the opposite happened. The Mihranids kept their Persian identity only for two generations and then converted to Christianity. The author of Book Three of the *History of Albania* writes this: “The Mihrean (branch) of the Sassanian family came from Persia and was established among the *nakharars*. Their names, from father to son, were as follows: Mihr, Armyael, Vard, Vardan Kaj (“the Brave”) who believed in Christ.”<sup>681</sup> The Mihranids embraced Christianity, married into the families of local princes, and were finally Albanized, adopting the

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<sup>679</sup> Sebeos. *History*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. New York, 1985. Chapter 3. P. 41.

<sup>680</sup> Svazian G.S. Rod Mikhranidov v Albanli [The Mihranid Dynasty in Albania], p. 83.

<sup>681</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 22, p. 225.



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customs and lifestyles of local population.

Yet, researcher Semenov sees the Persian Empire's general political trend in such behavior of the Albanian Mihranids.<sup>682</sup> He states that the importance of the Caucasus in the long-term military confrontation with Byzantium was steadily growing for Iran. As a result, the Sassanids gradually abandoned the practice of oppressing the Caucasian Christians and imposing Zoroastrianism upon them, while doing their best to win over the sympathies of military and political elites of Armenia, Albania, and Kartli. The most prominent *nakharars* were appointed to major administrative and military posts in vari

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<sup>682</sup> Semenov I.G. Kavkaz v politicheskikh otnosheniyakh Irana s Vizantiyey i Tyurkskim kaganatom v 556-591 godakh [the Caucasus in Iran's Political Relations with Byzantium and the Turkic Khaganate in 556-591]. *Khazarsky Almanakh* [The Khazar Almanac], Vol. 13. Moscow, 2015. P. 291.

ous parts of the Sasanian state. These trends in the domestic policy of Iran intensified during the reign of Khosrow II and his successors, strengthening the population integration of Iran's Caucasian provinces into the general political and cultural life of the Sasanian state.<sup>683</sup> During this period, major anti-Sassanid uprisings stopped in the Caucasus, and the Transcaucasian troops took an active part in all subsequent wars of the Sassanid Empire until its collapse.

The Mihranids were concentrated in the *gavar* of Gardman during the initial period of their rule in Albania, but having attained supremacy over the Eranshahiks, they proclaimed themselves the only sovereign princes of the Kura and Aras interfluvium. Being prudent and far-sighted politicians, the Mihranids managed not only to consolidate their dominance in the specified territory, but also to extend it north of the Kura under Juansher, the dynasty's most remarkable personality.

After the death of the Byzantine emperor Maurice in 602, Persia took advantage of the turmoil in Byzantium and returned those Armenian and Iberian regions, which it had to give up in 591.<sup>684</sup>

The circumstances surrounding the fight of Khosrow II (whose troops included both Albanians and Atropatenians) with the Byzantines — the emperors Phocas (602-610) and Heraclius (610-641) — were detailed by Sebeos, a contemporary who kept his history up to 661. In the turbulent period of 614 to 628, the peoples of Albania had to endure great trials, as they became involved in military events caused by the struggle for trade routes and markets in Asia Minor and the Near East between the two great world powers of the time.<sup>685</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi, who seems to have written the history of his homeland in the 7th century, reports in a number of chapters what happened in Albania during these years.

He says that Heraclius reached Atrpatakan, destroyed, and burned its capital Gandzak. From there, Heraclius was going to the Albanian, Iberian, and Armenian countries for winter, obviously to subjugate them and to secure his rear before the main campaign against Ctesiphon. "He wrote to the princes and governors of these lands requesting them to come out and meet him voluntarily, that they might receive him and serve him with their forces during the winter; if they would not do this, he said, he would consider them as heathens and would capture their fortresses and enslave their kingdoms."<sup>686</sup>

Then the Albanian priests and chiefs left the city of Partaw in Khosrow II's command and fortified themselves in various castles and strongholds. The Greek

<sup>683</sup> Khurshudian E.S. *Armeniya i Sasanidsky Iran (istoriko-kulturologicheskoye issledovaniye)* [Armenia and Sasanian Iran (Historical and Cultural Study)]. Almaty, 2003. P. 22-23.

<sup>684</sup> Ivanov M.S. *Ocherk istorii Irana* [An Essay on the History of Iran], p. 33.

Abeghian M.K. Op. Cit., p. 327.

<sup>6869</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 79-80.

army arrived and encamped in the province of Uti “by the swift stream” of the river Terter within the confines of the village of Kalankatuk, which the historian Movses claimed as his origin. The Greek army “trampled down and ruined the beautiful vineyards and fields over which they passed,” and, marching thence, they camped by the river Terter near the village of Diwtakan. Here, the Greeks were attacked by the Persian army that drove Heraclius over the land of Syunik and “retook the towns which he had forcibly taken from them.” Movses Kalankatuatsi may have relied on the local and Persian sources for this story. We have considered the events above from the viewpoint of Greek and Roman sources. According to Trever, this campaign of Heraclius, which is regarded by the Albanian historian as a failure, appears to have taken place in 624.

In 626, the Khazars, summoned by Heraclius for help, opposed Caucasian Albania. “They made swiftly for the gates of Cholay, ignored the garrison and army of the king of Persia stationed at the great gate and swooped down like eagles upon the great river Kur.”<sup>687</sup> There was a Persian ruler named Gay-shak in Partaw at the time. Showing cowardice, Gayshak escaped to Persia. The Khazars killed part of the population of Partaw and took others as prisoners, while the remainder fled and fortified themselves in Artsakh. Then the Khazars rushed over Iberia and besieged Tiflis; Heraclius came too with an army.

Meanwhile, Khosrow II was killed by his nobles, and in 628 his son Kavvad II<sup>688</sup> was put on the throne. He made peace with Heraclius and returned to him not only the territories captured by Khosrow II, but also all the lands that had once belonged to the Byzantine Empire.<sup>689</sup>

Internal feuds in Khazaria prevented further devastation and destruction of the Transcaucasian countries by the Khazars. These events occurred in the early “30s of the 7th century, i.e. when the Arabs were preparing to capture the countries of Western and Central Asia. They took possession of Syria and annexed it from Byzantium in 634. As things stood, Heraclius

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<sup>687</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 12, p. 87.

<sup>688</sup> Kavvad II was the shahanshah of Iran and Aniran. He was born to Khosrow II and his wife Maria, a Byzantine princess. Kavvad II ruled for several months in 628.

<sup>689</sup> Ivanov M.S. *Ocherk istorii Irana* [An Essay on the History of Iran], p. 34.

was in Byzantium, Yazdegerd III (632-651) in Iran, and Prince Varaz-Grigor (628-636) in Albania.

Mamedova points out that Caucasian Albania changed its political orientation several times during the reign of Varaz-Grigor by alternately recognizing the authority of either Byzantium or Khazaria.<sup>690</sup>

The Albanian historian describes the Arab invasion of Iran after Syria as follows:

**The race of Hagar, an alliance of twelve tribes, grew powerful, and approaching from a distant clime in a bold and terrifying mass like a tempest blowing over the desert, they crossed the land of Asorestan and swiftly marched against the king of the Persians. Thereupon those generals and princes, lords and indigenous nobles of the various regions subject to the kingdom of Persia recruited an army to march against the foreign foe.<sup>691</sup>**

Varaz-Grigor also took part in mobilizing the Persian army against the Arabs. Varaz-Grigor's son, young Juansher, headed the Albanian military force.

According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, Juansher fought for seven years in "painful battles" against the Arabs, returned to Albania after the fall of the Sassanid state, and revolted against the Persian governors, who were still in Atrpatakan. He inflicted a series of defeats upon the Persian troops stationed in Albania, received military assistance from the Iberian ruler Atrnerse- h,<sup>692</sup> and liberated Partaw from the Persians. Considering the decline of the once powerful Persia and "the independence of the first eastern kings ..., he resolved never again to entrust the fate of his principality to another," the historian says.<sup>693</sup> But Albania's independence did not last long: this time the Arabs conquered Transcaucasia in the mid-7th century, including Caucasian Albania.

The Arabs were not always successful. Sebeos writes about the defeat suffered by the Arabs at the hands of the Khazars.<sup>694</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Arab tribes sparked civil strife fueled by power struggle; the countries of Transcaucasia took advantage of this opportunity and separated from the Arabs. Some *nakharars* found it necessary to submit to Byzantium in order to protect

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<sup>690</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 364-365.

<sup>691</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 18, p. 109.

<sup>692</sup> This probably refers to Adamase I, ruler of the principality of Kartli (619/627-637/642) from the Guaramid dynasty.

<sup>693</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 19, p. 115.

<sup>694</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 51, p. 149.

themselves from the Arabs, while others preferred to keep oriented towards the Arabs, pay taxes to them, and carry other duties to avoid future invasions.

Juansher advocated rapprochement with Byzantium and, to this end, exchanged letters with the Byzantine emperor Constans II (641-668), the text of which is provided by Movses Kalankatuatsi. Juansher wrote to Constans: "All-conquering lord, powerful and merciful king of the Romans, Constantine Augustus ... May it please your Christian lordship to accept this new offer of vassalage from a distant people that divine virtue may be bestowed from your great dignity and glory upon our humble selves who seek a crown [from you]." <sup>695</sup>

The Byzantine emperor was glad to accept the offer in his response letter. The Byzantine court sent precious gifts to Juansher, as well as *patiws* (honorary armbands) for 1,200 men to be elevated to the titles of *patricius*,<sup>696</sup> *hypatos*,<sup>701</sup> *apohypaton*, *stratelates*,<sup>698</sup> and *elist*,<sup>699</sup> "that Juansher might bestow them upon whomsoever he wished."

Thus, realizing the need to make a choice dictated by the situation, Juansher concluded a treaty with Constans II to prevent the plundering of his country by the Byzantines. According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, Juansher met the Byzantine emperor in the Median village of Kungur (Kinkiwar in Southern Azerbaijan) and accepted his suzerainty.<sup>700</sup>

The Albanian historian, who devotes a lot of chapters to Juansher and does not hide his enthusiasm for him, ends one section on the exchange of diplomatic notes that contain the following words: "He prudently brought the wild people around Mount Caucasus to order, and from the borders of Georgia to the gates of the Huns and the river Araxes he ruled as absolute monarch."<sup>701</sup> These words accurately indicate the borders of Albania, whose territory had reached its largest size by the 7th century.

The exchange of letters is likely to have taken place in 658, while in 660 Albania suffered a new marauding invasion by the Khazars: the Albanians met them on the left bank of the Kura, did not let them enter the country, engaged in a battle, and

<sup>695</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 20, p. 116.

<sup>696</sup> *Patricius* (Latin: *patricius*) was the highest senatorial title of the late Roman Empire introduced by Constantine the Great by analogy with the Roman patricians of the Republic.

<sup>697</sup> *Hypatos* was a chief, an imperial governor. His Byzantine dignity sometimes corresponded to the consulship.

<sup>698</sup> *Stratelates* was an honored person in the Byzantine Empire, who held the position of one of the commanders-in-chief and sometimes co-governed some part of the empire.

<sup>699</sup> This probably refers to the Georgian title of *eristavi*, denoting the public office of the governor or hereditary feudal lord.

<sup>700</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 22, p. 118.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 2, Chapter 21, p. 117-118.

defeated them.

The conflicts, which arose in the center of the Caliphate in the first years of the second half of the 7th century, naturally undermined the Arab positions in the South Caucasus, resulting in more Khazar raids. This time the Khazars seem to have appeared suddenly, because they managed to cross the Kura, reach the Aras, and take captive not only the Albanians but also the Armenians and the people of Syunik. Now, however, Juansher acted diplomatically: the Albanian and Khazar rulers met on the bank of the Kura, conducted negotiations, and concluded a peace treaty, under which the Khazars returned the prisoners, whereas Juansher took the Khazar *khagan's* daughter to wife.<sup>702</sup>

The Khazar raids, Byzantium's weakening against the Arab conquest of Asia Minor regions, the aggressive policy of the Arabs towards Transcaucasia, and economic hardships faced by the population of Albania — all prompted the Albanians and Armenians to reconsider their alliance with Byzantium and choose friendship treaties with the Arabs instead, pledging their submission to the Caliphate. Accordingly, Theodoras Rshtuni, *ishkhan*<sup>703</sup> <sup>704</sup> and *spar- apet*<sup>TM</sup> of Armenia, visited Caliph Muawiyah (661-680) in Damascus in 652 bearing great gifts. According to Sebeos, the caliph bestowed his own gifts upon Theodoras and purportedly “gave him the rank of prince of Armenia, Iberia, Aluank, and Siwnik, as far as the Caucasus mountain and the Pass of Chor. Then he dismissed him with honor. He had made a pact with him to bring that land into subjection.”<sup>705</sup> We may conclude from these words of Sebeos that Theodoras' assignment to submit all countries of Transcaucasia to the Arab will was meant to sow discord among the peoples of these countries in an effort to weaken them, while thwarting any attempts to resist the intentions of conquerors. When comparing the texts of Armenian and Albanian historians, it can be seen that none of the caliph's expectations were met, there was no fratricidal struggle between the peoples of Transcaucasia, which

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<sup>702</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 26, p. 123.

<sup>703</sup> *Ishkhan* was an Armenian princely title.

<sup>704</sup> *Sparapet* was the supreme commander of the Armenian army.

<sup>705</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 49, p. 143.

Muawiyah hoped for, and this, along with other circumstances, caused the Arabs to attack Armenia in 654, capture Dvin, and take a large number of *na-kharars* with their families as hostages and prisoners. Meanwhile, according to Sebeos, the Arabs devastated Albania and Syunik.<sup>706</sup>

The Arabs must have been especially interested in subjugating Albania, given its strategic position between the Khazars in the north and Atropatene (which was yet to be completely subdued) in the south; its trade routes on territory leading from Near Asia to the North Caucasus; the Volga and South Russian steppes; its natural resources, metal-rich minerals, etc.

This may explain why Juansher managed to reduce the heavy taxes, imposed upon the population of Caucasian Albania by the Arabs, during his second visit to the caliph.

At the same time, the alliance with the Khazars and their claims to the territory of the South Caucasus could not but worry the Caliphate. Juansher inquired into the situation and quite rightly decided to get closer to the Arabs due to the fading power of Byzantium and distrust of the Khazars.

It should be noted that after reinforcing the troops sent by Caliph Uthman to the South Caucasus, Juansher was able to retain political authority, but despite all attempts to maintain independence, he had to pay tribute to the Arab governor (*amil*) residing in Barda. This is once again demonstrated by Juansher's arrival in Damascus to meet Caliph Muawiyah and negotiate a decrease in the tribute paid to the Arabs. Interestingly, Juansher was held in great reverence and esteem during this meeting and received by the caliph as an honorary guest. The caliph seems to have entrusted Juansher to govern Syunik, which was constantly striving for political independence. However, Juansher refused Muawiyah's proposal to transfer the administration of Atrpatakan (Southern Azerbaijan to him); the southern part of the historical Azerbaijani lands, which Movses Kalankatuatsi calls "Atrpatakan beyond the river (i.e. the Aras — A. N.)," remained under the control of the Arab governor. Movses Kalankatuatsi attests that the caliph "subjected to his rule the principality of Siwnestan [Siwnik], and urged him to undertake to rule also over the people of Atrpatakan beyond the river, but he would not consent to rule with absolute power over the regions of the world."<sup>707</sup>

Thus, in spite of efforts to preserve the political independence and Juansher's administration of northern lands as long as tribute was paid to the Caliphate, the governors appointed by Caliph Muawiyah continued to perform

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Ibid., Chapter 52, p. 149-154.

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Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 28, p. 128.

their functions in these lands (as the Persian governors had done before) and tried to pursue Arab fiscal policy in the South Caucasus.

During these years, when the Arab-Byzantine relations gravely deteriorated and there was a constant threat of new Khazar raids (according to al-Yaʿqubi, Muawiyah's army attacked Byzantium 16 times in 43-59 A. H. (663-679)), the Arabs confined themselves to collecting taxes in the South Caucasus and allowed the local princes to rule independently, including Juansher, but in order to prevent the Byzantine and Khazar attacks, they stationed their troops in particularly precarious regions of the country, including Derbent and Nakhchivan. Although Juansher's marriage to the daughter of the Khazar *khagan* somewhat slowed the Khazar raids, his strong preference for the Arabs fueled the resentment of local feudal lords, who were vassals to Byzantium, and caused the murder of the Albanian ruler.<sup>708</sup>

Throughout his account, the Albanian historian distinguishes the outstanding figure of the Albanian prince Juansher. He is portrayed as a great and prominent statesman of the mid-7th century. Movses Kalankatuatsi depicts Juansher as a hero in battle, a subtle diplomat who knew how to get along with Byzantium, the Khazars, and the Arabs — a builder and restorer of the destroyed country.

Reputable researchers, albeit without convincing evidence, point to 669 as the year of Juansher's death.<sup>709</sup> However, we consider 680 to be a more appropriate date, as supported by Bunyatov.<sup>710</sup> This choice can be explained by consistent analysis of information sources on the dating of Bishop Israyel's mission to the Huns, which will be reviewed further.

So, Juansher is said to have died from severe wounds inflicted upon him by one of the conspirators in 680. Unfortunately, Movses Kalankatuatsi describes these events<sup>711</sup> in the style of an epic song, from which it is not clear what kind of conspiracy it was. At the beginning of Chapter 28, the historian vaguely hints at what Juansher might have done and how "the beloved and glorious man became vain and empty and was stripped of these glories by the snares of vice, for he transgressed the commandments of the Lord. All became a spider's web [cf. Job 8,14], and the wonderful splendor swiftly vanished."<sup>712</sup>

<sup>708</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 34, p. 142-145.

<sup>709</sup> Trever K. V. Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e. [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 220, 233; Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuysky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarskomu khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], *Zapiski IVAN SSSR* [Notes of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR], p. 130,155.

<sup>710</sup> Bunyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhān v VII—IXw.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 59,102.

<sup>711</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 34, p. 142-145.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid., p. 142.



Taking advantage of internecine wars that arose between the Arabs after the reign of Caliph Muawiyah, the peoples of Transcaucasia ceased to pay them taxes in 680 and enjoyed independence for a few years.<sup>713</sup> However, Albania was attacked by the Khazars in 681.<sup>714</sup> Alp-Ilutuer, ruler of the Huns, launched devastating raids on the left bank of the Kura, the foothills of the Caucasus, and the Kabala region.

Juansher's successor Varaz-Trdat abstained from military action and, as Juansher had once done, decided to influence the Khazars diplomatically. He sent to them in Varachan (Alp-Ilutuer's headquarters) Bishop Israyel, who managed in 682 to convince the Khazars to make peace by promising them tribute.<sup>715</sup>

At the same time, the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (685-695 and 705- 711) sent a huge army, led by the commander Leontius, to the South Caucasus in 689 or 690. According to sources, the reliability of which is confirmed by the Byzantine author Theophanes,<sup>716</sup> the Byzantine troops plundered 25 regions in all countries of the Caucasus, captured 8,000 people, and imposed heavy taxes upon the territory.

A year later, the South Caucasus was attacked by the Arabs again. The new caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685-705), member of the Umayyad dynasty, sent an army to the Transcaucasian countries. Seeking to restore the system of tribute paid to the Caliphate's treasury, the Arabs sparked unprecedented outrage in Caucasian Albania. According to Ghewond, their assaults were difficult to resist.<sup>717</sup> In the same year, however, the army, led by Justinian II, invaded the South Caucasus provinces and tried to regain Byzantium's political supremacy in the region. To this end, the princes of the three countries arrived to meet the emperor and left their sons with him as hostages.

Varaz-Trdat and Nerseh Kamsakaran, ruler of Shirak, acknowledged the seizure of Armenia. Justinian abandoned his army of 30,000 and returned to Constantinople with prisoners.

The aggressive policy, pursued by the two most powerful empires of that period (including the Khazars), to subjugate the South Caucasus ended in a peace treaty that was concluded to achieve a common goal; under the treaty, the taxes collected from the South Caucasus were equally distributed between Byzantium and

<sup>713</sup> Ghewond. *History*. Translated from Classical Armenian by R. Bedrosian. Long Branch, 2006. Chapter 4. P. 6.

<sup>714</sup> The Khazars were a Turkic-speaking nomadic people. It became famous in the Eastern Fore-Caucasus (lowlands of Dagestan) shortly after the Hunnic invasion and was formed as a result of interaction between three ethnic components: local Iranian-speaking population, as well as alien Ugric and Turkic tribes.

<sup>715</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapters 40-45, p. 155-171.

<sup>716</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, A. D. 686-687, p. 62.

<sup>717</sup> Ghewond. *History*, Chapter 7, p. 7-8.

the Caliphate. However, peace in the South Caucasus did not last long. In 692, the Arabs broke the treaty, attacked Sham, and inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Byzantine emperor. The victory strengthened the Arab positions in the South Caucasus. Still, according to Movses Kalankatuatsi, "Varaz-Trdat paid tribute to three nations — the Khazars, the Tachiks (Arabs), and the Romans (Byzantines)."<sup>718</sup>

In 693, Caliph Abd al-Malik appointed his brother Muhammad ibn Marwan as the governor of "Al-Jazira, Azerbaijan, and Armenia." During his governorship (693-709), the Arab consolidation in the South Caucasus entered a crucial phase. The conflicts between the Arabs and the Khazars, the Arabs and the Byzantines, as well as the Arabs and the local population led to the substantial reinforcement of the Arab invading machine in the early 8th century and the deployment of Arab troops in many places across the region, including the provinces of Caucasian Albania.

Varaz-Trdat, who was promoted to the rank of exarch<sup>719</sup> by Justinian, i.e. became "the second *ishkhan* of Albania after the king," was sent with his sons to Constantinople under Tiberius III (698-706) in 699, but he was released and returned to Albania during the second reign of Justinian II. The Arabs, in turn, captured Albania in 705 and took to Syria the Albanian prince Sheroy (699-705), the last great prince of the Mihranid dynasty.

Thus, Albania — which throughout its history fought for political independence first with Rome, then with Byzantium, the Alans and other nomads, Parthia and Persia, the Huns and the Khazars — shared the fate of other peoples of Transcaucasia, Near Asia, and Central Asia who were subjected to the Arab conquest of the 7th-8th centuries.

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<sup>718</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 12, p. 202.

<sup>719</sup> Exarch was the supreme ruler of a large province in early Byzantium.

### II.3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH LIFE OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

An attempt by the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527-565) to create religious unity in the East proved unsuccessful — and not only politically. Neither argumentation nor violence could overcome the deep mistrust of the Council of Chalcedon that had been instilled by its first opponents in the peoples of Syria and Egypt, Armenia and Caucasian Albania, among others. Throughout the history of doctrinal disputes between East and West, never were such theological opportunities and concessions given to dissenters from the Orthodox Church — and all for the sake of its unity.

Does this mean that opposition was based only on cultural, national, and ethnic factors? Were doctrinal issues exploited to cover up the cultural separatism of Syrians, Armenians, Albanians and Copts and their hatred of the Greeks and the Byzantine Empire? This point of view was and remains widespread: many still defend it, failing to notice a serious historical mistake. While cultural differences, predictably, contributed to the split, they were not the driving force.

According to church historian Meyendorff, the basic conservatism of the masses and their profound distrust of an often vacillating ecclesiastical leadership should be seen as the main motivation for opposition to Chalcedon during and after the reign of Justinian, though growing cultural and ethnic differences should not be wholly excluded as factors contributing to the spirit of opposition.<sup>720</sup>

Despite the complexity of the political situation in the Caucasus in the 6th-8th centuries, this time can be viewed as quite favorable to the development of church life in Caucasian Albania. During this period, the Albanian Church showed its potential strength and vitality in spreading the Christian mission to the nearby Khazaria.

#### 11.3.1. *The Dogmatic Attitudes of Christians in Transcaucasia*

The Caucasian and Syrian Christians suffered from ongoing rivalry between the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires from the very beginning of their communities; the border, which separated them and constantly changed because of wars or for diplomatic reasons, passed through Armenia and Meso

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Meyendorff John, protopresbyter. *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Chapter VIII, p. 252.

potamia and divided the Christian population living on both sides of it. Since the Byzantine emperors acted as defenders of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, the interests of Christians living in Persia clearly required that they ensure their church affiliation not make them appear as foreign agents in the eyes of Persian kings. This prompted the Syrians to identify themselves and oppose the Council of Ephesus (431), while the Caucasian peoples stood against the Council of Chalcedon (451).

From the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator, the Caucasians seem to have very quickly "indigenized" Christianity by seamlessly integrating it into the life of people as a whole and into various clans. Of course, the Christian tradition, dating back to St. Gregory the Illuminator and his grandson Grigorios of Albania and carried on by St. Mesrop and Bishop Jeremiah, was essentially Orthodox, universal and missionary: both the Scripture and the divine service were translated into all languages of the region.<sup>721</sup> However, the Armenian episcopate and later catholicosate became a hereditary function. The main see was closely connected with the Arsacid dynasty, whereas "the most effective limitation of the royal control over the ecclesiastical hierarchy stemmed not from as yet unformulated canonic regulations, but from the irrevocable hereditary privileges that united the Armenian secular and ecclesiastical magnates against any encroachments on the part of the crown."<sup>722</sup> In Armenia, the catholicos was the head of the national church controlled by the king, while the bishops felt like pastors of individual clans and even signed the conciliar acts accordingly without mentioning the territorial titles of their cities,<sup>723</sup> as was always the case in other places, including Caucasian Albania. The councils of Caucasian Churches assembled the bishops together with noble chieftains,<sup>724</sup> who determined the faith of people not only in religious but also in political and cultural terms. Such conditions were driven by the need to survive as a minority amidst Persia's Zoroastrian culture; however, the relations with Byzantium followed a similar pattern. Despite their hatred of Persian domination, the Caucasians had no other option but to be loyal to the Sassanids and even formally benefited from the Persian patronage when they had to rebel against the Chalcedonian emperors of Byzantium.

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<sup>721</sup> Michalowski K. *Paras: die Kathedrale aus den Wüstensand*. Zürich, 1967; Dinkier E. *Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in christlicher Zeit*. Recklinghausen, 1970.

<sup>722</sup> Garsoian N.G. Secular Jurisdiction over the Armenian Church (Fourth-Seventh centuries). *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, No. VII. Harvard, 1983. P. 233-234,250.

<sup>723</sup> Regarding the Council of 505/506; "Mersapuh, bishop of the Mamikonean, Khabbay, bishop of the Artsruni, Sahe, bishop of the Amatuni," etc.

<sup>724</sup> Sarkissian K. *The Council of Chalcedon and the Armenian Church*. New York, 1975. P. 205.

Still, they sometimes turned to the Greeks for help to oppose the Persians, although often their appeals to Constantinople proved fruitless. Interestingly, both pro-Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian texts point to the direct interference of Persian kings in such issues as the ecclesiastical independence of Caucasian peoples from the Greek Church and the convocation of councils rejecting Chalcedon.

All these facts did not mean that the adoption of Monophysitism by the Caucasian Churches was a matter of Persia's political pressure alone. A.M. Velichko, an expert in Byzantine and church history, thinks that "the Monophysite schism should in no way be interpreted as an ecclesiastical dispute only, for this phenomenon was largely caused by numerous political factors and ideological differences between the East and the West."<sup>725</sup>

Indeed, the Syrian Nestorian Catholicosate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was the Christian Church in Persia, which had direct and regular contacts with the Persian court. Nestorianism was therefore an acceptable choice for the Caucasians politically, and the pressure of Syrians in this regard was quite strong in the first decades of the 5th century. Fear of Syrian Nestorianism was one of the main reasons determining the religious choice of Caucasians. This fear was implanted in them immediately after the Council of Ephesus during St. Mesrop's translation activities under the Armenian catholicos Sahak (390-439). Temporarily deposed in 428, Sahak was replaced by several catholicoi appointed from Ctesiphon. However, the resistance to Nestorianism was also caused by the letters of theologians, St. Cyril's followers, such as Acacius of Melitene,<sup>726</sup> whom the exiled Sahak addressed specifically on this topic in 433. The efforts of local Caucasian Churches to create their own script, literature, and culture were, at least in part, motivated by the need to protect Transcaucasia from the monopoly of Syrian Nestorianism. After a period of direct relations with Constantinople, the Armenians were cut off from the Empire by the war of 451. The events of the Council of Chalcedon did not affect them. In 451, the uprising of Caucasian peoples against the Persian rule was suppressed in Avarayr, while in 454, Catholicos Hovsep Vayotsdzorts (444-451) and several bishops were killed by the Persians. There was no help from Byzantium in response.

In the second half of the 5th century, Nestorianism in Persia continued to stand firm thanks to the famous Barsauma (415/420-492/495, bishop

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<sup>725</sup> Velichko A.M. *Istoriya vizantiyskikh imperatorov* [The History of the Byzantine Emperors], Vol. I, p. 531.

Acacius of Melitene (c. 370-438) was a bishop and wonderworker. He fought Nestorianism at the Third Ecumenical Council.

435-489),<sup>727</sup> Metropolitan of Nisibis, and was heavily supported by the Persian court.<sup>728</sup> Meanwhile, Emperors Zeno (474-475, 476-491) and Anastasius (491-518) began to stand up for the Monophysites in Persia, leading to new contacts with the Armenians. In 505 to 506, due to improving relations between Byzantium and Persia, a council was held in Dvin in the presence of the Albanian clergy, where the Armenian catholicos Babgen I Utmsetsi (490- 516) gladly refuted Nestorianism and affirmed Cyril's traditional confession, firmly rejecting Eutychius. He condemned the great leaders of the School of Antioch, in particular Theodore of Mopsuestia,<sup>729</sup> Ibas,<sup>730</sup> Theodoret,<sup>731</sup> and Nestorius, as well as Barsauma, arguing that "the same faith was held by the Greeks, Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians."<sup>732</sup> This signalled basic consent with Zeno's *Henotikon* policy, which prevailed in Byzantium at the time, allowing the Transcaucasian Churches to claim to be part of the universal consensus, contrasting it with the Nestorians isolated from the Christian world.

This position was confirmed by several councils in Dvin even after Justin I repudiated the *Henotikon* in 518.

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<sup>727</sup> Muravyev A.V. Bar Sauma [Barsauma]. *Pravoslavnyaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. IV. Moscow, 2009. P. 349-350.

<sup>728</sup> Lopukhin A.P. Varsuma [Barsauma], *Pravoslavnyaya bogoslovskaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Theological Encyclopedia], Vol. III. Petrograd, 1902. P. 167-168.

<sup>729</sup> Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428) was an early Christian theologian and saint of the Nestorian Church. He was one of the most significant religious scholars of the East in the post-Origenian period and headed the School of Antioch for some time.

<sup>730</sup> Ibas of Edessa (died in 457) was a church figure, member of the Catechetical School of Antioch, and Bishop of Edessa since 435. He was suspected of Nestorianism, accused of distributing the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and deposed at the Robber Council of 449. Two years later, Ibas of Edessa was reinstated in his see at the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

<sup>731</sup> Theodoret of Cyrus (386-457) was a theologian, bishop, and one of the most prominent apologists of Dyophysite Christology. He represented the Catechetical School of Antioch, ideologically opposed Cyril of Alexandria, and defended Nestorianism.

<sup>732</sup> Cf. long text excerpts in K. Sarkissian's work (Sarkissian K.Op. Cit., p. 196). Along with many other historians, Sarkissian holds that the Armenians officially rejected the Council of Chalcedon at the council of 505/506. For the problems of authenticity of texts and other controversial issues see Inglisian V. Chalkedon und die armenische Kirche. *Das Konzil von Chalkedon Bd. 2*. Würzburg, 1955. Vol. II. P. 364-370; Mécérian J. *Histoire et Institutions de l'église arménienne*. Beirut, 1965. P. 64-66. The problem is that Chalcedon's critical mention (which is not substantially different from that in the *Henotikon*) can be found not in the synodal epistle itself, but only in the catholicos' second personal letter, whose authenticity is questionable. Otherwise, the faith, defended in Dvin, fully corresponded to the faith of the Byzantine Empire at that time, i.e. the *Henotikon*.

Yet, in 551 to 555 the Armenian Church came into closer contact with established Monophysite communities of Mesopotamia.<sup>733</sup> They asked the Armenian catholicos Nerses II (548-557) for protection. He agreed to appoint a bishop named Abdisho and, assembling a new council in Dvin in 555, formally condemned not only Eutychius, the Three Chapters, Nestorius, the Tome of Leo (this time quite definitely), and the Council of Chalcedon, but also Severus of Antioch<sup>734</sup> for his doctrine of “corruptibility” of the body of Christ. After this council, the Armenian Catholicosate of Dvin, followed by the Albanian Church, took a firm Monophysite stance in the form of moderate Julianism or Aphthartodocetism.<sup>735</sup>

Thus, theological, historical, cultural, and political factors were woven into the evolution of the Caucasians’ official position in the Sassanid Empire. These factors included the need to survive and receive theological and cultural protection from the Syrian Catholicosate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the confusion arising from the contradictions of Constantinople’s imperial policy, and the difficulties faced by all non-Greeks trying to understand the terminology of Christological disputes.

Nevertheless, throughout this period the social standing of Armenians in the Byzantine Empire was second only to Greeks.<sup>736</sup> This is illustrated by the fact that the two greatest commanders in the Byzantine army under Justinian I — Belisarius and Nerses — were Armenians. Emperors Maurice (582-602) and Heraclius (610-641), as well as some of their successors, were of Armenian origin themselves. It is quite evident that those Armenians, who were part of the imperial organization, belonged to the official Orthodox Chalcedonian Church, as was the case with many Armenian communities of eastern Asia Minor controlled by Byzantium. The church affiliation of the Armenians clearly had a certain political significance for both the Byzantines and the Persians, especially since Armenia was a battlefield between these two empires. Therefore, it is likely that if the Byzantines had fought more successfully against Persia, the Chalcedonian faith would have prevailed among the Transcaucasian peoples.

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<sup>733</sup> they belonged to the Julianist Anti-Sevirian movement and adhered to the doctrine of the incorruptibility of the Body of Christ until the Resurrection (Aphthartodocetism).

<sup>734</sup> Severus of Antioch was the Patriarch of Antioch in 512-518 and founder of Severianism (movement in Monophysitism).

<sup>735</sup> To this day, the Armenian scholars and theologians have not agreed on the exact meaning of this Julianism (See Sarkissian K.Op. Cit., p. 215). However, Severus’ condemnation undoubtedly became an integral part of the official Armenian faith because of this “Julianist” affiliation.

<sup>736</sup> Charanis P. *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*. Lisbon, 1963.

Around 562,<sup>757</sup> the Armenian catholicos Hovhannes II (557-574) sent a letter to the Albanian catholicos Abas (552-596) concerning the confirmation of the faith, setting out dogmatic principles observed by the Caucasian Christians. This letter is presented in Chapter 7 of Book 2 of the *History of Albania*:

Greetings and blessings to my good, true, godly, and beloved brother and colleague the Lord Abas, catholicos of Albania, and to Movses, bishop of Bakhalat, Grigor, bishop of Kapalak, Hromik, bishop of Amaras, Timote, bishop of Bala- sakan, Ambakum, bishop of Shake, Yovhanik, bishop of Gardman, and Lewond, bishop of Mec Kolmank.

(...) ... certain ravening wolves in sheep's clothing have entered your country ... who are ... haters of Christ... and who sow the evil tares of the accursed Nesto- rius and the council of Chalcedon without restraint...

(...) We hasten with the utmost urgency to ... remind you to maintain firmly the Orthodox faith which our fathers received from the holy writ of the Old and New Testaments through St. Gregory and the thrice-blessed councils ... in Nicaea,... in Constantinople, and ... in Ephesus, with all of whom we agreed and from whom we inherited the Orthodox faith, that is, the faith of all the churches of Christ God.

We confess one God, the Almighty Father, creator of all things, and the one Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, begotten of the Father, very God of very God, by whom all things [were made], and in the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, worshipped and glorified with the Father and Son, the Holy Trinity, associates in creation and equal, of one perfect nature, watching with power and glory over all things which are.

And finally the eternal Word of God, being God, became perfect and unchanged Man, born incarnate of the Holy Virgin, neither separated from his nature nor parted from his fleshliness, but remaining I AM, the same immutable God incarnate not partially, but wholly, not a duality, but an indivisible unity. It was not the Father who became incarnate, but the Son; it was not the Holy Spirit which became solid flesh, but the Only-begotten of the Father, although this came to pass through the will of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit; but by substance (*goyutiwn-ovoia*) only the Word God. Thus is the Holy Nativity understood.

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<sup>751</sup> According to Malachia Ormanian, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople (Or- manian M. *The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature, and Existing Condition*. Translated by M. Gregory. London, 1912).



The Infinite itself was wrapped in swaddling clothes that we might clad ourselves in incorruptibility; He was laid in a manger that we might lay aside our bestiality; He was glorified by the angels that we might sing with them; He received gifts from the Magi that we might cause the Faith to bear fruit; He was fed with milk that we might acquire freedom from sin; He grew perfect in body that we might achieve the perfection of Christ; He submitted voluntarily to torments that we might be saved from the torments of sin; He was crucified that we might be worthy of the fruit of Life; He died that by His death Death too might die; He was laid in the tomb that he might shatter the locks of Hell; He rose on the third day that He might lead us to life; He ascended into Heaven and sat on the right hand of the Father that we also might be ranged on the right hand; He will come again to judge the quick and the dead, and there is no end to His kingdom.

Therefore we say in faith and praise: Holy God, holy and powerful, holy, and immortal, who wert crucified for us, have mercy upon us.

Those who did not confess thus were cursed by the holy fathers just as we curse all the ancient and modern heretics: namely, Paul of Samosata, Mani, Marcion, the filthy Nestorius, Theodoret, the evil and vain Council of Chalcedon, and the Jewish letter of Leo which impudently presumed to attribute two natures (*bnu- tiwn*) and two persons (*dem*) to the one Christ God and to assert that the Holy Virgin did not give birth to God, but to a mere man like ourselves, a temple of the Word of God.

There are others who affirm that while the Lord Christ was on earth, He was not in heaven, and that while He was on the cross, He was not on the throne of glory, and that while He was in the tomb, He was not at the right hand of the Father. God curses those who think thus, and we curse all who believe and accept it.<sup>738</sup>

In 572, the Armenian revolt, led by Vardan Mamikonian, was supported by Emperor Justin II (565-574) and temporarily destroyed the Persian authority in Dvin.<sup>739</sup> A strong Persian counterattack made Prince Vardan, Catholicos Hovhannes, and other rebellion leaders flee to Constantinople,<sup>740</sup> where Justin II had only recently published (in 571) his *Henotikon*, vigorously affirming Cyril's Christology once again and adhering to the Council of Chalcedon.<sup>741</sup> In 573, the Armenians,

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<sup>738</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72-74.

<sup>739</sup> Evagrius Scholasticus. *The Ecclesiastical History*. Translated and edited by E. Walford. London, 1846. Book V, Chapter VII. P. 256-257.

<sup>740</sup> Kulakovskiy Y. A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium], Vol. II, 2003, p. 285.

<sup>755</sup> Evagrius Scholasticus. *The Ecclesiastical History*, Book V, Chapter IV, p. 249-254.

including the catholicos, agreed

to unite with the Orthodox Church and entered into communion with the Chalcedonians. Catholicos Hovhannes II died in Constantinople a year later.

In 591, Emperor Maurice (582-602) concluded an extraordinary treaty between Byzantium and Persia due to his friendship with and backing of Khosrow II (591-628), a treaty which gave the Byzantine Empire control over most of Armenia. The border was the Azat River.<sup>742</sup>

Dvin, the residence of the Armenian catholicos, remained on the Persian side, but just across the border with Byzantium. Catholicos Movses II (574-604), who was invited to participate in the council for the purpose of unification, famously rejected the offer: "I will not cross the Azat river nor will I eat the baked bread of the Greeks or drink their hot water."<sup>743</sup> However, most Armenian bishops living on the Byzantine side gathered in Theodosiopolis (Erzurum) in 593 and elected a new Chalcedonian catholicos, Yovhan Bagarantsi (590-610), who resided in Avan on the river across from Dvin, until he was arrested and exiled by the Persians in 610. The further adoption of the Council of Chalcedon by the Georgian catholicos Kyrion (599-614/616) and difficulties in electing Movses' successor faced by the anti-Chalcedonian Armenians, even in the Persian-occupied areas, possibly show that the Chalcedonian faith could have been fully restored in Armenia and throughout the Caucasus under Maurice. But the Persian conquest halted all efforts towards unification until Emperor Heraclius made a significant new attempt after his victory over Shahanshah Khosrow II.

Bolotov notes that

**the Armenians joined the Monophysites by pure accident and received no honor or glory among them; moreover, throughout the subsequent period, their position among the Monophysites was very miserable. The Monophysites – if they were Greek, Syrian, or Egyptian – felt as if they belonged to the same church, but the Armenians with their incomprehensible language and liturgical ranks appeared somewhat mysterious and strange to other Monophysites. The Monophysite Syrians tried to exert their influence on the Armenians and sent their bishops to them; this contributed to a rapprochement, but still the Syrians did not trust the Armenians. The Syrian Monophysite writers considered the Armenian people to be stupid and backward; they found their rituals ridiculous. In**

<sup>742</sup> Kulakovsky Y. A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium], Vol. II, 2003, p. 290.

<sup>743</sup> Garitte G. La narratio de rebus Armeniae. *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*. 132. Subsidia 4. Leuven, 1952. P. 226-227. The allusion is obviously to the use of leavened bread and zeon, or hot water, poured in the chalice before communion by the Orthodox Greeks. The Armenians use unleavened bread and unmixed wine in the liturgy.

**short, an Armenian, who broke away from his tradition, lived like a proletarian. After adopting Monophysitism, the Armenians were in the same position as the Slavs and Uniate Greeks, who betrayed Orthodoxy yet did not completely accept Catholicism.**

**... Maurice decided to act, convene a council by persuasion, and resolve all issues at it, but was confronted by Movses, the catholicos of Dvin, who declared that he would not cross the border separating the two empires, and this ended in nothing...<sup>744</sup>**

As for Iran itself, we remember that it was dominated by the Nestorian Persian Church of the East. But since Persia served as a refuge for all dissenters of the Byzantine Empire, while Syriac-speaking Christian communities always lived on both sides of the border, it was inevitable for a wide variety of beliefs existing among the Syrians to penetrate Iran, including not only the Nestorians, but also the Jacobites.

The Persian Church, rooted in the Judeo-Christian traditions brought directly from Palestine in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, was constantly cut off from the Roman world by wars and political rivalry between empires. It accepted the Nicene definitions and church foundations at its Council of Seleucia in 410. The city of Seleucia served as a residence for its great metropolitan, or catholicos. Located on the Tigris, 20 miles southwest of present-day Baghdad, capital of Iraq, it was the twin city of the ancient Ctesiphon, capital of the Persian king of kings. The resolutions of 410 were formally approved by the king, and the catholicosate came to be regarded as the center of Christianity in the Persian Empire. This reorganization, which followed the violent persecution of Christians by the Zoroastrians, was welcomed by the Syriac-speaking Christians as a way of survival into the future under Persian kings, whose temper could be softened through political loyalty. To demonstrate the exclusivity of this loyalty, Catholicos Dadisho I (421-456), presiding over the Council of Markabta of the Arabs in 424,<sup>745</sup> determined that a catholicos was "Peter's successor" and the only head of the church to exist without any dependence on the "western fathers." The "West" included Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople, as well as Rome.<sup>746</sup>

These statements of religious self-sufficiency and political loyalty did not prevent King Peroz from executing Catholicos Babowai in 484 on an official charge

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<sup>744</sup> Bolotov V.V. *Leksii po istorii Drevney Tserkvi* [Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church], Vol. III, p. 624-625.

<sup>745</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Araby u granits Vizantii i Irana v IV-VI w.* [The Arabs at the Borders of Byzantium and Iran in the 4th-6th centuries], Moscow-Leningrad, 1964. P. 73.

<sup>746</sup> Labourt J. *Le Christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide (224-632)*. Paris, 1904. P. 119-125.

mentioned only in correspondence with the Byzantine emperor Zeno. The famous Barsauma, Metropolitan of Nisibis, sharply rebuffed any contact with the West and may have been responsible for the death of Babowai. Catholicos Acacius (484-496) convened the Council of Beth Lapat in 484, the Council of Beth Adrai in 485, and the Council of Seleucia in 486, all of which were specifically directed against the position prevailing in the Church of the Byzantine Empire, which lived under the regime of the *Henotikon* that Monophysitism favored at the time. Some of the ordinances of these councils were adopted under the immediate influence of Metropolitan Barsauma, others were rejected by him before his death in 495, for Barsauma considered the ordinances too moderate to express his Nestorian beliefs.

The Council of Seleucia of 486 affirmed the strictly "Antiochian" confession of faith about Christ's union of "two natures in one person, each retaining its own properties without mixture or blending,"<sup>747</sup> and changed the church discipline by prohibiting celibacy to all but monks: bishops, priests, and deacons were required to get married. Priests were allowed to remarry.<sup>748</sup> These measures are likely to have been caused directly by the Persian kings, who, on the one hand, found celibacy unacceptable, but, on the other hand, fought the Zoroastrian sectarians preaching the community of wives. Thus, the Persian Church promulgated the precise laws establishing some middle way at a new council of 497 under Catholicos Babai II (497-503). Each clergyman was expected to have one wife.<sup>749</sup>

Be that as it may, the Persian Church experienced several decades of turmoil partly stemming from the scandalous marital behavior of the clergy, in particular consanguine marriages usually practiced in Zoroastrianism. The order was restored with the election of Catholicos Mar Aba I (540-552) in 540.

Mar Aba, who converted from Zoroastrianism and then studied in Nisibis, was inquisitive and well-educated. He traveled through the Byzantine territories and learned Greek in Edessa, visited the Egyptian monasteries, and later went to Constantinople, where he lived for at least a year and made some friends. The rule of Justin I and the early years of the reign of Justinian I were marked by anti-Monophysite reaction. The Nestorian Persians seem to have been willingly hired for high positions. Mar Aba's travels to Alexandria and Constantinople demonstrate the constant influence of Syrian Christians on the Byzantine world, regardless of their religious affiliation. Upon returning to Persia, he taught in Nisibis for a while before being elected catholicos in 540 and becoming one of the most prominent figures of

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<sup>747</sup> Macomber W.F. The Christology of the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon A.D. 486. *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, XXIV, 1958. P. 142-154.

<sup>748</sup> Synodicon Orientale, p. 301-303.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

the Church of the East. Mar Aba's work restored discipline in the white clergy and regained unity among the bishops disrupted by Barsauma's chaotic activities. He was arrested in 541, when it turned out that he had converted from Zoroastrianism (such conversions were treated as a criminal offense by the Persian authorities), but was saved from execution only due to his extreme popularity among the Christians. Appearing before Shahanshah Khosrow in person, he managed not only to receive forgiveness but also helped to stop the uprising, which involved many Christians. He died in 552, having strengthened the Persian Church considerably.

There is evidence that when Justinian I reinstated the peace treaty with Persia in 561,<sup>750</sup> he achieved conditions that protected the rights of Christians. Hoping to reunite the Nestorian catholicosate and Orthodoxy, he received a delegation of theologians, led by Bishop Paul of Nisibis.<sup>751 752</sup> The negotiations ended in failure. In 585, Catholicos Ishoyahb I (582-595) presided over another council in Seleucia that showed further and final alienation from Byzantium. In response to the Jacobites' activities in Persia, the council published thirty-one canons expressing the final doctrinal position of the Persian Church. It not only affirmed the "Antiochian" Christology, but also directly opposed the condemnation of the Three Chapters in Byzantium by declaring that "no one may defame the Church Teacher (i.e. Theodore of Mopsuestia), whether secretly or publicly, reject his holy writings, or accept other interpretations of the Scriptures..." (Canon 3).<sup>765</sup> The Persian councils of this period do not mention Nestorius personally; by canonizing Theodore, the church defined itself as "Mopsuestian" rather than "Nestorian," and that is undoubtedly a more accurate definition of its basic Christological position in terms of theological content.

After the Fifth Ecumenical Council of 553, which formally condemned Theodore of Mopsuestia, the Persian Church found itself already in direct conflict with Byzantine Orthodoxy.

Despite the isolation and difficult conditions of its survival, the Persian Church was extremely rich in theologians. Theodore of Mopsuestia's exegetical tradition was continued and developed by a plethora of writers. Their commentaries on both the Old and New Testaments are mostly known by their titles alone,<sup>753</sup> but many handwritten gems in the Syriac language still remain undiscovered. The doctrine of the Incarnation, which was at the heart of all Christian divisions of that time, found new theological insight. One of the theologians named Henana, a famous teacher of

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<sup>750</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 147.

<sup>751</sup> Not to be confused with Paul the Persian received in 527. For this episode see Guillaumont A. Justinien et l'église de Perse. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, No. 23-24, 1969-1970. P. 49-50, 62-66.

<sup>752</sup> *Synodicon Orientale*, p. 400.

<sup>753</sup> Duval R. *La littérature syriaque*. Paris, 1907. P. 71-74, etc.; Fischer R.H. *A Tribute to Arthur Voobus*. Chicago, 1977.

the School of Nisibis, appears to have protested against Theodore of Mopsuestia's exclusive authority, preferring the interpretations of St. John Chrysostom. His ideas, obviously closed to the Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, were criticized by the Nestorian theologian Babai the Great (569-628), abbot of Mount Izla near Nisibis, one of the leaders of the significant monasticism revival that followed Mar Aba I's catholicosate. At the council of 612, the church supported the views of Babai, whose Book of Union (that is, the union of Deity and humanity in Christ) became the standard for the profession of Nestorianism in Persia: Christ had not only two natures but also two hypostases.<sup>754</sup>

After Emperor Heraclius' unsuccessful attempts to restore the Christian unity in the East in the wake of his victory over Khosrow II, the Islamic conquests doomed all Christian communities to isolation for centuries.

The Catholicosate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, opposed by the Jacobites and rejected by the Caucasians, retained jurisdiction over the Arab Christian Kingdom of Al-Hirah for some time, which lasted until the latter disappeared after the Muslim conquests. However, the church spread further east. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Nestorians maintained that ardent zeal characterizing the Syriac Christianity from the very beginning. Being the most accessible Christian center for the Christians of India, the catholicosate continued to appoint bishops in India for centuries, where the Eastern Syriac worship and language were preserved until the Portuguese conquest at the end of the 15th century. The Nestorian missionaries converted the Hephthalite Huns on the Oka River (the Amu Darya), and Catholicos Mar Aba consecrated a bishop for them in 549. If the famous "Nestorian Stele" in Xi'an, China is authentic, the inscription on it, dating from 781, documents the activities of the embassy sent to this country by Catholicos Ishoyahb II (628-645).

Such was the ecclesiastical, political, and dogmatic situation in Persia. Caucasian Albania was under its direct political and, consequently, religious influence in the historical period described. During the era following the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I, Christianity in Transcaucasia was affected by various theological systems: Chalcedonism, Monophysitism, Nestorianism, and Jacobitism.

What were the main reasons for the tragic split of Eastern Christianity in the 5th and 6th centuries? Some factors that are usually mentioned by historians have already been discussed above: ethnic and cultural differences, opposition to the Byzantine imperial power, the need to survive under the Persian and later Muslim conquest. All these elements undoubtedly contributed to prolonging the schisms. They have never been cited alone as a formal ground for the division and therefore cannot be viewed separately as sufficient explanations. The fact remains, for example,

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<sup>754</sup> GuiUaumont A.Op. Cit., p. 61.

that while the Persian domination required the Christians to break with the West, not all of them chose the same path: the Nestorians, Jacobites, and Armenians established themselves as separate groups. On the other hand, the socio-cultural factor was not crucial to the Byzantine Empire either because the leadership of all factions throughout this period was actually in the hands of educated Greek-speaking theologians. Hence, it is inevitable that those of them who rejected unity within the Orthodox Church (which was both Chalcedonian and Cyrillic and refused to be bound by one terminological system) did so not because of misunderstanding but under firm conviction adhering to Cyril's "fundamentalism," in the case of Monophysites.

There was almost no external form of church unity other than that provided by the imperial system, as defined by Justinian I. The Monophysites knew this very well and, although suffering from its cruelty, nevertheless constantly tried to turn the imperial system to their advantage. They sometimes succeeded and then willingly used its political authority for themselves. But the Empire was not always cruel. It would be unfair to simply forget the widespread practice of ecumenism (in the modern sense of the word) both by the emperors and by the Chalcedonian Orthodox Church, that is, attempts at terminological compromise, benefits conferred upon opposition leaders, readiness to correct and clarify the previous definitions (up to the condemnation of dead people, as was the case with the Three Chapters), and desire – as under Justin II – to forget the previous anathemas of Monophysite chiefs. Many modern historians, who dislike Cyril's Christology, see in all these episodes the Machiavellian and "Caesaropapist" betrayal of Chalcedon. An effort has been made here to emphasize that this understanding is, generally speaking, incorrect.

## II. 3.2. *Albanian Catholicos Virov*

Thus, the political situation in the 7th century led to the emergence of a new Mihranid princely dynasty in Caucasian Albania.

The Sassanids could not count on local Albanian princes to protect the western borders from potential Byzantine invasions and decided to rely on the new rulers of Gardman, the Mihranids, who were religiously and politically close to Iran. But the Sasanian hopes for the Albanian Mihranids were not fulfilled. The Mihranids remained Persians for no more than two generations, after which they converted to Christianity, formed families with local Albanian nobles, and adopted the Albanian culture and language, i.e. became Albanized.<sup>755</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The



Taking advantage of the Persian-Byzantine wars, the population of Caucasian Albania rebelled against the Sasanian rule in 603 to 604. This uprising was brutally suppressed by Khosrow II. Many Albanian nobles died or were taken prisoner. Only the Albanian catholicos Viroy (596-629) survived, through the intercession of Shahbanu Shirin, wife of Khosrow II. Queen Shi- rin “was able, after much trouble, to save his life as a present from the king.”<sup>756</sup>

One of Khosrow II's wives was the Byzantine princess Maria, the other was a Christian from Khuzestan, probably a Syrian named Shirin, the famous heroine of many works. There is no doubt that Shirin was the most influential of the shahanshah's wives and belonged to the Jakobites.<sup>757</sup> Based on Sebeos' account, “she constructed a monastery and a church close to the royal abode, and settled priests and deacons there allotting from the court stipends and money for clothing.” According to the same historian, “bravely, with her head held high she preached the gospel of the Kingdom, at court, and none of the grandee mages dared open his mouth to say anything – large or small – about Christians.”<sup>758</sup>

The Byzantine historian Theophylact Simocatta quotes the texts of Khosrow II's two letters in Greek, which he sent together with donations to the Basilica of St. Sergius at Rezafa in Syria. One letter from 593 referred to the pregnancy of Shirin, who accompanied the shahanshah during his trip to Byzantium. In this letter, Khosrow wrote this: “To the great martyr Sergius, Chosroes, king of kings. I... have dispatched the gifts ... not for the sight of men, nor so that the greatness of your most holy name may be known from my words, but because the truth about events has been recognized as well as the many favors and benefactions which I had from you ... And since Seirem is a Christian and I a pagan, our law does not grant us freedom to have a Christian wife. So on account of my gratitude to you, for this reason I disregarded the law, and I held and hold from day to day this one among my wives as legitimate.”<sup>759</sup>

Shahbanu Shirin helped build a monastery near the shah's palace in Ct-esiphon around 598. The Albanian catholicos Viroy may have lived in this monastery as well. The Albanian prelate undoubtedly participated in the Council of Ctesiphon, which

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Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 196.

<sup>756</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 14, p. 93.

<sup>757</sup> Zabolotny E.A. *Siriyskoye khristianstvo mezhdu Vizantiyey i Iranom* [Syrian Christianity between Byzantium and Iran]. St. Petersburg, 2020. P. 278.

<sup>758</sup> Sebeos. *History*, Chapter 4, p. 41-42.

<sup>759</sup> Theophylact Simocatta. *The History*, Book 5, Chapter 14, §2-4, p. 151.

took place in 616<sup>760</sup> as evidenced by Stepanos Taronetsi.<sup>761</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi portrays the head of the Albanian Church as follows:

**Viroy, an intelligent and wise man, strong in words of wisdom and with a tongue which was like the pen of a ready writer when relating words of counsel and sensible words to kings and nobles. Moreover, the humility of his manner of speaking was sweet to the ears of the common people and the masses. He would speak at great length, adapting the discourse of wise men and their parables, and he so disposed, ordered, and embellished the parables of his own mouth that they were like pearls set in gold. He was above all a skilled interpreter of the Persian language, acquired during his twenty-five years of imprisonment at Khosrov's court.**<sup>762</sup>

Khosrow II, yielding to his wife's entreaties, agreed to spare Catholicos Viroy, who stayed at the royal court. Still, Khosrow II stipulated that Viroy would not be able to return home for the rest of his days and would be detained at court. According to the historian, Khosrow II "did not withhold from him what was due to him by virtue of his princely throne, nor did he deprive him of the title of catholicos."

While in captivity, the Albanian catholicos Viroy ensured that Khosrow II ordered the Albanian princes of the Mihranid dynasty to be granted the title *Lord of Gardman and Prince of Albania*. This right was obtained under Varaz-Grigor when he became the first prince of all Albania.

Khosrow II "kept him (Viroy — A. N.) like some precious vessel, tending him like a swift steed on the day of the battle, right down to the time of his emigration. Tribulations and misfortunes and merciless torments at the hands of evil foes fell upon Albania, and God sent him as once He sent Moses from Midian, that he might come and deliver his country and wrest it from the hands of the murderous and licentious people."<sup>763</sup>

The shahanshah's favorable attitude towards the Albanian catholicos must be considered in light of the fact that Khosrow, as attested by historians, generally surrounded himself with Christians.<sup>764</sup>

The Christian communities of the Sasanian state included Christians who spoke

<sup>760</sup> Some researchers date the Council of Ctesiphon to 612/613. However, the list of its participants includes Zacharias, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was taken prisoner by the Persians after Jerusalem's capture in 614. The council shall be more accurately dated to 616.

<sup>761</sup> Stepanos Taronetsi. *The Universal History*. Introduction, translation, and commentary by T. Greenwood. Oxford, 2017. Book 2, Chapter 2. P. 160.

<sup>762</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 14, p. 93.

<sup>763</sup> Ibid., p. 93-94.

<sup>764</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Vizantiya i Iran na rubezhe VI-VII vv.* [Byzantium and Iran at the Turn of the 6th-7th centuries], p. 234-249.

Persian, Greek, Syriac, Albanian, and Armenian. These were groups of people that came to Iran as a result of mass deportations that took place during military campaigns. For instance, Shapur I deported a lot of Christians, who had previously lived in Syria and Asia Minor, to the western *satrapies* of the Persian Empire in 260. During Shapur II's reign, a significant part of the Armenian population was displaced to Khuzestan. Following the campaign of 540, Khosrow I ordered 12,000 people to be settled near Ctesiphon. From that time on, the anti-Chalcedonian doctrine began to actively spread in Iran. In 559, Jacob Baradaeus, Metropolitan of Edessa, appointed Ahudemme as the first head of anti-Chalcedonians in Iran and gave him the title *Metropolitan of the East*.<sup>765</sup>

Under Khosrow II, a large number of Christians, mainly anti-Chalcedonians, were removed from the conquered Byzantine territories. The simultaneous support of the Church of the East and the Syro-Jacobite Church sought to maintain a balance between communities that were on the opposing sides of Christological disputes.<sup>766</sup>

Khosrow II, despite his Christian environment, remained a consistent advocate of the Sasanian policy — the policy of separating the Transcaucasian countries from Byzantium. In the opinion of Adontz, for this purpose he convened the famous Persian Council of Christians under his rule from 612 to 614, which “declared Monophysitism to be an official Christian denomination.”<sup>767</sup>

E. A. Zabolotny, an expert in Syriac Christianity, believes that the Council of Ctesiphon was held in 616 and gathered the representatives of all major Christian communities of Persia such as the Nestorians, anti-Chalcedonians, and Orthodox — including Zacharias, Patriarch of Jerusalem, who was taken prisoner by the Persians during the city's capture in 614. Based on the letter from the Armenian catholicos Nerses III (641-661/2) to the Byzantine emperor Constans II Pogonatus (641-668), the text of which has been preserved by Sebeos, Khosrow II, upon learning about the content of Christological disputes, ordered the Nestorians to leave the council and recognized the anti-Chalcedonian doctrine as mandatory for all Christians in Iran. Even Patriarch Zacharias allegedly agreed that this particular teaching was true.<sup>768</sup> In actual fact, the council only announced that the Jacobite Church would be patronized along with the Church of the East, which, however, did not rule out the possibility of

<sup>765</sup> Ahudemme, Bishop of Tikrit, was originally a cleric in the Nestorian Church of the East, but later joined the Monophysites, was ordained bishop, and became the head of the Monophysites in Sasanian Iran, known as the Maphrian of the East. Ahudemme is called the Apostle of the Arabs for his missionary work among the Arabs of Mesopotamia.

<sup>766</sup> Zabolotny E.A. *Siriyskoye khristianstvo mezhdru Vizantiyey i Iranom* [Syrian Christianity between Byzantium and Iran], p. 278.

<sup>767</sup> Adontz N.G. Op. Cit., p. 295.

<sup>768</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 46, p. 114-132.

changing its position.<sup>769</sup>

Thus, according to Movses Kalankatuatsi's account, Catholicos Viroy spent 25 years at the court of Shahanshah Khosrow II. Kasumova shows<sup>770</sup> that the position of Christianity under Khosrow II should be distinguished between its official, legal side, recognizing only *the status quo* and severely punishing people for conversion to Christianity, and its unofficial side, the shah's personal favor towards individual Christians. The general state policy had to contend with the Christian population, mainly consisting of artisans and merchants. Moreover, Christianity could not be ignored as the religion of Iran's own subjects, who had a certain weight in the state.<sup>771</sup>

In 628, Khosrow II suffered a violent death, and his son Kavad II Shiroe (who reigned for only 8 months) was raised to the Persian throne. Ferdowsi considered Kavad to be the son of the Byzantine princess Maria, daughter of Maurice. The Nestorian author of the *Chronicle of Seert* says that the shah professed Christianity and even wore a cross on his body.<sup>772</sup> Kavad II made peace with the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and returned to him the lands captured by Khosrow II. The shah allowed the Persian Nestorians to convene a council and elect a catholicos.<sup>773</sup> Thomas of Marga<sup>774</sup> reports that Kavad II desired and wished "to live in his kingdom in peace, and ... there was rest to all the churches that were under the dominion of the Persians."<sup>775</sup> The Albanian catholicos Viroy was released after 25 years of imprisonment alongside the rebellious Albanian nobles:

**When he had left the palace and arrived at the borders of the land of his birth, he fell down and kissed the doors and the floors of the churches in his diocese everywhere: he shed tears and wept, and on bended knee he watered the earth. Rising to his feet, he took courage and consoled them who were with him, giving thanks to God who had liberated him from the teeth of the lion and had suffered him to see again the roofs of the holy churches. He thought**

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<sup>769</sup> Zabolotny E.A. *Siriyskoye khristianstvo mezhdru Vizantiyey i Iranom* [Syrian Christianity between Byzantium and Iran], p. 279.

<sup>770</sup> Kasumova Sara Yunus Kyzy is a Doctor of Historical Sciences and Leading Researcher in the Department of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences. She specializes in studying the Middle Persian epigraphy and history of medieval Iran.

<sup>771</sup> Kasumova S.Y. *Khristianstvo v Azerbaydzhane v rannem Srednevekovye* [Christianity in Azerbaijan in the Early Middle Ages], p. 87.

<sup>772</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 184.

<sup>773</sup> Thomas of Marga. *The Book of Governors A.D. 840*. Translated and edited by E. A. W. Budge. London, 1893. Vol. II. P. 115.

<sup>774</sup> Thomas of Marga was a Syrian historian of the Arab period (9th century), who wrote the Book of Governors on the history of Syrian monasticism (c. 840).

<sup>775</sup> Thomas of Marga. *The Book of Governors A.D. 840*, Vol. II, p. 124.

**to rest awhile and to indulge his tender love for his homeland after his long exile. Untold grief, labor, and toil awaited him, however, and [the hour when] he would witness approaching doom.<sup>776</sup>**

The Byzantine emperor Heraclius was in Transcaucasia at that time. Based on the Georgian chronicles,<sup>777</sup> Heraclius pursued a policy of persecution of not only Zoroastrians, but also Monophysites in the cities of Mtskheta, Ujarma, and elsewhere. In 628, Heraclius arrived in the Albanian province of Gardman and commanded that the Albanian prince Varaz-Grigor and his people be converted to Orthodoxy in the town of Lai.<sup>778</sup>

The successful Persian campaigns of Heraclius in 623-628, often compared with the magnificent conquests of Alexander the Great, led to his victory over Persia and brought the heretical eastern provinces back to Byzantium. Heraclius wanted to restore ecclesiastical unity to the Byzantine Empire and its subordinate countries at the Caucasus by establishing Orthodoxy.<sup>779</sup>

The Albanian historian is silent about the Chalcedonian decrees being adopted by the Albanian prince Varaz-Grigor, apparently for the following reason: Catholicos Viroy was a convinced Monophysite, therefore Varaz-Grigor's conversion to Orthodoxy should have been very unpleasant to him, whereas the history of these events is believed<sup>780</sup> to have been written by Viroy himself and later used by Movses Kalankatuatsi in his work.

In 628 or 629, the Khazars attacked Transcaucasia again. The Khazar leader Jebu Khakan sent his son Shat to Albania. In order to survive and prevent the devastation of the country, the Albanians were offered to voluntarily surrender to the Khazars. Catholicos Viroy, who was in Partaw, tried to delay the reply to the Khazars. By this time the princes and clergymen had gathered in the fortress of Charaberd (Jraberd), where Catholicos Viroy stayed: "The catholicos summoned before him all the principal sons of the royal family and the nobles of this kingdom, the governors of provinces and the heads of villages, and the priests, deacons, and clerks, and all met

<sup>776</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 14, p. 94.

<sup>777</sup> Takayshvili E.S. *Istochniki gruzinskikh letopisey* [The Sources of Georgian Chronicles], *Sbornik materialov dlya opisaniya mestnostey i piemen Kavkaza* [A Collection of Writings to Describe the Territories and Tribes of the Caucasus], Vol. XXVIII. Tiflis, 1900. P. 128.

<sup>778</sup> Yeremian S.T. *Zametki k textu "Khroniki Sumbata"* [Notes to the Text of Sumbat's Chronicle]. *Izvestiya Arm. filiala AN SSSR* [Proceedings of the Armenian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR], No. 9, Yerevan, 1941. P. 27-28.

<sup>779</sup> Mamedova E.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 201-202.

<sup>780</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Ocherki drevneyshey istorii khazar* [Essays on the Ancient History of the Khazars], p. 59-60.

at the time appointed in the fortress of Charaberd.”<sup>781</sup> After a discussion regarding surrender to the Khazars, it was decided on Viroy’s advice to go to Shat, request that he stop the destruction and looting, and bring valuable gifts to him and his associates. To this end, Viroy bade the tutor of the king’s son Shat come to him, and he asked him “the names of the nobles, princes, barons (*nakharark*), generals, and the chiefs of the various tribes in the entire army in order of precedence, that he might know in what way to honor

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<sup>781</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 14, p. 98.

them with riches.” Surrounded by Albanian nobles who were not afraid to visit the Khazar camp, Viroy went to Shat. The Khazars stayed in Uti, where they encamped in a large plain not far from Partaw. Shat gave an affectionate welcome to old Viroy, accepted the gifts, and, after talking to him, ceased the raids and plundering, handed over the prisoners, but said that his father, Jebu Khakan, had received “these three kingdoms of the Albanians and the Lpink and Cholay as his royal patrimony for ever.”<sup>782</sup>

We learn from this text that the territories of Cholay and Lpink, still part of Albania in the 7th century, seem to have enjoyed some kind of internal independence. This may have been the reason for their desire for Albania. Incidentally, the primate of the Albanian Church was called the “Catholicos of Albania, Cholay, and Lpink”<sup>783</sup> in the 7th century.

Some researchers hold that during the years of 629 to 630, in the last year of Catholicos Viroy’s life, the Albanian prince Varaz-Grigor sided with the Monophysites.<sup>784</sup> Despite apparent evidence of this step on the part of Varaz-Grigor, the historian R.B. Geyushev thinks that “the Mihranids remained loyal to Byzantium in all respects, because they conquered all Albania with the aid of Heraclius and adopted the religion of their suzerain.”<sup>785</sup> Varaz-Grigor probably considered himself an adherent of Monophysit-ism after being baptized by Catholicos Viroy, who was still at the Persian court, but already several years later, in line with Byzantium’s policy towards Monophysites, Varaz-Grigor rooted himself in Orthodoxy.

Given the historical realities of the time, it seems more likely that Emperor Heraclius had the Albanian Church reunited with Eastern Orthodoxy after all, that the Albanian Church remained loyal to it until the early 8th century. All this, however, was unfortunately overshadowed by the beginning of Arab conquests and the spread of Monothelitism.<sup>786</sup>

After the death of Catholicos Viroy, Catholicos Zakaria ascended the throne of Albanian catholicoi (629-644).

The name of Catholicos Zakaria is mentioned by Movses Kalankatuatsi only in connection with his selection for the patriarchal throne. The historian informs that Zakaria, who was a priest in Partaw and led a saint’s life, was chosen for his great acts of mercy during the invasion of Emperor Hera- clius’ troops into Albania (the

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>783</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 242-243.

<sup>784</sup> Svazian G.S. *Agvank v VII-VIII vekakh* [Aghuank in the 7th-8th centuries], p. 19.

<sup>785</sup> Geyushev R. B. *Khristianstvo v Albanii* [Christianity in Albania], p. 77.

<sup>800</sup> Kartashev A.V. *Vselenskiye sobory* [The Ecumenical Councils], p. 403.

'20s of the 7th century): "A certain priest called Zakaria, a holy man, a monk at the church of Partaw and a meek and gentle fellow, took command. He saved many Christians by oaths and various other means, by his prayers and guarantees, which he also made on behalf of the Jews and pagans; his work was afterwards praised by everyone, and he was appointed to a bishopric in the Albanian see."<sup>787</sup>

Catholicos Zakaria was succeeded at the head of the Albanian Church by Catholicoi Yovhan (644-655/668), Ukhtanes (655/668-680), and Eliazar (680-686).

### II.3.3. *The Albanian Christian Mission among the Huns-Khazars*

Dzhafarov, researcher of the Huns' history in the Caucasus, notes that the early Middle Ages brought a variety of mysterious, now extinct tribes and peoples to the front stage of world history. The Huns were one of them.<sup>788</sup>

The Huns were a nomadic people coming from the steppes of Central Asia. They led the first wave of large migration from the East to the West in the late 4th century, which triggered the Great Migration. It was a period of mass movements and formidable conquests that lasted intermittently for more than a millennium, redrawing the entire ethnic map of Eurasia. The theory that the Huns originated from the Xiongnu people mentioned in Chinese sources is accepted by most scholars,<sup>789</sup> but has no real evidence. The Huns are said to have been a tribal group of the Altaic family (Turkic, Mon- golic, Tungusic languages),<sup>790</sup> whose migration, caused by the so-called ethnic shifts, had far-reaching historical consequences.

During the reign of the great Hunnic leader Attila (434-453), the Hun- nic union centered in Pannonia reached its maximum expansion, covering the territory from the Volga and the Caucasus to the Rhine. After Attila's

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<sup>787</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 80.

<sup>788</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. *Gunny i Azerbaydzhan* [The Huns and Azerbaijan], Baku, 1993.

<sup>789</sup> Inostrantsev K.A. *Khunnu i gunny (razbor teory o proiskhozhdenii naroda khunnu kitayskikh letopisey. O proiskhozhdenii evropeyskikh gunnov i o vzaimnykh otnosheniyakh etikh dvukh narodov)* [The Xiongnu and the Huns (Review of Theories on the Origin of the Xiongnu People from Chinese Chronicles. Concerning the Origin of the European Huns and the Mutual Relations between These Two Peoples)], Leningrad, 1926.

<sup>790</sup> Gavritukhin I.O. *Gunny* [The Huns]. *Bolshaya rossiyskaya entsiklopediya* [The Great Russian Encyclopedia], Vol. VIII. Moscow, 2007. P. 160.



death in 453, the Hunnic Empire disintegrated, and the Huns were actually absorbed by new groups of nomads arriving from the East.<sup>791</sup>

It is worth noting that medieval authors refer to various nomadic groups as the “Huns”: the Hephthalites (the White Huns), the Kidarites (the Black Huns), the Chionites (in Central Asia and India), and the Hons (the Caucasian Huns).

In Byzantine and Latin sources,<sup>792</sup> the ethnonym *Huns* became a common designation for nomads and, apart from the Huns themselves, was later applied to other peoples living in the Black Sea region (the Sabirs, Avars, Hungarians, etc.).

The ethnicity of the Huns is still a matter of debate. Some researchers consider them to be Mongols,<sup>793</sup> while others suggest that the Huns could have been Turks or proto-Turks.<sup>794</sup>

According to K.A. Inostrantsev’s opinion, supported here by L.N. Gumilev, “the Xiongnu people who moved from place to place north of China ... was formed from the expanded Turkic family. A significant part of the subordinate tribes also consisted of Turks, although ... the state included other tribes: Mongolic, Tungusic, Korean, and Tibetan. In northwest Asia and Eastern Europe, the Xiongnu Turks, or Huns, encountered other tribes... the further the Huns went, the more the Turkish element thinned out among them.”<sup>795</sup> Nevertheless, the Hunnic language remains unknown and is estimated to have belonged to an ancient stratum of Turkic languages. Modern researchers are certain only that the Huns were of Mongoloid race, had a nomadic lifestyle, and inhabited the areas close to Central Asia.<sup>796</sup>

<sup>791</sup> Thompson E.A. *A History of Attila and the Huns*. Oxford, 1948.

<sup>792</sup> The Huns are mentioned by Dionysius Periegetes (Dionysius Periegetes. *Orbis Descriptio. Geographi graeci minores*. Edited by K. Müller. Paris, 1861), Claudius Ptolemy (Claudius Ptolemy. *The Geography*, Book III, Chapter V, p. 80), Ammianus Marcellinus (Ammianus Marcellinus. *The Roman History*. Translated by C.D. Yonge. London-New York, 1894), Priscus of Panium (Priscus. *The Fragmentary History of Priscus: Attila, the Huns and the Roman Empire, AD 430-476*. Translated with an introduction by J. Given. Merchantville, 2014), Jordanes (Jordanes. *The Gothic History*. Translated by C. Mierow. Princeton-London, 1915), and others.

<sup>793</sup> Howorth H.H. *History of the Mongols: from the 9th to the 19th Century*. London, 1880; Guignes J. *Histoire générale des Huns, des Turcs, des Mongols et des autres Tartares occidentaux, avant et depuis Jésus-Christ jusqu’à présent*. Paris, 1756-1758; Bichurin N.Y. *Sobraniye svedeny o narodakh, obitavshikh v Sredney Azii v drevniye vremena* [A Collection of Information about Peoples Who Lived in Central Asia in Ancient Times]. Moscow-Leningrad, 1950; Shabalov A.S. *Proiskhozhdeniye uyгурov, oyratov (kalmykov) i drugih teleskikh piemen XVIII v. do n. e. — XIV v. n. e.* [The Origin of the Uyghurs, Oirats (Kalmyks), and Other Tiele Tribes of the 18th Century BCE — 14th Century CE]. Irkutsk, 2014.

<sup>794</sup> Heather Peter. The Huns and the End of Roman Empire in Western Europe. *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 110, No. 435. Oxford, 1995.

<sup>795</sup> Gumilev L.N. Nekotorye voprosy istorii gunnov [Some Issues of the History of the Huns], *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], No. 4 (74). Moscow, 1960.

<sup>796</sup> Gavritukhin I.O. Gunny [The Huns]. *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclo-

The tribes of the Hunnic circle strengthened their positions in the Caspian region in the 2nd-4th centuries. The Huns advanced from the East in the last third of the 4th century and conquered the Iranian-speaking Alans, who lived in the territory from the North Caucasus to the Don steppes.<sup>797</sup>

After Attila's death in 453, the Huns began to be assimilated into other peoples, who continued to arrive from the East without interruption. The next wave of the Great Migration brought the Onoghur and Sabir tribes to the North Caucasus at the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries.<sup>798</sup>

In the early 6th century, there was a political entity on the northwestern coast of the Caspian Sea, called the "Kingdom of the Huns" by local sources.<sup>799</sup> Most researchers believe one of the Sabir tribes to have gone under that name.<sup>800</sup> Another view has it that this was a union of local Caucasian origin.<sup>801</sup> Its capital lay in the city of Varachan, but most of the population maintained a nomadic lifestyle. In the second half of the 7th century, the ruler of the Hunnic Kingdom bore the Turkic title *elteber* and recognized himself as a vassal of the Khazars, although he did have a great deal of independence, conducting military campaigns in Transcaucasia.

Almost the entire 6th century was marked by long wars between Iran and the Byzantine Empire for global domination, involving too the tribes of the North Caucasian. Procopius of Caesarea noted that the Sabirs and other Hunnic tribes lived near the Derbent and Darial passes in the plains, which were strategically important for Transcaucasia.<sup>802</sup> The Caspian Huns had to take an active part in the wars of their neighbors, acting as mercenaries in the armies of the great powers of the time.<sup>803</sup>

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pedia], Vol. XIII. Moscow, 2006. P. 457-459.

<sup>797</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus. *The Roman History*, Book XXXI, Chapter III, § 1, p. 583.

<sup>798</sup> Dzhamalov Y.R. *Gunny i Azerbaydzhan* [The Huns and Azerbaijan], p. 38, 64.

<sup>799</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 26, p. 122- 123; Sebeos. *History*, Chapter 2, p. 13.

<sup>800</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars]. Moscow, 2001. P. 256; Gmyr-L.B. "Tsarstvo gunnov" (savi) v Dagestane (IV-VII vv.) [The Kingdom of the Huns (Sabirs) in Dagestan (4th-7th centuries)]. Moscow, 1980. P. 8-12.

<sup>801</sup> Gadlo A.V. *Etnicheskaya istoriya Severnogo Kavkaza TV-X v.* [The Ethnic History of the North Caucasus in the 4th-10th centuries]. Leningrad, 1979. P. 152; Trever K.V. *Ocherki istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 193.

<sup>802</sup> Procopius. *History of the Wars*, Book I, Chapter X, p. 79.

<sup>803</sup> In 521, the Byzantine emperor Justin I tried to use the Sabir leader Zilgibis against the Sassanids. But the Sabirs, in violation of the treaty, began to plunder the Byzantine possessions and were themselves defeated by the combined army of Byzantium and the Sassanids. In 527, the Sabirs located near the Iranian border were ruled by Boarex, widow of the chieftain Balaq. She made an alliance with Byzantium. Two other tribal leaders agreed to serve Iran. During the clash, one of the leaders, Glom, was killed, the other one, Styra, was captured and sent to Constantinople as booty. The Sabirs helped the Byzantines seize Lazica in 551. During the campaign of 554-555,

As a result, the authority of the Caspian Huns was undermined by numerous wars and internecine conflicts, as well as the expansion of the Arabs.

We learn from Movses Kalankatuatsi's reports that Prince Juansher (642-680) was the ruler of Caucasian Albania in the mid-7th century. At first, he participated in Iran's struggle with the Caliphate, but, convinced that there was no hope for the Sassanids, returned to his homeland and destroyed the Persian garrison in the city of Partaw, making his country independent for a short period. Yet, the Arabs soon appeared in Transcaucasia; the Albanian princes, like the Armenian *nakhharars*, had to accept the authority of their conquerors, but not for long. In 656, Caliph Uthman was killed, sparking feuds and a struggle for power in the Caliphate, which radically undermined the Arab position in the region. The Transcaucasian feudal lords sided with Byzantium again. Following them, the Albanian prince Juansher recognized the Byzantine emperor Constans II (641-668) as his suzerain, for which he was proclaimed the ruler of all Albania by Byzantium.<sup>804</sup> In this political context, the Albanian author Movses Kalankatuatsi describes the first appearance of the Huns in the Caucasus.

Artamonov, a specialist in Khazar history, associates their emergence in Transcaucasia with an unstable political situation.<sup>805</sup> Around 662, the Huns invaded Caucasian Albania through the Derbent Pass, but were repelled by Juansher.<sup>806</sup> This raid seems to have had no purpose beyond "plunder and pillage." In 664, the attack was repeated, but already on a larger scale. According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, "the king of the Huns invaded with many thousands of horsemen." The Huns crossed the Kura River to the banks of the Aras, captured many prisoners and many cattle that had come to the Mughan steppe for winter pastures. The "king of the Huns" was not content with his loot, seeking an agreement with the Albanian prince and offering to see him for negotiations. They met, and the negotiations ended in peace and the Albanian prince's marriage to the daughter of the "king of the Huns." The new relative returned to Juansher 120,000 head of cattle, 7,000 horses, and no less than 1,200 prisoners taken in Albania.<sup>807</sup> It was no longer a simple raid, but a war meant to place Albania in a certain position of dependence on the Huns.

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the Sabirs, led by "their most illustrious people" Balmaq, Kutilzis, and Iliger, took an active part in the war on Byzantium's side and destroyed a strong force of the warlike Dilimnites, allies of the Persians.

<sup>804</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 22, p. 118 – 120.

<sup>805</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], Leningrad, 1962. P. 181.

<sup>806</sup> It was not the first raid of the Huns on the South Caucasus countries. The previous ones took place prior to 442 (418/9), as well as in 451, 460-462, 466, 503 and were mentioned in the stories of Elishe, Movses Kalankatuatsi, and Priscus of Panium.

<sup>807</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 26, p. 123.

It should be noted that the Armenian and Arab sources do not identify the Huns with the Khazars. The Armenian writers place the country of the Huns north of Derbent: "North of it is the kingdom of the Huns near the sea," the *Armenian Geography* says. "And west of it, by the Caucasus, is the city of the Huns [called] Varajan and also Chungars<sup>808</sup> and Semendr."<sup>809</sup> Al-Mas"udi, an Arab writer from the first half of the 10th century, calls this country the Kingdom of Jidan, i.e. also of the Huns. According to him, it is the most powerful of all kingdoms in this region, namely in the East Caucasus. The people of Bab al-Abwab (Derbent) suffer, as he puts it, injury from its proximity. He refers to the capital of this kingdom as Semender, which was inhabited by the Khazars in his time (he wrote in 944) and had been the capital for the Khazars themselves.<sup>810</sup> Since Varachan is known to be the capital of the Hunnic Kingdom in the 7th-century Armenian sources, al-Mas"udi's information can be arguably ascribed to a later period, when the center of this kingdom moved to Semender, probably after the Khazars had transferred their capital from this city to the lower reaches of the Volga.

According to another Arab writer, Ibn Khordadbeh<sup>811</sup> (9th century), the kingdom located north of Derbent was called Sur, Sabir, or Subar.<sup>812</sup> Judging by the name, it belonged to a group of Bulgar tribes, formerly known as the Sabirs. The Byzantine and Caucasian sources usually refer to the Sabirs as Huns. Therefore, it seems natural to assume that the "kingdom of the Huns," recounted by the Caucasian and Arab writers, is the same as the kingdom of the Sabirs recounted by Ibn Khordadbeh. M.I. Artamonov finds it undeniable that the Sabirs (Subars) and Barsils (Bersula) were part of the Bulgar tribes.<sup>813</sup>

Although the Khazars were closely related to the Bulgars, they were a special tribe that differed from the Sabirs and Barsils. During the period under review, the North Caucasian Huns, like many other divisions of the Bulgars, were politically dependent on the Khazars. Movses Kalankatuatsi calls Alp-Ilituer (Alp-Elteber),<sup>814</sup>

<sup>808</sup> The name of this city does not appear elsewhere and is not identified with any other famous city north of Derbent.

<sup>809</sup> Ananias of Shirak. *The Geography*, Chapter V, §18, p. 57.

<sup>810</sup> Karaulov N.A. Svedeniya arabskikh pisateley o Kavkaze, Armenii i Azerbaydzhan [The Information of Arab Writers on the Caucasus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan], *Sbomik materi- alov dlya opisaniya mestnostey i piemen Kavkaza* [A Collection of Writings to Describe the Territories and Tribes of the Caucasus], No. 29. Tiflis, 1901. Section XXXVIII, p. 43,51.

<sup>811</sup> Abu-l-Qasim Ubaydallah ibn Khordadbeh (c. 820-912/913) was a Muslim geographer of Iranian origin. His *Kitab al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik* ("Book of Roads and Kingdoms") is the first extant example of descriptive Arab geography.

<sup>812</sup> Karaulov N.A. Op. Cit., Section XXXII, p. 17.

<sup>813</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 184.

<sup>814</sup> The name of this Hunnic prince may have the following meaning: *alp* (Turkic) is a hero, *elteber* (Turkic-Iranian) is a military title.

the great prince of the Huns, a vassal of the Khazar *khagan*, who is otherwise referred to in this source as the “king of the north” or the “king of Turkestan.”<sup>815</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that the difference in the names of both the king of the Huns and the Khazar *khagan* is very unclear here. The king of the Huns is simultaneously called the king of Turkestan and even the *khagan*, while the Khazar khagan is called the king of the Huns.<sup>816</sup> Nevertheless, it is quite certain that there was a special, albeit Khazar-dependent, principality in the northwestern Caspian region in the 7th century. However, the degree of dependence of the Hunnic prince on the Khazars appears to have been small at that time: he went to war with the Khazars, probably had some other obligations, but at the same time made campaigns, concluded treaties, and entered into alliances with neighboring rulers on his own, which, for example, happened in Alp-Ilituer’s relations with the princes of Caucasian Albania. As we will see below, the Hunnic prince could even change his religion at will.

In the late “60s of the 7th century, Caliph Muawiyah I (661-680) began the carnage against the feudal lords of Transcaucasia because they betrayed the Caliphate and defected to Byzantium. The Albanian prince Juansher, according to Movses Kalankatuatsi, traveled twice to Damascus to see the caliph, for “he had a premonition that the multitude from the south might capture his land and trample it underfoot, and although he was able to summon the numberless forces of Turkestanis to his aid, he therefore undertook to submit to the yoke of vassalage of the king of the south.”<sup>817</sup> It is likely that

Juansher did not think he could resist the Arabs even with the help of the Khazars.

The nature of the relations between Alp-Ilituer and the Albanian princes on the one hand, and between the Huns and the Khazars on the other hand, is somewhat revealed by the events that followed Juansher’s death. In 680, he was killed by the conspirators. His nephew Varaz-Trdat (680-705) became the head of Albania. Immediately afterwards, “the general and great prince of the Huns, Alp Ilituer, assembled great numbers of his soldiers ... and as if to avenge the brave Juansher, he invaded Albania.”<sup>818</sup> Varaz-Trdat sent him Catholicos Eliazar as a messenger with assurances that he had no part in the murder of his uncle, offering submission and alliance. Eliazar managed to incline the *khagan* toward peace and friendship with the prince of Albania, most probably by acknowledging the previous commitments to the Huns made by Juansher.<sup>819</sup>

Under Caliphs Yazid I, Muawiyah II, and Marwan I, whose rule lasted from 680

<sup>815</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 26, p. 123.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapters 26,36, 39, p. 122-123,150,155.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 27, p. 125.

<sup>818</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 36, p. 150.

<sup>819</sup> Ibid.

to 685, the Caliphate was riven by civil strife again. Taking advantage of this, Armenia, Kartli, and Albania separated from the Arabs and ceased to pay taxes and tribute to the Caliphate.<sup>820</sup> Nevertheless, the “annual” raids of the Huns continued to pose a problem for the Albanians. In order to establish the friendly ties with them and, if necessary, consolidate them by marriage between the rulers’ families in both countries, Varaz-Trdat sent a new embassy headed by Bishop Israyel to Alp-Ilituer, the prince of the Huns.

Varaz-Trdat conferred with the Albanian princes and Catholicos Eliazar and said this: “The tribute imposed upon us by the cruel people of Arabia (*Tachkastan*) dangerously embarrasses us, while the annual invasions of our country by the forces of the Huns are also terrible calamities for us, for our country is plundered and weakened from both sides by enemy attacks.”<sup>821</sup> They decided to send an embassy to the Huns under the leadership of St. Israyel, who had been recently ordained bishop of Mec Kueank (Mec Kolmank).

The embassy set out on Mehekan 18, 130 A<sup>822</sup> (December 23, 681). Movses Kalankatuatsi describes the difficult journey of the embassy in each detail. They arrived in the “magnificent city of Varachan” in six weeks and were received with honors by the “great prince of the Huns”:

**They came to the magnificent town of Varachan<sup>823</sup> at the beginning of the forty-day fast. When the great prince of the Huns learned of his arrival he went out to greet him, received him with great joy and humbled himself before him, honoring him and paying great respect to his patriarchal holiness. When the days of Lent dawned in splendor, the townspeople received him with a great show of friendship, and they were gladdened and honored by all, especially by the solicitous prince and the worthy nobles. When the bishop observed the magnificence of this reception and their holy**

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<sup>820</sup> Ghewond *History*, Chapter 4, p. 6.

<sup>821</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 39, p. 153.

<sup>822</sup> A new church calendar was first discussed at the Council of Dvin in 554, but became officially adopted only in 584. The Armenian church year can be converted to the Gregorian one (the modern year of the Common Era) by adding 551 to the former.

<sup>823</sup> Varachan was an early medieval city on the territory of Dagestan mentioned in ancient chronicles. It was considered the capital of the kingdom of the Huns (Sabirs). Its location is controversial among historians. Some believe it to be Buynaksk (S.T. Yeremian), others place it at the Urtsaki settlement near the village of Ullubia in the Dakhadayevsky District of Dagestan. Varachan is described to have been founded in the 5th century and situated on a hill 15 km from the Caspian Sea. The city was a fortress and transit point on the trade route (Kotovich V.G. *O mestopolozhении rannesrednevekovykh gorodov Varachana, Belendzhera i Targu* [On the Location of the Early Medieval Cities of Varachan, Balanjar, and Targu]. *Drevnosti Dagestana* [The Antiquities of Dagestan], Makhachkala, 1974).

and friendly welcome he was extremely pleased and gave thanks for the ineffable gifts of Christ. Reposing thus for many days from his weary labors, he heard and saw the presumption and self-indulgent religion of the wretched tribe, and he lamented and sorrowed for the enormous wickedness and doubtful faith of these men who called themselves worshippers of God, for they had rejected His power and invented another.<sup>824</sup>

This message concerns the route by which Prince Varaz-Trdat's embassy, headed by Bishop Israyel, moved to the Khazar *khagan* Alp-Ilituer in 681/682 — a message that has been interpreted differently by different researchers. Let us quote a passage of interest to us:

...and they were sent on their way on the eighteenth day of the month of Mehe-kan. Safely escorted out of the town of Peroz-Kawat, they crossed the river Kur, crossed the Albanian frontier, and arrived at the town of the Lpink on the twelfth day. All the inhabitants of this town came forth to meet him and joyfully received him in a manner befitting a bishop, especially since the divine Feast of Epiphany drew nigh. Entering the town and lodging there they celebrated the feast, and departing again, they passed into the country of the Chilbk at the foot of the great mountain. Then the northern blasts of the winter winds raised terrible snowstorms near the summit of Mount Caucasus, and held back for three days, they could not look up or find their way, and utterly fatigued, they were filled with fear..then he led them up the mountain called Vard-e Gruak, and thanks to the power of the holy cross and the prayers of the great bishop the winds died down and their fury abated, and thus they fearlessly crossed the huge and gigantic summit. After this neither sun nor stars shone for many days and the bad weather continued. Reluctantly they continued their journey abroad, until, forlorn and exhausted, they arrived after many days at the site of the ancient royal residence where St. Grigoris, the catholicos of Albania and grandson of the great Gregory, was martyred.

After some days they reached the gate of Cholay near Darband, and there they received aid and homage from the townspeople. They continued their long journey and came to the magnificent town of Varachan at the beginning of the forty-day fast.<sup>825</sup>

<sup>824</sup> Moyses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 39, p. 155.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154-155.

Analyzing the embassy's trip, Yeremian finds that it followed the route: Partaw – Belakh – Mingachevir Crossing – (Agdash – Kapalak – Khachmaz) – Shaki – Qakh – Zaqatala – Lagodekhi – Kvareli – Na- pareuli – Kodori Gorge – Khazar cities.<sup>826</sup> He thinks that “the details of this journey are at odds with direction through Derbent. The distance it took them to travel for the time specified in the text should have been much longer, with the geographical environment being different: if this is the case, we have a contradiction in the text itself. The references to “the site of the ancient royal residence where St. Grigoris, the catholicos of Albania and grandson of the great Gregory, was martyred” and “Darband” are mechanically attached to the main text to mention and show one of the main shrines of the Albanian Church. In order for the informed reader not to be perplexed and to better disguise the artificiality, he explains this absurdity by saying that “reluctantly they continued their journey abroad, until, forlorn and exhausted, they arrived after many days at the site of the ancient royal residence where St. Grigoris, the catholicos of Albania and grandson of the great Gregory, was martyred.”<sup>827</sup> Yeremian's basic arguments are the length of the journey and the natural climatic conditions. From his perspective, the embassy should have covered at least 250 km in 12 days to reach the Lpink city, which would have made it possible to cross the Caucasian Ridge only through the Kodori Gorge. As for the path traveled from the Lpink city to Varachan in 40 days, the author considers this unlikely, since even in winter conditions it would not have taken so much time to go along the Caspian coast considering its warm climate.<sup>828</sup> Further, the author tries to substantiate his theory by providing topographic and other materials.<sup>829</sup>

B.A. Arutyunian does not agree with Yeremian's point of view. He deems it

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<sup>826</sup> Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuysky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarскому khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], p. 137-139.

<sup>827</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 39, p. 154- 155.

<sup>828</sup> Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuysky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarскому khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], p. 137-139.

<sup>829</sup> In 1586, the ambassadors of the Kingdom of Kakheti said in Moscow that the distance from the banks of the Terek to Kakheti could be traversed through the Kodori Gorge in 15 days (Polyevktov M. A. *Ekonomicheskoye i politicheskoye razvedki Moskovskogo gosudarstva XVII v. na Kavkaze* [The Economic and Political Intelligence of the Moscow State at the Caucasus in the 17th Century], Tiflis, 1932. P. 31). If this path could have been completed in 15 days under favorable circumstances, then, as S.T. Yeremian writes, it would have taken a much longer period in winter conditions (Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuysky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarскому khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], p. 147-148).



incorrect to draw such far-reaching conclusions based on the number of days.<sup>830</sup> First, it is not implausible that the embassy moved slowly and with frequent halts due to the advanced age of Bishop Israyel. Second, it is likely that the number of days was the figment of the historian's own imagination, for the figures he gives — 12 days, 3 days, and 40 days — are rather symbolic. But even assuming all this information is true, a whole series of facts rule out the possibility of the embassy having passed the Kodori Gorge. The areas in the upper reaches of the Alazani and the Andi Koysu were not part of Caucasian Albania.

It seems more believable that Bishop Israyel moved in the following direction: Barda — Mingachevir Crossing (Yevlakh) — Agdash — Goychay — Shemakha — Maraza — Khizi — Shabran — Quba — Samur — Derbent — the coastal region of the Caspian Sea — Varachan (Buynaksk).

After a difficult journey the embassy reached the capital of the Huns, the “magnificent” city of Varachan, in February 682 (62 AH).<sup>831</sup> Researchers locate it on the site of present-day Buynaksk,<sup>832</sup> which seems quite plausible. There are still significant cultural deposits of the medieval period in some places of the city, which may be related to the ancient Varachan. Based on Movses Kalankatuatsi's account, Bishop Israyel, who headed the embassy, managed to persuade the prince of the Huns not only to make peace with Caucasian Albania, but also to accept Christianity. Inspired by his sermon, Alp-Ilituer decided to follow the example of neighboring countries that had adopted this religion — foremost, the example of the “great kingdom of the Romans” (Byzantium).<sup>833 834</sup> This report is indisputable, because close proximity to Albania, which that had been Christian for a long time (since the 4th century), undoubtedly led to the spread of Christianity among the Huns, as explicitly stated in Alp-Ilituer's letter to the Armenian catholicos Sahak III Dzoraporetsi (677-

<sup>830</sup> Arutyunian B.A. K voprosu o lokalizatsii strany Lpink [On the Location of the Lpink Country]. *K osveshcheniyu problem istorii i kultury Kavkazskoy Albanii i vostochnykh provintsy Armenii* [Revisiting the Issues of History and Culture of Caucasian Albania and Eastern Provinces of Armenia]. Yerevan, 1991. P. 118-119.

<sup>831</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi dates the embassy to the 62nd year “of the southern kingdom of... Muhammad,” i.e. of the Hijrah. This year covers the period from September 20, 681 to September 9, 682. Since the month of the embassy's departure is known, it should be attributed to 682 (Minorsky V.F. A New Book on the Khazars. *Orients*, No. 11. Leiden, 1958. P. 126).

<sup>832</sup> Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuatsky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarскому khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], p. 134. The embassy's route went through the Main Caucasian Range along the passage connecting the Alazani and Koysu sources. According to V.F. Minorsky, Varachan was located near the modern village of Bash- li, formerly Barshli (Minorsky V.F. A New Book on the Khazars, p. 126).

<sup>833</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 42, p. 167.

<sup>834</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 2, Chapter 44, p. 169.

703), cited in the *History of Albania*.<sup>TM</sup> Christianity began to penetrate the north of Derbent as early as the 6th century. The barbarian prince obviously sought to consolidate his ties with neighboring states and his place among them as equal.

There is very little information in the sources on the history of Khazaria in the 7th century. All the more important are Movses Kalankatuatsi's rather detailed insights about the Huns, who were ethnically related not only to the Khazars, but also to other Bulgar tribes belonging to Khazaria.

The Hunnic religion is most extensively discussed in the narrative about the mission of the Albanian bishop Israyel. Their supreme deity appears to have been Tangri Khan, whom they represented as a giant hero; the Persians called him Aspandiat.<sup>835</sup> The name of this deity corresponded to Tengri, god of heaven, known even among the Huns and Turkic peoples; it was clearly brought to the North Caucasus by some newcomers from Asia. The Huns revered Kuar, god of thunder, and, if a person or thing was struck by the lightning, propitiated him with sacrifices. They also deified the sun, moon, fire, water, etc., and honored the gods of roads. Tree worship was widespread as well. One tall oak, located near Varachan, was especially venerated. The prince and nobles, according to Movses Kalankatuatsi, held it "to be the savior and life-giver and bestower of all good things."<sup>836</sup> The concept of Tangri Khan, who was said to control the forces of nature, was associated with trees.<sup>837</sup> Horses were sacrificed to the honored deities and trees, their blood poured around the trees and their heads and skins thrown over the branches.<sup>838</sup> The sacred trees were protected. The Huns believed that even those who unknowingly took twigs or branches from the tree would face terrible torments, rabies, and even death. Apart from worshipping the sacred trees and groves, the Huns also built fanes and idols.<sup>839</sup>

Of particular interest in this account of events from 681 to 682 is specific information about the Hunnic-Sabir religious beliefs and cults: "Let the graves of the thunder-*chopayk* [which are called] *Darkunand* ... be burned on this great day by those chief priests who profess that faith."<sup>840</sup> This passage is explained by the researcher M.D. Karaketov.<sup>841</sup> He argues that the story described by the medieval Albanian author allows for some parallels to be drawn between the Hunnic tradition

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<sup>835</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 40, p. 156.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 41, p. 161.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 40, p. 155-156.

<sup>838</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 41, p. 161.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 40, p. 158-159.

<sup>840</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *History of the Aghuans*, Book 2, Chapter 41, p. 112.

<sup>841</sup> Karaketov M.D. O gunnskom Chopa-Darkunande iz opisaniya albanskogo episkopa VII v. [On the Hunnic Chopa-Darkunand from the 7th Century Description of the Albanian Bishop]. *Albania Caucasica*, No. I. Moscow, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2015. P. 260-267.

and the religious life of modern peoples, meaning primarily the Turkic-speaking ones who inhabit the historical “country of the Huns.” A significant time gap between the information of the *History of Albania’s* author and the first details of Chopa among the Kara-chays, Balkars, and other peoples of the North Caucasus, recorded in later sources, does not preclude us, however, from making a preliminary conclusion that it is the most conservative worldview and ritual-ceremonial system linked to thunder and lightning.

The location of the sanctuary and the phonetic, semantic similarity of the deity name correspond to the Karachay name of the deity Choppa, god of thunder and lightning, and the Hunnic or Hunnic-Sabir “thunder-chopayk.” The Karachays, like the Huns-Sabirs before them, named a natural fence of shrubs for the sacrificial animal or a grove using one word, *Durku*, which is to a certain extent consonant with *Darku+nand* named in the source. It is most likely that this word sounded the same both for the Huns and for the modern-day Karachay Turks.

The Georgian prince Vakhushti<sup>842</sup> also documented information on the cult of the deity Choppa celebrated by the peoples of the North Caucasus in 1745. The Karachays, or Ovsians, as they were traditionally called in Georgia (according to N. Marr), “honored the deity Choppa, so that he would deliver them from hail and give the harvest of the land, by slaughtering a goat, eating the meat, stretching the skin over a tall tree, and worshipping this hide.”<sup>843</sup> It should be noted that the Svans refer to the Karachays as Saviars, which word resembles the ethnonym *Sabir*. There is evidence of the Choppa cult being practiced not only by the Karachays, but also by other peoples of the North Caucasus such as the Kabardians, Balkars, Ossetians, and Abkhazians,<sup>844</sup> which is due to the Khazar role in their ethnogenesis.

The sources attest that the rituals performed by the Huns included wrestling and sword fighting, in which they engaged naked (man against man or troop against troop), in addition to horse racing, games, dances, and orgies. All this was accompanied by the beating of drums. Most of these ceremonial acts seem to have been related to funerals. In this respect, there was also a custom of self-inflicting wounds and other injuries to mourn the dead. The Huns wore the gold and silver images of fantastic animals (dragons) as protective amulets. They had heathen

<sup>842</sup> Vakhushti Bagrationi (1695-1758) was a Georgian prince, historian, and geographer. He was born as a royal bastard of Vakhtang VI, but enjoyed the full rights of a dynasty member. He lived in Moscow from 1724.

<sup>843</sup> Vakhushti, prince. *Geografiya Gruzii* [The Geography of Georgia]. *Zapiski Kavkazskogo ot- dela Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* [Proceedings of the Caucasian Department of the Russian Geographical Society], Tiflis, 1904. P. 141.

<sup>844</sup> Shilling E.M. Cherkesy [The Circassians]. *Religioznye verovaniya narodov SSSR* [The Religious Beliefs of the Peoples of the USSR], Vol. II. Moscow-Leningrad, 1927. P. 48.

priests, wizards, magicians, and sorcerers, as well as special worshippers of temples and trees. The wizards uttered spells to summon the forces of the earth.<sup>845</sup>

The details presented by Movses Kalankatuatsi show the Hunnic religion in the usual forms of a barbaric society and reveal many similarities to the cultic customs which have survived in the Caucasus. The same common forms seem to have been characteristic of the religion of the Turks, Khazars, and Bulgar tribes as far as we know from fragmentary written evidence.<sup>846</sup>

Alp-Ilituer and his nobles converted to Christianity and began to eradicate paganism. They permitted Bishop Israyel and his clergymen to demolish temples, cut down sacred groves, and deal with the ministers of the old religion — heathen priests and magicians — who were burned at the stakes by the roads. New objects of worship were erected instead of the old ones: the sacred tree was transformed into a huge cross “with painted ornaments” and “shining crosses,” which was to be worshipped instead of the sacred oak by recent converts.<sup>847</sup>

Then Alp-Ilituer informed the princes and bishops of Albania and Armenia that he had joined the family of Christian sovereigns and asked for a diocese to be established in his country and Bishop Israyel to be appointed the head of the Hunnic Church. The *History of Albania* provides the copies of letters exchanged between Alp-Ilituer and the Armenian catholicos Sahak III in this regard.

The Albanian historian reports that when it was time for Bishop Israyel to return to Albania, Alp-Ilituer conferred with his associates and sent him a request from the dignitaries of his country and all the people that the prelate stay in their kingdom. Bishop Israyel gave the following answer to this proposal: “I am not empowered to act independently of the great patriarch of Albania, the holy Eliazar; he has authority in this matter. I have a well-regulated diocese; how could I desert the flock which God has given me to tend? But may Christ the Lord take care of you, prosper you, and bless you, and give you on account of your faith a shepherd to watch over you with the gospel of Christ.” The messengers came a second and a third

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<sup>845</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 41, p. 160- 166.

<sup>846</sup> Theophylact Simocatta describes the religion of the Turks as follows: “Now the Turks honor fire to a quite extraordinary degree, they revere air and water, and they praise the earth; but they only worship and call god him who made the heaven and the earth. To him they sacrifice horses, cattle, and sheep, and they have priests who, in their opinion, even expound the prophecy of the future.” (Theophylact Simocatta. *The History*, p. 191). Trees were venerated in Fulla (Crimea), as referred to in the *Pannonian Legend*, and at the mouth of the Dnieper, as mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (Constantine Porphyrogenitus. *De Admin- istrando Imperio*. Greek text edited by G. Moravcsik, English translation by R.J. H. Jenkins. Washington, D. C., 1967. P. 61); there is also a lot of information here that the Slavs had sacred trees and groves.

<sup>861</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 41, p. 164.

time and said the same thing, and the bishop said:

**Leave me now until God suffers me to return to my country and to my pious son Varaz-Trdat, prince of Albania, and the holy catholicos. If it please God and them, God shall do as you ask; (who [should refuse] the honor which you promise? If I am tortured by you with cruel and mortal torments, however, I shall consider this a glory and honor for myself and shall rejoice in the Lord). You must inform the whole land of Albania of your decision in writing, and also the patriarch, [now] Eliazar, who from the time of St. Elishe till now has alone been granted the apostolic see of the north-east by the city of Jerusalem where God dwelt and which was consecrated by St. James, the brother of the Lord. Without the consent of all the fathers and brothers and my fellow bishops, how can I do what you ask? The question is a new one, and consultation is essential.<sup>848</sup>**

Hearing these words from Bishop Israyel, they fulfilled his wish and honorably released him to his native country.

The Hunnic prince Alp-Ilituer sent letters to Varaz-Trdat, the Albanian catholicos Eliazar, and the Armenian catholicos Sahak, indicating that “our inviolable friendship with you may be confirmed”<sup>849</sup> and “through ... our sharing the one faith attacks from barbarous tribes may be averted”<sup>850</sup> only if Bishop Israyel stayed with the Khazars and headed the local Church.

In his reply to the Khazar *khagan*, the Armenian catholicos Sahak, in particular, wrote: “It is difficult and painful for us to refuse your request. The fact is, however, that he is not appointed by our see, but by the house of Albania. Our wish and inclination are that he should always be with you, but an instruction to this effect is the prerogative of our patriarchal colleague Eliazar, patriarch of Albania, and it is for him to decide.”<sup>851</sup>

Varaz-Trdat and the Albanian catholicos Eliazar also supposed that if Bishop Israyel remained in the position of an “intermediary” acting between the two countries, they could hope for a lasting peace with the Khazars:

**He must not abandon the flock entrusted to him by God in order to be with you, but we command him to come and go [between the two countries] as often as he can, to confirm you in the faith of Christ and to safeguard the**

<sup>848</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter 42, p. 167-168.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter 43, p. 169.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid., Book II, Chapter 44, p. 169.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 45, p. 170.

**inviolable friendship we have for each other. Now we are allies, for by his intercession between you and ourselves he shall rid us of the enmity between us and friendship and peace shall flourish.<sup>852</sup>**

As a result, Israyel was appointed bishop of the Huns and became known in the Albanian Church as an educator of the Huns and Khazars; however, there is no evidence of his further activities among recent converts.

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<sup>852</sup> Ibid.

The Albanian historian reports that “the blessed bishop, true to his gentle nature, brought prosperity to both sides, willingly undertaking to visit the Huns and tend the newly converted flock of Christ, and to abide firmly by the covenant and the conditions of the treaty.”<sup>853</sup>

Alongside information about the religion of the North Caucasian Huns, Movses Kalankatuatsi’s story on their Christianization also contains details of this people’s family and social relations. For instance, it mentions a custom undoubtedly associated with polygamy, according to which the deceased’s wife, provided she was not the heir’s mother, passed to the heir together with other property. There was also polyandry among rich and noble people as opposed to polygamy: brothers, who could not take individual wives, shared one wife.<sup>854</sup> The Huns had the rich and the poor, lords and commoners. References are made to the persons involved in negotiations with Israyel and embassy to the Albanians, including the Hunnic princes or dignitaries such as Tarkhan Owchi (Awchi), the chamberlain Chitar-Hazr (Chatkasar), and Zurdkin-Khorasan.<sup>855 856</sup>

Data on the North Caucasian Huns presented by Movses Kalankatuatsi are essential for understanding the relations between the Khazars and their subordinate tribes and estimating the general social system of Khazaria. The contact of the Hunnic Kingdom with the Khazars may have been no exception either. The same forms of dependence existed for other tribes subject to the Khazar *khagan*. Consequently, the Khazar state was a large federation of tribes that had preserved their internal organization and even most of their independence in foreign policy within subordination to the supreme power of the Khazar *khagan*.<sup>TM</sup>

Such was the general social nature of the Khazar state, which had become the most powerful political entity of Eastern Europe by the 8th century.

One of the most significant Khazar invasions of Transcaucasia probably dates back to 684.<sup>857</sup> The Khazars had just finished their struggle with the Bulgars which distracted all their attention and efforts, and apparently they decided to use the Caliphate’s weakening to extend their rule to the countries of Transcaucasia, which had long attracted them. They devastated several regions, captured great booty and many prisoners. Grigor Mamikonian (661-685), ruler of Armenia, as well as some Georgian and Albanian princes and nobles, fell in battles with them.<sup>858</sup>

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<sup>853</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 40, p. 156.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapters 42,43, p. 167,168.

<sup>856</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 189.

Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 1, p. 56.

<sup>858</sup> Ghewond. *History*, Chapter 4, p. 6; Stepanos Taronetsi. *The Universal History*, Book 2, Chapter

<sup>871</sup> 2, p. 165; Vardan Areweltsi. *The Historical Compilation*. Translated by R. Thomson. *Dumbarton*

It is likely that, as Artamonov holds, “the invasion, which took place after the Huns had been Christianized and Alp-Ilituer had established close diplomatic ties with Albania and Armenia, was directly associated with this event, being the Khazar government’s response to the self-willed behavior of one of the vassal countries that had overstepped the mark in its independence and, in fact, connected itself with the Transcaucasian states.”<sup>859</sup> As long as the Khazars were busy fighting the Bulgars, they had to put up with the extra trouble of the Hunnic prince escaping their power, but once the Khaz- ar-Bulgar war ended in victory, it became possible to deal with both the Huns and Transcaucasia.

The *History of Albania*, however, says that after converting to Christianity, Alp-Ilituer “performed many feats of bravery in Turkestan with the Khazar Khan whereby he gained his affection and [the Khan] was obliged to promise and give his daughter in marriage to him. He himself achieved the rank of *il-ituer* and was renowned in three lands.”<sup>860</sup> But this is a clichéd praise, which reflects the actual state of affairs only by mentioning that the Hunnic prince had to give his daughter in marriage to the Khazar *khagan*. The Khazar rulers were later known to marry the daughters of their vassals. According to the 10th-century historians, there were 25 such wives in the Khazar *khagan*’s harem by the number of peoples subjected to the Khazars.<sup>861</sup>

The tale of the Huns’ baptism concludes the account of the Albanian history in the work by Movses Kalankatuatsi. It omits the invasion of the Khazars in 684. This suggests that the Khazar campaign in question did not affect Albania itself.<sup>862</sup> The further narrative in the *History of Albania* is of a completely different nature and probably belongs to another, much later author. Thus, we can only guess why the relations of Caucasian Albania with its northern neighbor changed so drastically and what consequences the Khazar

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*Oaks Papers*, Vol. 43. Washington, D. C., 1989. Chapter 36. R 178; Bros- set M. *Histoire de la Géorgie*. Vol. I—II. St-Petersburg, 1849. P. 250.

<sup>859</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 190.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 2, Chapter 41, p. 160.

<sup>861</sup> Kovalevsky A. P. *Kniga Akhmeda Ibn Padlyana o yego puteshestvii na Volgu v 921-922 gg.* [The Book of Ahmad Ibn Fadlan about His Journey to the Volga in 921-922]. Articles, translations, and comments. Kharkov, 1956. P. 127.

<sup>862</sup> Asadov Farda. *Novaya kniga o Kavkazskoy Albanii* [A New Book about Caucasian Albania], p. 101.



invasion brought to the Huns. Unfortunately, we also have no information on whether the Christianization of the Huns was strong or not.

The conversion of the Hunnic prince Alp-Ilituer may have been a mere episode that did not play any significant role in the religious life of the Hunnic country, although the spread of Christianity in this territory, which had started before this episode, undoubtedly continued after it. There were already in the 10th century a lot of Christians in Semender, the former capital of the Khazars and then the main city of the Huns, although its prince had adopted Islam. It can be noted that along with Christianity, Judaism was also propagated among the Khazars and became the religion of one of the local princely dynasties and later the religion of the ruling elite in the Khazar *Kha-ganate*.

After 684, the sources kept silent about the Khazar involvement in the affairs of Transcaucasia for a long time. Caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705), who ascended the throne in 685, managed to sign a peace treaty with Byzantium, according to which Byzantium and the Caliphate were to jointly own Armenia and Iberia. Revenues from these countries had to be divided in half.<sup>863</sup> Although Caucasian Albania was not mentioned in the report of this treaty, it is likely to have joined the list of countries with dual allegiance. Its position could have been even worse, for apart from the Caliphate and Byzantium it was supposed to pay tribute to a third power, Khazaria, probably under the agreement concluded with the Huns by Juansher and later confirmed by Varaz-Trdat. As attested by Movses Kalankatuatsi, "the prince Varaz-Trdat paid tribute to three nations — the Khazars, the Tachiks (Arabs), and the Romans (Byzantines)."<sup>864</sup>

Yet, the Byzantine emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711) broke a treaty recently made with the Arabs and occupied Armenia, Kartli, and Albania with his troops in 688.<sup>865</sup> Only at the end of the 7th century, due to the raging civil war in Byzantium, the Arabs were able to restore their positions in Transcaucasia, although they faced the Khazars again when establishing there. In 692 or 693, Muhammad ibn Marwan, ostikan (Arab governor) of Armenia, invaded Albania and first seized the Derbent Pass.<sup>866</sup> The capture of Derbent was undoubtedly intended to prevent the Khazars from interfering with

<sup>863</sup> Kulakovsky Y. A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium]. Vol. III. Kiev, 1915. P. 254.

<sup>864</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 12, p. 202.

<sup>865</sup> Müller A. *Der Islam im Morgen- und Abendland*. Berlin, 1885. P. 376; Kulakovsky Y.A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium], p. 257-258; Theophanes. *The Chronicle of theophanes*, A. D. 686-687, p. 62.

<sup>866</sup> Ibn al-Athir. *Tarikh al-Kamil* (Polny svod istorii) [Tarikh al-Kamil (The Complete History)]. *Materialy po istorii Azerbaydzhana* [Papers on the History of Azerbaijan]. Baku, 1940. P. 22; Ghewond. *History*, Chapter 7, p. 7.

Transcaucasia. However, the Khazar attention was drawn in a different direction at the time, and the Arabs suppressed the resistance of Caucasian peoples and took a firm and lasting possession of Transcaucasia for once without being hindered by the Khazars or Byzantium, which was gripped by anarchy during this period, with one palace coup following another.<sup>867</sup>

It may be added to Movses Kalankatuatsi's account of the Christian mission of Bishop Israyel among the Huns in 682 that we find stories about the prior interactions of North Caucasian Huns with Christian preachers in the sources. This issue was discussed in detail by Dzhamalov,<sup>868</sup> who points out that two strong Hunnic associations, which formed almost simultaneously in the North Caucasus, immediately attracted the attention of both Byzantium and Iran. According to the historian, Zacharias Rhetor's<sup>869</sup> *Chronicle*<sup>870</sup> indicates that both powers made contact with the Huns-Sabirs even before their first invasion of the Caucasus in 503.<sup>871</sup> A new attempt to win over the Caspian Huns proved unsuccessful for Emperor Justin I (518-527), whom Byzantium decided to compensate at the expense of the Hunnic tribes of the Azov region. The brewing war with Iran in Lazica (a province in Western Georgia) required serious preparations and a large army. For this purpose, an embassy led by *Patricius*<sup>872</sup> Probus, nephew of Emperor Anastasius, was sent to Bosporus. Shortly before Probus' mission, this strategically important trading city was detached by Byzantium from the Azov Huns, who had controlled it for a long time. This triggered a bitter backlash from the Huns, who were well aware of the importance of old trading cities in the Crimea that played a crucial role in their trade. In this regard, the recruitment of the Huns, to whom Probus came with much money

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<sup>867</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 192.

<sup>868</sup> Dzhamalov Y.R. Op. Cit., p. 72-82.

<sup>869</sup> Zacharias Rhetor (465-553) was a Monophysite church historian. He received education in Alexandria and Beirut and served in Constantinople. Around 518, he wrote the Monophysite *Ecclesiastical History*. By 536, however, Zacharias Rhetor had converted to Orthodoxy and become Bishop of Mytilene. The original of the *Ecclesiastical History*, covering the period from 450 to 491, has not been preserved. Its Syriac translation in abridged and modified form has survived to this day.

<sup>870</sup> The *Chronicle* is a work on the history of the Eastern Church and the Byzantine Empire that was written in the mid-6th century in Syriac; the name of the original author is unknown; previously it was mistakenly attributed to Zacharias Rhetor, Bishop of Mytilene and author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, which is included in the *Chronicle* as one of its parts.

<sup>871</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. Siroysky istochnik VI v. o narodakh Kavkaza [The 6th Century Syriac Source on the Peoples of the Caucasus]. *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], No. 1 (5). Moscow, 1939. P. 113.

<sup>872</sup> *Patricius* was one of the highest Byzantine titles. The word *patricius* was etymologically associated with the ancient Roman class of patricians, but had a completely different meaning. Unlike Rome, where it meant the highest rank of hereditary aristocracy, in Byzantium it was a non-hereditary title granted by the emperor.

in 522, ended in failure. Meanwhile, Probus' mission seems to have left its mark on the Caspian Huns. The Byzantine chronicler John Malalas reports that in 527, upon the accession of Justinian I (527-565), the empire contracted an alliance with Boa, queen of the Huns-Sabirs and widow of the Sabir leader Balaq, who was "a woman manly both in size and wisdom" and ruled up to 100,000 Huns. She was persuaded by generous gifts to ally with the empire.<sup>873</sup>

At the same time, Shahanshah Kavad brought to his side two other Hun- nic leaders, Tiranke (Styrax) and Glom (Aglanos), offering them considerable rewards. The Fedorovs believe that the tribe, led by Tiranke and Glom, lived in the area of present-day Buynaksk in Dagestan. From there, on the way to Derbent, Kavad's mercenaries could not pass Boa's domains and were intercepted by her near Manas or the Buynak Cape.<sup>874</sup> Thus, as assumed by the Fedorovs, the territories inhabited by Tiranke and Glom's "inner Huns" were not to the north or west of the proposed center of Boa's possessions on the Middle Sulak — the city of Varachan — but to the south, in the area of Buynaksk.

It turns out that in 527 the Caspian Huns, led by Boa, were opposed to Iran and entered into an alliance with the Empire, while the Eastern Azov Huns, dissatisfied with the strengthening of Byzantine positions on the Bosphorus, sided with Iran against the Empire, but were defeated by Byzantium's allies. However, a year later, in 528, the leader of the Eastern Azov Huns, Grod, came to Constantinople and was baptized,<sup>875</sup> which indicates a significant rapprochement between the Huns and the Empire, signaling their transformation into Byzantium's vassals, because the Christianization of the barbarian periphery was always more of a political than religious act. With this in mind, it is unlikely that the adoption of Christianity by the "king" of the Huns — a very significant event for the pagan Huns — could have been the initiative of a certain Azov tribe of the Huns, in particular the Onoghurs.<sup>876</sup>

It has been already noted above how important the Christianization of the barbarian periphery was for Byzantine politics. Zacharias Rhetor's *Chronicle* contains very valuable evidence of the spread of Christianity among the Huns.<sup>877</sup> The Syrian relates what he has heard from two Ami- da residents, Thomas the tanner and John of Rhesaina, "who were carried into captivity when Kawad carried away captives

<sup>873</sup> John Malalas. *The Chronicle*. Books 16-18 (A. D. 491-563). Translated from Greek by E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott. Melbourne, 1986. Book 18, Chapter 13. P. 249.

<sup>874</sup> Fedorov Y.A., Fedorov G.S. *Ranniye tyurki na Severnom Kavkaze* [The Early Turks in the North Caucasus]. Moscow, 1978. P. 184.

<sup>875</sup> John Malalas. *The Chronicle*, Book 18, Chapter 14, p. 250.

<sup>876</sup> Dzhabarov Y.R. Op. Cit., p. 75-76.

<sup>877</sup> Zachariah of Mitylene. *The Syriac Chronicle*. Translated into English by E.J. Hamilton and E.W. Brooks. London, 1988. Book XII, Chapter VII. P. 329.

fifty years and more” before the completion of the *Chronicle*, “but after about this space of time they returned.” According to them, “they were again sold to the Huns and went beyond the gates and were in their country more than thirty years.” The account goes on to specify that the prisoners were in the land of the Huns for 34 years, and seven Christian missionaries, led by the Albanian bishop Kardutsat,<sup>878</sup> arrived there during their captivity. These priests, however, “did not enter by way of the Gates,” through which the prisoners had been brought into the land of the Huns, but “were guided over the mountains.”<sup>879</sup> “When they reached the place,” Zacharias continues, “they told these things to the captives, and many were baptized, and they made converts among the Huns also. They were there for a week of years, and there they translated books [the Scripture – A. N.] into the Hunnic tongue.”

Pigulevskaya argues that the Hunnic Scripture may have been composed in Sogdian-Manichaean or Sogdian language. This assumption is based on the following: as they were moving, the Huns also passed through the areas inhabited by the Sogdians, where they could have become acquainted with this type of writing. On the other hand, Bishop Kardutsat, who came from Albania, belonged to the region that probably spoke one of the Iranian dialects, therefore his familiarity with the Sogdian script cannot be surprising.<sup>880</sup>

Zacharias does not know exactly when this Scripture (it seems to have been a translation of the Gospel into the Hunnic language) “was published,” but he states that it appeared in “their language” (i.e. the language of the Huns) 20 years ago or more, counting from the date of the *Chronicle* (555). Then Zacharias gives an interesting detail: “Now at that time Probus happened to be sent on an embassy to those parts by the king, in order to hire some of them to meet the nations in war. And, when he heard from the Huns about these holy men and understood their story also from the captives, he was very eager and desirous to see them. And he saw them, and received a blessing from them, and showed them much honor before the eyes of those nations. And our king, when he heard from them the facts recorded above, which the Lord so brought about, loaded thirty mules from the territories of the neighboring Roman cities and sent them to them, and also flour and wine and oil and linen cloths and other commodities and sacramental vessels. And the animals he gave as a present to them, because Probus was a believing and a kindly man.”<sup>881</sup>

In 14 years, as Zacharias further tells us, Bishop Kardutsat left and was

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<sup>878</sup> Zacharias Rhetor himself translates the name of Bishop Kardutsat into Greek as Theokletos (summoned by God).

<sup>879</sup> Zachariah of Mitylene. *The Syriac Chronicle*, Book XII, Chapter VII, p. 330.

<sup>880</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Siriysky istochnik VI v. o narodakh Kavkaza* [The 6th Century Syriac Source on the Peoples of the Caucasus], p. 114.

<sup>881</sup> Zachariah of Mitylene. *The Syriac Chronicle*, Book XII, Chapter VII, p. 330.

replaced by “another Armenian bishop also, whose name was Maku,” who “went to the country of his own accord and some of his priests with him.” He built a church in the land of the Huns, “planted plants and sowed various kinds of seeds and did signs and baptized many. When the rulers of these nations saw something new happening, they admired the men and were greatly pleased with them and honored them, each one among them inviting them to his own district and his own people, and beseeching them to be his instructors: and behold! they are there to this day,”<sup>882</sup> Zacharias Rhetor ends his story.

These reports may clarify many obscure issues related to important points in the history of the Huns' relations with Caucasian Albania. First, it should be discussed which Huns the Christian preachers, led by Bishop Kardutsat, went to. According to Pigulevskaya, the Christian preachers were in the land of the Huns-Sabirs.<sup>883</sup> Artamonov is of another view, arguing that Bishop Kardutsat preached among the Kuban Huns. In his opinion, this is based on the following facts. First, Bishop Kardutsat and his companions came to the Huns not through “the Gates,” but through another chosen way over the mountains. Second, although his mission arrived from Albania subordinate to Iran, it was organized without the approval of the Sasanian government. Therefore, they traveled not through the Iranian-controlled Derbent Pass but through a difficult path over the mountains. Third, while Iran knew nothing about Bishop Kardutsat's mission in Iran, Byzantium was very well aware of it. Fourth, given that Bishop Kardutsat visited Bosphorus to meet Probus, Pigulevskaya's assumption of the activities of the bishop in the Sabir country seems unlikely. Lastly, it is quite possible that Grod's baptism was directly connected with these activities. Considering that Bishop Kardutsat's departure from the country of the Huns dates back to approximately the same period as Grod's visit to Constantinople, the baptism of the Hunnic prince was presumably prepared by this missionary bishop.<sup>884</sup>

This reasoning is very convincing, although Zacharias Rhetor's reports can be analyzed from slightly different premises. First, Zacharias (or his informants) knew only one passage or “Gates,” beyond which the “the land of the Huns” began, namely the Derbent Pass or the Caspian Gates by “the sea,” as the Syrian author calls them. According to Zacharias, the captives taken by Kavad in Amida (503) were sold to the Huns, then set out from the Persian land to the land of the Huns, “went beyond the gates and were in their country” for 34 years. It is clear that in this case the prisoners

<sup>882</sup> Ibid., p.330-331.

<sup>883</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Siriyskiye istochniki po istorii narodov SSSR* [The Syriac Sources on the History of the Peoples of the USSR], Moscow-Leningrad, 1941. P. 84-87.

<sup>884</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 92-94.

passed through the Derbent Pass and lived for 34 years with the Huns dwelling north of the Derbent Pass. The preachers from Caucasian Albania, led by Bishop Kardutsat, saw these prisoners in the “land of the Huns,” “told these things to the captives, and many were baptized.” However, in order to come to the land of the Huns, the Albanian clerics did not pass through the “Gates,” but used a road over the mountains. But as a result, they preached among the Huns holding the prisoners, who had been sold to the Huns and brought into their land through the “Gates,” i.e. through the Derbent Pass.<sup>885</sup>

The *History of Albania* preserves a story of another Christian mission sent from Caucasian Albania to the country of the Huns in 682, which has been discussed above. This mission was headed by Israyel, bishop of the Albanian province of Mec Kolmank. Bishop IsrayeTs mission departed from Partaw (Barda), but soon lost its way and reached the Cholay Pass and the city of Derbent after going over the mountains instead of following a direct route along the Caspian coast. In other words, the difficult road across the mountains, leading to the Derbent Pass and the land of the Huns, was undoubtedly known in Albania before. Hence, it can be easily assumed that the Albanian preachers, led by Bishop Kardutsat, had used this particular way to bypass the direct path to the “Gates” more than 170 years before Bishop Israyel’s mission to the land of the Huns.<sup>886</sup>

Second, as pointed out by Dzhaferov, it is known from Zacharias Rhetor’s account that “Probus happened to be sent on an embassy to those parts” to hire the Huns. According to Procopius, Probus’ embassy was dispatched to the Huns living near Bosporus, i.e. to the Utigurs. However, Rhetor’s information in the text cannot be interpreted in such a way that Bishop Kardutsat met Probus in Bosporus himself. On the contrary, the *patricius* was very eager and desirous to meet the Christian preachers himself, and “he saw them, and received a blessing from them, and showed them much honor before the eyes of those nations.” Therefore, it was clearly Probus who visited Bishop Kardutsat in the land of the Huns, where the Albanian missionaries preached and where the prisoners sold to the Huns and brought into their land through the “Gates” were kept. This is all the more likely because, having failed to recruit the Azov Huns, who were hostile towards Byzantium, Probus took advantage of a favorable opportunity and decided with the aid of the Albanian bishop to enlist the support of the Caspian Huns, who were no less hostile towards Iran. Probus may have succeeded to some extent, because five years after his activities in the Crimea and a meeting with the Albanian preachers,

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<sup>885</sup> Dzhaferov Y.R. Op. Cit., p. 78-79.

<sup>886</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Siriysky istochnik VI v. o narodakh Kavkaza* [The 6th Century Syriac Source on the Peoples of the Caucasus], p. 113.

Boa, queen of the Huns-Sabirs, sided with Emperor Justinian and defeated Shahanshah Kavad's mercenaries.<sup>887</sup>

Third, as for Bishop Kardutsat's Albanian mission, which aimed to prepare Grod for adopting Christianity, it should be noted that the Huns were continuously surrounded by the trading Greek cities of the Azov Sea, the Taman Bay, and the Crimea, whose population had long professed Christianity, and hardly faced a shortage of preachers, especially from distant Caucasian Albania. All this, in the opinion of Dzhafarov, clearly indicates that the Albanian Christian mission was directed specifically to the Caspian Huns, who dwelled in close proximity to the borders of Caucasian Albania, meaning the Sabirs and the Bulgar tribes of Bersilia.<sup>888</sup>

No less important is when Bishop Kardutsat came to the land of the Huns and "the Scripture was published" in the Hunnic language. Pigulevskaya dates Kardutsat's arrival to the Huns to 537, i.e. exactly 34 years after the prisoners captured by Kavad in Amida in 503 were sold to the Huns. Accordingly, she attributes the "publication of the Scripture" in the Hunnic language to 544, i.e. 7 years after Bishop Kardutsat's appearance among the Huns.<sup>889</sup> Yet, Artamonov's dating is much more reasoned. Given that Probus' meeting with the Albanian bishop could have taken place only in 522, when Probus came to Bosporus, Artamonov rightly points out that the story of Zacharias Rhetor divides Kardutsat's time of stay with the Huns into two periods, 7 years each, with the former ending in the "publication of the Scripture" and the meeting with Probus. Thus, Kardutsat arrived in the land of the Huns no earlier than 515 and left it after 14 years, i.e. in 529. The Scripture was issued around 520. The 34 years stated in the source should be understood not as the number of years lived by prisoners before Bishop Kardutsat's arrival, but as the total duration of years of captivity lasting until 537.<sup>890</sup>

Artamonov's finding that the Christian mission from Caucasian Albania came to the land of the Huns in 515 is of particular relevance for our topic, as one of the most devastating Sabir invasions of Central Asia happened during this period. This seems to be no coincidence: the emergence of a powerful nomad association on the Caucasian border of Sasanian Iran, which made its presence known by invading Transcaucasia for the first time in 503, provided a strong impetus for the Transcaucasian Christians (especially those suffering from Hunnic invasions) to begin preaching the Christian doctrine among the pagan Huns. It is quite obvious that Bishop Kardutsat's mission was intended not so much to extend the influence of

<sup>887</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. Op. Cit., p. 79-80.

<sup>888</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>889</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Siriyskiye istochniki po istorii narodov SSSR* [The Syriac Sources on the History of the Peoples of the USSR], p. 84-87.

<sup>890</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 93, Note 76.

the Albanian Church, but to implement very specific political tasks, namely to prevent the pillage and devastation of Albania and other Caucasian states by spreading Christianity among the Hunnic tribes and trying to gain the support of Huns in relations with Iran.<sup>891</sup>

Artamonov is correct in his assertion that Bishop Kardutsat's mission was organized without the consent of the Sasanian government, which was probably the reason for its appearance in the land of the Huns after making a detour through the mountains. It is also clear that the strengthening influence of the Albanian Church among the Caspian nomads could not but concern the shah's court, which had long fought Christianity in the Iran-controlled Caucasus and forcibly imposed Zoroastrianism. It is no accident that the liberation movement in the South Caucasus was generally of a religious nature and was targeted both against the political domination of Iran and against its state religion. The idea of Christianization of the Huns, Iran's potential enemies, was particularly dangerous given the unstable position of the Sassanids in the Caucasus, since the common religion shared by the nomads of the North Caucasus and the peoples of Transcaucasia could sooner or later lead to undesirable consequences for Iran.

In this regard, Dzhafarov notes a certain consistency in the relations between the Albanian Church and the Caucasian nomads, which has its own

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<sup>891</sup> Dzhafarov Y.R. *Op. Cit.*, p. 80-81.



prehistory.<sup>892</sup> The Albanian tradition has it that the first preacher of Christianity among the nomads was Gregory the Illuminator's grandson, the Albanian bishop Grigoris, who was executed by order of the Maskut king Sanesan in the Vatnean field (near Derbent) in the '30s of the 4th century. The Albanian bishop Kardutsat and his companions came to the Huns around 515, and after 14 years of staying with them, he was replaced by another Albanian bishop, Maku, who, according to Zacharias Rhetor, was "there to this day," i.e. until 555. In 682, another mission was sent to the country of the Huns under the leadership of Bishop Israyel, who preached among the Huns for a long time and baptized the Hunnic prince Alp-Ilituer.

We find out from the accounts of the Albanian historian Movses Kalankatuatsi and the Syriac author Zacharias Rhetor that missionary work among the pagan Huns was one of the ministries of the Albanian Church in the 6th-7th centuries.

We cannot claim that this mission had great historical success, for the Khazars later dissociated themselves from the Christianity they had accepted. But at the same time, we have no right to say that the sermon of Albanian missionaries among the Khazars was useless, because we encounter references to Christianity among the indigenous peoples of the North Caucasus and Dagestan up to the 12th century.

Another significant detail to the overall historical picture of the Albanian Church is that it had many spiritual forces and courageous ascetics during one of the most difficult and challenging periods in its history, individuals who became the bearers and preachers of gospel teaching both among the Zoroastrian Persians and among the militant pagan Khazars.

### II. 3.4. *The Title of Albanian Catholicos*

We learn from Book Two of the *History of Albania* about the title of the primate of the Albanian Church.

Movses Kalankatuatsi attests that starting from the mid-6th century, the official title of the Albanian patriarch was "Catholicos of Albania, Lpink, and Cholay." The author of the *History of Albania* assigns this title to Lords Abas (552-596)<sup>893</sup> and Viroy (596-629).<sup>894</sup> Hence, it is required to find out the meaning of such a title and, consequently, the territory covered by the jurisdiction of the head of the Albanian Church.

So, the authority of the Albanian primate extended to three regions — Albania,

<sup>892</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>893</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 15, p. 103.

Lpink, and Cholay — which were probably independent of each other and therefore mentioned separately.

As for the territory of Albania itself, this question is more or less clear. The issue related to the borders of the Albanian kingdom (and then *marzpanate*) is highlighted in Section B of Introduction to this monograph.

Chola (Choi, Chor, Tzour, Choga, Jora) is the ancient name of a settlement and later a city on the site of modern-day Derbent. From the 1st century CE, Chola became the center of the state of Iranian-speaking Maskuts (Mas- sagetae), who settled in the Caspian regions.<sup>895</sup> The province of Chola reached the Terek-Argun-Andi Ridge (the Ceraunian Mountains) in the north, extended to Mount Besh Barmag<sup>896</sup> in the south, and included the Tabasarans (Tavaspars), Albanians, Chilbs (Silvi), Legae, Khachmataks, Maskuts, Khaz-ars, Huns, and other tribes.

The researcher F.R. Nagiyev<sup>897</sup> finds it unacceptable to identify the toponyms *Chora* and *Chola*. He considers the former to be a settlement located at a distance of one kilometer from the city of Belidzhi (Balanjar) and the latter to be Derbent. The author calls Balanjar the capital of the Maskuts.<sup>898</sup> However, according to Trever, “the name *Chor* applied to the whole Derbent area in a broad sense and to the city at the mouth of the Samur in a narrow sense.”<sup>899</sup>

B.A. Arutyunian outlines the borders of the province of Chola as follows:

**In the north, the frontier ran from the Caspian coast, north of the Derbent slope, then stretched along the mountain range, skirting Tabasaran from the north, to the watershed of the Sulak Guli (Kuli) tributary, where it turned sharply to the**

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<sup>895</sup> Pogrebova M.N. Kavkaz i Srednyaya Aziya v drevnosti i srednevekovye [The Caucasus and Central Asia in Antiquity and the Middle Ages], *Pamyatniki skifskoy kultury v Zakavkazye* [The Monuments of Scythian Culture in Transcaucasia]. Moscow, 1981. P. 42-58.

<sup>896</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i alban* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 248.

<sup>897</sup> Nagiyev Feyzudin Ramazanovich (born 1951) is a Russian literary critic and publicist, Doctor of Philology, Director of the Research Institute of Albanian Studies.

<sup>898</sup> Nagiyev F.R. Drevny gorod mezhdru Evropoy i Aziyey [The Ancient City between Europe and Asia]. *Nastoyashcheye Vremya* [The Present Time], No. 13, 2009.

<sup>899</sup> Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 260.

southeast, over Mount Alakhundag and the Samur Ridge, then turned again to the southeast near the present-day village of Filya, reached the Main Caucasian Range near Mount Bazardziizii, went along the Caucasus Mountains in the south, separating Chola from Albania proper, and approached the Caspian Sea approximately in the area of the settlement of Khyzy.<sup>900</sup>

The etymology of the name *Chola/Chora* is unknown. From 488, under the reign of Vachagan III the Pious, this province became part of Caucasian Albania,<sup>901</sup> but was later annexed by the Persians due to its important strategic position.<sup>902</sup> After the Albanian statehood had been dismantled by the Sassanids and the country had been transformed into the northern Adur- badagan *kust* of the Sassanid state, Chola became an independent province (separate from Maskut) that played a major political and military role, being a military and political stronghold of the Sassanids in the Caucasus. It was only during the rule of the Albanian princes Juansher and Varaz-Trdat that Chola may have reunited with Albania again.

We know from Kalankatuatsi's *History* that St. Grigoris used to preach within the Maskut Kingdom and was martyred there by order of the Maskut king Sanesan (Sanatrük).<sup>903</sup> The city of Chola (Derbent) is also known to have been the first residence of the primates of the Albanian Church until the 6th century.<sup>904</sup>

"We have reason to believe," Trever writes on this matter, "that it was a city with Albanian population: after all, if the Chor inhabitants gave a cordial welcome to the Albanian embassy, headed by the Albanian Christian bishop Israyel, they apparently thought of them as brothers in faith, and, consequently, the general population of the city may have still consisted of Christian Albanians in the 7th century."<sup>905</sup>

The importance of Chola as the religious center of the Albanian Church is likely to have stemmed from the strategic and political role assigned to the city and region by the Sasanian government. It housed the administrative center of the entire South Caucasus and the residence of the Persian governor (*marzban*) before being transferred to Partaw in 552.

<sup>900</sup> Arutyunian B. A. K voprosu o lokalizatsii strany Lpink [On the Location of the Lpink Country], p. 122-123.

<sup>901</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 89.

<sup>902</sup> Kudryavtsev A.A. *Drevny Derbent* [Ancient Derbent]. Moscow, 1982. P. 79.

<sup>903</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 23.

<sup>904</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 4, p. 70.

<sup>905</sup> Trever K.V. *Ocherkipo istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 248.

It remains to clarify the issue of the toponym *Lpink* – *Lpinia*. The historian B.A. Arutyunian is one of the recent researchers to explore this issue. The author collects all information on the *Lpink* country provided by ancient historians and analyzes the views of modern scholars on this topic.<sup>906</sup> He notes that, according to Strabo's account, the Albanian Kingdom at the dawn of its history united 26 tribes speaking different languages. Unfortunately, the names of most of these tribes have not survived in written sources and appear to be lost to history forever. The sources have preserved some facts about individual tribes, which give an idea of the ethnic composition of the Albanian Kingdom to a certain extent. The *Lpins* were one of the indigenous tribes living on the territory of Caucasian Albania, although their settlement area is still open for debate. Based on the same data, the researchers have located them in completely different ways.

Back in the second half of the 19th century, the Caucasian scholar I.I. Chopin<sup>907</sup> expressed the opinion that the similarity of the distorted syllabic phrase *Alpani* – *Albania* to the name *Lpink-Lbnia* could not be ignored.<sup>908</sup> In the "30s of the 20th century, S. V. Yushkov, unfamiliar with Chopin's point of view, voiced a similar idea.<sup>909</sup> He wrote regarding *Lpink* and its location:

**... the story of (Prince Varaz-Trdat's – A. N.) embassy includes a report of Albania being directly adjacent to Lbinia, country of the Lbins or Lupenians, which is extremely valuable for solving the Albanian issue. The question of Lbnia does not seem to have been raised by anyone in the historical literature, but it can be assumed that Lbnia is one of the fragments of ancient Albania, while the name Lbnia is a modification of the word Albania. Lbnia, or the land of the Lbins, was situated north of Albania. The capital of Lbnia was in the hinterland, about 12 days away, i.e. it was located in the upper reaches of the Samur or in its central**

<sup>924</sup>  
course.

In the opinion of Bishop Barkhudarian, the *Lpin* tribe dwelled in the interfluvium

<sup>906</sup> Arutyunian B.A. K voprosu o lokalizatsii strany *Lpink* [On the Location of the *Lpink* Country], p. 108-125.

<sup>907</sup> Chopin Ivan Ivanovich (1798-1870) was a Russian historian of French origin. While serving in the Caucasus, he studied the history and ethnography of the East, especially Georgia and Armenia.

<sup>908</sup> Chopin I.I. *Novye zametki na drevniye istorii Kavkaza i yego obitateley* [New Notes on the Ancient History of the Caucasus and Its Inhabitants]. St. Petersburg, 1866. P. 373.

<sup>909</sup> Yushkov Serafim Vladimirovich (1888-1952) was a historian of state and law, Doctor of Law, Professor, academician, and Honored Scientist of the RSFSR.

of the Sumgait<sup>910 911</sup> and Divichi<sup>912</sup> rivers on the northern slopes of the Caucasian Ridge.<sup>913</sup> As for the capital of the Lpins, Makar Barkhudarian places it 30 km northeast of Shamakhi, in Qizmeydan.<sup>914</sup> The German scientist A. Hermann has attempted to locate the Lpins in the mouth of the Kura River,<sup>915</sup> which in K.G. Aliyev's view contradicts the data of primary sources.<sup>916</sup> According to Yeremian, Lpink appears in the *Ashkharatsuyts* in the distorted form *Pvik*<sup>917</sup> and is an abbreviated version of the name *Alban* or *Alowan*.<sup>918</sup> Yeremian argues that "... the country of Loinoz (Lpnik) should be sought northeast of Marzpan Kartli, at the foot of the Main Caucasian Ridge, namely in the upper reaches of the Alazani River, in the area of the villages of Alvani, Aranta, and Shilda, i.e. in the left-bank part of Kakheti, of which it becomes an inseparable part later."<sup>919</sup> Yeremian's point of view is reflected in numerous historical maps published by him.<sup>920</sup>

Trever praises Yeremian for his historical and geographical research, but does not agree with the identification of the names *Albanian* and *Lpin*, thinking that this point of view is at odds both with information given by Pliny, who... geographically distinguishes these two tribes, and with the title of Albanian catholicos, which reads "Catholicos of Albania, Lpink, and Cholay" starting from the 6th century. This phrase undoubtedly refers to three main different Albanian provinces, therefore Albania can be hardly equated with the region of Lbins."<sup>921</sup> It is surprising, however, that her

<sup>910</sup> Yushkov S.V. K voprosu o granitsakh drevney Albanii [On the Borders of Ancient Albania], p. 138-139.

<sup>911</sup> The Sumgait is a river in the west of Azerbaijan, one of the tributaries of the Kura River. Its length is 198 km. It originates on the slopes of the Greater Caucasus.

<sup>912</sup> The Divichi is a river in the northeast of Azerbaijan, which flows through the territory of the Shabran District from the Caucasus Mountains to the Caspian Sea.

<sup>913</sup> Barkhudarian M. *The Aghuank Region and Its Neighbors*, p. 76, 145; see also Barkhudarian M. *The History of Albania*. Vagharshapat, 1902. P. 26.

<sup>914</sup> Barkhudarian M. *The Aghuank Region and Its Neighbors*, p. 147.

<sup>915</sup> Hermann A. Lupenii. *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Berlin, 1927. P. 1815.

<sup>916</sup> Aliyev K.G. *Antichnaya Kavkazskaya Albaniya* [Ancient Caucasian Albania], Baku, 1974. P. 104.

<sup>917</sup> Yeremian S.T. *Armenia according to the Ashkharatsuyts*. Yerevan, 1963. P. 54,105.

<sup>918</sup> Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuysky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdat k khazarскому khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], p. 149.

<sup>919</sup> Yeremian S.T. Torgovyie puti Zakavkazya v epokhu Sasanidov. Po Tabula Peutingeriana. [The Trade Routes of Transcaucasia in the Sassanid Era. Based on Tabula Peutingeriana]. *Vestnik drevney istorii* [Journal of Ancient History], No. 1. Moscow, 1939. P. 86.

<sup>920</sup> Yeremian S.T. *Atlas k knige "Istoriya armyanskogo naroda"* [The Atlas to the Book "History of the Armenian People"]. Part I. Yerevan, 1951-1952; *Atlas ArmSSR* [The Atlas of the Armenian SSR], Yerevan-Moscow, 1961. Maps No. 103 and 104.

<sup>921</sup> Trever K. V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy Albanii IV v. do n. e. — VII v. n. e.* [Essays on the History and Culture of Caucasian Albania in the 4th century BCE — 7th century CE], p. 48.

opinion coincides with that of Yeremian regarding Lpink's location in the Alazani Valley.<sup>922</sup> Mamedova holds the same view.<sup>923</sup>

Pliny seems to be the most ancient source that mentions the Lpins: "... then after the frontier of Albania the whole face of the mountains is occupied by the wild tribes of the Silvi and below them those of the Lupenii, and afterwards the Diduri and Sodi<sup>924</sup> (... rursus ab Albaniae confinio tota montium fronte gentes Silvorum ferae et infra Lupeniorum, mox Diduri et Sodi)."<sup>925</sup> This brief account may certainly give a rough idea of the location of the Lpins. The Diduri or Didoites still exist and live in the upper reaches of the Andi Koysu; consequently, following the inner logic of the above report, the Lpins and Chilbs should be sought east of the Didoites, probably on the northern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains.

The information on Lpinia is more complete in the Caucasian sources. Agathangelos' *History*, describing the fall of the kingdom of the Parthian Arsacids and the murder of Artavan Arshakuni, says this:

**But at the start of next year Khosrov king of Armenia began to raise forces and assemble an army. He gathered the armies of the Albanians and the Georgians, opened the gates of the Alans and the stronghold of Chor; he brought through the army of the Huns in order to attack Persian territory and invade Asorestan ... There quickly arrived in support great numbers of strong and brave cavalry detachments, Albanians, Lpink, Chilpk, Kaspk and others from those regions, in order to seek vengeance for the blood of Artavan.**<sup>926</sup>

The abridged beginning and end of the passage quoted are restored in Ukhtanes'<sup>927</sup> *History of Armenia*: "When the year began, following the assassination of Artawan and the accession of Artashir son of Sasan as king, King Khosrov of Armenia enrolled men for war. He levied troops from Albania, Georgia, Lpink, Chilpk, Kasbk, and Hunk, and organized them as a powerful unit, adding to them large troops from other races. He then sent word to the Roman Emperor Philip, asking for his additional military assistance."<sup>928</sup>

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<sup>922</sup> Ibid.

<sup>923</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 251.

<sup>924</sup> There are no other details of the Sodi, therefore it is difficult to judge where they dwelled.

<sup>925</sup> Pliny. *Natural History*, Book VI, Chapter XI, p. 358-359.

<sup>926</sup> Agathangelos. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 1, §19, p. 37.

<sup>927</sup> Ukhtanes (c. 935-1000) was an Armenian historian, church and public figure. He was educated by Anania Narekatsi in the Narekavank. He headed the diocese of Sebastia (c. 970- 985) and presumably the diocese of Edessa (after 985). In 980, he started working on the *History of Armenia* at the request of Anania Narekatsi and completed it around 982.

<sup>928</sup> Ukhtanes. *History of Armenia*. Translation, introduction and commentary by EZ. Arzoumanian. Fort Lauderdale, 1988. Part I, Chapter 50. P. 62. Ukhtanes borrowed the passage concerning

Reducing and combining Agathangelos' data, Ukhtanes lists the countries that sent troops from the west to the east. The only exception is Albania, which stands before Georgia as an apparently more powerful state in military terms. After swapping Aghuank and Virk (Albania and Georgia), we get the following list: Virk — Aghuank — Lpink — Chilbk — Kaspk — Honk. The country of the Huns (Honk) turns out to be the last one in the northeast; Kaspk is to the south of it, on the coast of the Caspian Sea; Georgia is in the west; and Albania is to the east of it. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that Lpink and Chilbk were to the east of Albania and to the west of Kaspk (Kas- plane).

Elishe mentions that Lpinia was a kingdom<sup>929</sup> controlled by Sasanian Persia in the mid-5th century (449), which, like Armenia, Georgia, and Albania, received an order of the Persian king Yazdegerd II to send an army to the country of Achar:

**In this form the edict reached the lands of the Armenians, Georgians, Albanians, Lpink, Tsawdeik, Korduik, Aldznik, and many other distant parts ... A force of nobility and lesser nobility was assembled from Greater Armenia and retainers from the royal house; likewise, from Georgia, and Albania, and the land of the Lpink, and still others from all the districts of the south near the borders of Tach- kastan, the Roman Empire, Korduk, Dasn, Tsawde, and Arznarzn, people who were all believers and baptized into the one catholic and apostolic church.<sup>930</sup>**

Finally, extremely valuable material about Lpinia can be found in Movses Kalankatuatsi's work, which makes it possible to determine with great accuracy where the Lpins and Chilbs lived, by comparing it with information from the foregoing sources, as well as the *Ashkharatsuyts*. Movses Kalankatuatsi uses Koriun's work and other sources to recount the educational activities of Mesrop Mashtots in Albania:

**He passed through Armenia into the eastern regions to the province of Uti; and he dwelt among marshy places and moss-covered swamps in the place**

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Emperor Philip from Movses Khorenatsi. See Movses Khorenatsi. *History of Armenia*, Book 2, Chapter 71, p. 218.

<sup>929</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 3, p. 128: "...Arshavir Arsharuni ... attacked wildly, striking and slaying Vurk, the valiant brother of the king of the Lpink ..."

<sup>930</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 1, p. 64-65; see Chapter 2, p. 103: "For they had received a general command from the court [to instruct] not only Armenia but also Georgia, Albania, and the land of the Lpink, Aldznik, Korduk, Tsawdeik and Dasn, and wherever else in the Persian empire they secretly observed Christianity."

called Gis. He revived the church and strengthened the Faith and spread the teaching of the gospel to the land of the Utians, the Albanians, the Lpink, the Kaspik, up to the Cholay Pass, and to other foreign tribes whom Alexander of Macedon had captured and settled around the great Mount Caucasus, namely, the Gargark and the Kamichik Hep-talk (Hephthalites); he reconverted them to the Christian faith and taught them the form of worship which they had learned long ago and had now forgotten.<sup>931</sup>

The Utik — Albania — Lpinia — Kaspiane — Chora sequence shows that the countries listed by both other authors and Movses Kalankatuatsi present a specific geographical pattern: Utik is in the southwest of the said regions, inner Albania is to the north of Utik, Kaspiane is in the coastal strip of the Caspian Sea, and Chora is to the north of it. Following this pattern, it should be accepted that Lpinia was located between Albania and Kaspiane, which does not contradict other information given here, but supplements it.<sup>932</sup>

According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, the Albanian *marzpanate* included the countries of Albania, Lpink, and Cholay. Thus, Jebu Khakan's son, the Khazar prince Shat, considered these countries to be the perpetual ancestral property of his father: "for my father has received these three kingdoms of the Albanians and the Lpink and Cholay."<sup>933</sup>

Summing up all the accounts provided in the sources and relying on both editions of the *Ashkharatsuyts*, B.A. Arutyunian concludes that the western border of Lpinia (and, accordingly, the eastern border of Albania itself) ran from Mount Babadag along the Girdymanchai River south to the Kura,<sup>934</sup> which is in line with the opinion of Bishop Makar Barkhudarian.<sup>935</sup>

The scholar draws the eastern border of Lpinia (and accordingly, the western border of Kaspiane) as follows: the Caucasian Ridge (near the village of Altyagach) — through the mountains to the eastern tip of the village of Sundu — Maraza — Mount Gidzhak — along the hills lying west of the Pir- saat River — the Kura River.

<sup>931</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 54-55.

<sup>932</sup> Arutyunian B. A. K voprosu o lokalizatsii strany Lpink [On the Location of the Lpink Country], p. 113-114.

<sup>933</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 14, p. 100.

<sup>934</sup> Based on the reports of Greco-Roman sources, the rivers flowing down from the Caucasian Ridge were much more abundant in ancient times. This is also confirmed by geological studies. The waters of the Girdymanchai River seem to have reached the Kura in the early Middle Ages, and near their confluence was one of the Albanian settlements, which to this day bears the name *Alvand*, apparently originating from the name *Albanian*.

<sup>935</sup> Barkhudarian M. *The Aghuank Region and Its Neighbors*, p. 76,145; Barkhudarian M. *The History of Albania*, p. 26.



So, the area of present-day Shamakhi can be regarded as the center of Lpinia. Robert Hewsen, a modern researcher of the Caucasian geography, also locates Lpinia there.<sup>936</sup>

As a result, we have formed the view that the jurisdiction of the Albanian Church extended to three different state entities belonging to the Albanian *marzpanate* in the 6th century, which means they were ecclesiastically and administratively dependent on the Albanian catholicos.

Yet, we find only two catholicos bearing the title of “Catholicos of Albania, Lpink, and Cholay” – Abas and Viroy – in Movses Kalankatuatsi’s work. Neither their predecessors nor successors, as far as we can judge by the *History of Albania*, had this title.

One important historical relic stored in the collection of the National Library of France is of particular interest for clarifying the title of the primates of the Albanian Church. This is a Sasanian gem with the following Middle Persian inscription: “/kus/ty ZY “lb”n W bl’skn wcwlk k”twlykws” (kust i Alban ud Balasagan wuzurg katolikos) – “the Great Catholicos of the province of Albania and Balasagan.”<sup>937</sup>

The issues associated with this gem are studied in Gadzhiev’s publication.<sup>938</sup>

It is analyzed from three perspectives, regarding the individual to whom this gem seal can be attributed and whether the seal belongs to a specific head of the Albanian Church:

1. Its dating based on the legend paleography.
2. The title used in the inscription.
3. The name of the administrative division shown in the inscription.

R. Frye dates the gem to the 7th century.<sup>939</sup> P. Gignoux, relying on the specific spelling of letters, more cautiously refers it to the 6th-7th centuries.<sup>940</sup> Kasumova notes that “the inscription paleography does not allow for its exact dating: the cursive

<sup>936</sup> Hewsen R.H. *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, p. 58, 72.

<sup>937</sup> Kasumova S.Y. Le Sceau du catholicos d’Albanie et du Balasagan. *Studia Iranica*, Vol. 20, 1991. R 23-24; Kasumova S.Y. *Khristianstvo v Azerbaydzhanе v rannem Srednevekovye* [Christianity in Azerbaijan in the Early Middle Ages], p. 48-50; Gyselen R. *Catalogue des sceaux, camées et bulles sasanides de la Bibliothèque Nationale et du Musée du Louvre*. Paris, 1993. P. 155.

<sup>938</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana i vo- pros ocherednosti patriarshestva vладыk Albanskoy tserkvi [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan and the Issue of Succession of Albanian Church Patriarchs]. *Problemy istorii, filologii, kultury* [The Problems of History, Philology, and Culture]. Moscow-Magnitogorsk, 2004. P. 465-479.

<sup>939</sup> Frye R.N. The Pahlavi Inscriptions on the Seals. *Christian Seals of the Sasanian Period*. Edited by J.A. Lerner. Leiden, 1977. P. 41.

<sup>940</sup> Gignoux P. Sceaux chrétiens d’époque sasanide. *Iranica Antiqua*. Vol. XV, 1980. P. 299-314.

writing on the gems appears no later than the 5th century and is applied in the same varieties for several centuries.”<sup>941</sup> The researcher tends to date the seal to the 6th century. At the same time, Kasumova expresses the opinion that the title *Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan* reflects the situation prevailing after the anti-Sasanian protests of 481 to 484, when, in her opinion, Balasagan “united with Albania.”<sup>942</sup> However, there is no documentary evidence in the sources regarding the unification of these two state entities, and this point of view is based on an assessment of the general political situation in the region. According to the researcher, the first to adopt this title could have been Shuphalishoy — “the senior chief bishop,”<sup>943</sup> “archbishop of Partaw,”<sup>944</sup> “catholicos, who came ... from Jerusalem”<sup>945</sup> — and the title itself existed until the mid-6th century, when a new one was introduced, *Catholicos of Albania, Lpink, and Cholay*.<sup>946</sup>

As Gadzhiyev points out, the issue of gem dating also relates to the problem of attribution. The title *Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan* presented in the inscription is unknown to written sources. However, Movses Kalankatuatsi in one instance refers to Shuphalishoy, head of the Albanian Church, who participated in the Council of Aluen in 488, as the “the senior chief bishop.”<sup>947</sup> This title is basically equivalent to the title *Great Catholicos*. And it would be tempting to determine that the gem in question belonged to Lord Shuphalishoy, especially since the ductus of the inscription on it does not rule out the possibility of its dating to the late 5th century.<sup>948</sup>

But here we also have a number of understandable objections, with the main issue being that the title in the inscription does not match Shuphalishoy’s titles recorded in narrative sources, where he is known not only as “the senior chief bishop,” but also as “patriarch,” “bishop,” and “archbishop of Partaw.” It is important to note that the potential appearance of the title *Great Catholicos* at that time corresponded to the political situation in the late 5th century, when Caucasian Albania gained independence and was on the rise culturally and politically, while King Vachagan the Pious was the “master of all the lands in his kingdom”<sup>949</sup> and Christianity was establishing its positions. This assumption may be supported by the

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<sup>941</sup> Kasumova S.Y. Le Sceau du catholicos d’Albanie et du Balasagan, p. 28-29.

<sup>942</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>943</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 23, p. 47.

<sup>944</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50.

<sup>945</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>946</sup> Kasumova S.Y. Le Sceau du catholicos d’Albanie et du Balasagan, p. 31.

<sup>947</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 23, p. 47.

<sup>948</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 467.

<sup>949</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 17, p. 27.

information of the Albanian chronicler, who says that Shuphalishoy is a “catholicos, who came ... from Jerusalem.”<sup>950</sup>

The relative dating of the gem might also be suggested by the name *Catholicos* itself. This title began to be applied to Albania, according to Mamedova, from the mid-6th century, after the Caucasian churches broke off canonical communion with the Byzantine Church at the Council of Dvin in 551.<sup>951</sup>

Gadzhiev assumes that the gem seal at hand could have belonged to the Albanian catholicos Zakaria (629-644). Subsequent primates may be excluded from the list of purported owners of the gem seal due to the existing political situation marked by the fall of the Sassanid Empire. This should have led to rejecting the use of Middle Persian script and Zoroastrian symbols in the official Christian documents and attributes (seals), as is observed in the case of the gem under review. Thus, the gem with the inscription *Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan* is likely to have been held by Zakaria, one of the most revered heads of the Albanian Church, who deservedly earned the epithets “holy man” and “saved the great city of Partaw from slavery by his prayers.”<sup>952</sup> He could have been awarded the title *Great Catholicos* for his efforts. But this is only one possible solution to the problem of personal attribution of the gem.<sup>953</sup>

As for the toponym *Balasagan* mentioned on the gem (also called Pay-takaran), it is a historical province in Kaspiane, which was formerly part of Media-Atropatene and later part of Caucasian Albania starting in the mid-1st century BCE. Historical data suggest that Paytakaran-Balasagan sometimes maintained its independence and sometimes joined either Albania or Atropatene.<sup>954</sup>

The researchers holding different views on the location of Balasagan unanimously agree that this area included territories to the north of the Kura and along the Caspian Sea up to the Samur or Derbent.<sup>955</sup> Mamedova locates Balasagan

<sup>950</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>951</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 234-235.

<sup>952</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 229; Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 10, p. 158.

<sup>953</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. *Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana* [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 468.

<sup>954</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 255-256.

<sup>955</sup> Ulubabian B.A. *O lokalizatsii Balasakana* [On the Location of Balasagan], *Vestnik Yerevanskogo universiteta* [Bulletin of the Yerevan University], No. 1. Yerevan, 1971. P. 178-182; Arutyunian B.A. *Administrativnoye deleniye zakavkazskikh vladeny Sasanidskogo Irana soglasno trudu Egishe* [The Administrative Organization of the Transcaucasian Possessions of Sasanian Iran according to Egishe's Work], *Kavkaz i Vizantiya* [The Caucasus and Byzantium], No. 1. Yerevan, 1979. P. 32-33; Akopian A.A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh*

in the southeast of Azerbaijan, partially at the site of Mil and Mughan steppes, on the right bank of the Kura.<sup>956</sup>

According to written sources, Balasagan was a very important state, political, and administrative unit of the East Caucasus. Generally, it ranks fourth among other Caucasian countries, after Armenia, Iberia, and Albania.

There were major administrative and territorial reforms in Iran, including the Transcaucasian provinces of the Sasanian Empire, during the reign

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<sup>956</sup> *istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources], p. 100-104.  
Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i alban* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 255.

of Shahanshah Khosrow I Anushirvan (531-579) in the mid-6th century and during the reign of Khosrow II Parviz (590-628) in the late 6th century.<sup>957</sup> Under the former ruler, Iran was divided into four *kusts* – “sides” – led by *spahbeds* (military governors, army commanders),<sup>958</sup> with the Transcaucasian countries and regions entering the Caucasian *kust* Adurbadagan, while under the latter ruler, 35 provinces were formed in the territory of Iran, although not all of their names have been preserved. Unfortunately, we do not know the specific names of the Caucasian districts that were included in any new administrative divisions resulting from these reforms. Based on some written sources, it can be assumed that the province of Albania and Balasagan, which united the two largest and most essential political regions of the East Caucasus, could have been one such division.<sup>959</sup>

We have no accurate data as to when Balasagan was incorporated into the kingdom or *marzpanate* of Albania, but in the 3rd-5th centuries, judging by fragmentary evidence from written sources, it represented an independent political entity that seems to have been in confederate relations with Albania.

In the mid-5th century, we find an independent kingdom with hereditary power in Balasagan.<sup>960</sup> However, based on Elishe’s account, the king of Balasagan was executed in 451, and we do not know whether the royal authority remained in this Transcaucasian region after that. At least the kings of Balasagan were no longer mentioned in the sources.

Sources also say that there was a diocese in Balasagan belonging to the Albanian Church.<sup>961</sup> Finally, Zacharias Rhetor’s *Chronicle* mentions the “Land of Bazgun” (which researchers unanimously identify with Balasagan) among the countries of five faithful peoples of the “northern region” (Armenia, Gurzan, Arran, Sisagan, Bazgun), which have 24 bishops.<sup>962</sup>

Thus, assuming no reliable information can be found in the written sources about either the formation of the province of Albania and Balasagan or the establishment of a catholicosate under this name, Gadzhiyev concludes that, given

<sup>957</sup> Kolesnikov A.I. Iran vnachale VII veka [Iran in the Early 7th Century]. *Palestinsky Sbornik* [The Palestinian Collection], No. 22 (85), 1970. P. 64, 93, 99.

<sup>958</sup> Dashkov S.B. *Tsari tsarey — Sasanidy* [The Sassanids: Kings of Kings], p. 139.

<sup>959</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 468.

<sup>960</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapters 3, 6, p. 128, 185; Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 2, p. 67.

<sup>961</sup> Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*, Chapter XVII, p. 41; Movses Khorenatsi. *History of Armenia*, Book 3, Chapter 60, p. 333; Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

<sup>962</sup> Pigulevskaya N.V. *Siriyskiye istochniki po istorii narodov SSSR* [The Syriac Sources on the History of the Peoples of the USSR], p. 82, 165.

the relative dating of the gem being examined, this administrative, political, and ecclesiastical unit appeared during the period of administrative and territorial changes in the East Caucasus in the 6th century.<sup>963</sup>

In his research, Gadzhiyev notes another aspect that makes it possible to solve the problem of attributing this gem differently. The term *kwsty* (province, region) in its inscription is reconstructed by the researchers as [*kws*] *ty*, because there are only ending letters in the text; this does not rule out the possibility that it could have been the name of the Great Catholicos himself, rather than the designation of an administrative unit. In this case, we see a conventional construction for lapidary Middle Persian texts: name – topo- nym – title. Such a form is presented, for instance, on the Albanian king's gem: "ahzwahen i ardan sah" (Aswagen, King of Albania).<sup>964</sup> Therefore, considering the already familiar names of the Albanian Church heads, the name *Pand/Pant* can be reconstructed in its Middle Persian spelling as *Pandy/Parity*.

Lord Pant (Pand) is listed among the patriarchs of Caucasian Albania by Movses Kalankatuatsi,<sup>965</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi,<sup>966</sup> Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi,<sup>967</sup> and Mkhitar Gosh.<sup>968</sup> But the time of his reign is not defined. The authors place him between the apostolic father Eliseus and the holy martyr Grigoris of Albania. Yet, Gadzhiyev believes that there was a mistake in the list of the first Albanian primates in the sources and is convinced that Pant's primacy should be moved to the early 6th century.<sup>969</sup>

Such determination of the relative date of Pant's patriarchy correlates with the dating of the gem in question and allows for reconstructing his name in its inscription. Based on the above, the researcher concludes that this gem could have belonged to one of the two catholicoi of Albania, Pant or Zakaria.<sup>970</sup>

<sup>963</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 472.

<sup>964</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. *Gemma-pechat tsarya Albanii Asvarena* [The Gem Seal of the Albanian King Aswagen], p. 102-119.

<sup>965</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>966</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 10, p. 157.

<sup>967</sup> Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi. *Khronograficheskaya istoriya* [The Chronographie History], Translated by K.P. Patkanov. St. Petersburg, 1869. Chapter XIX. P. 348.

<sup>968</sup> Mkhitar Gosh. *The Albanian Chronicle*, p. 476.

<sup>969</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 472-473.

<sup>970</sup> Ibid.

The gem seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan and the gem seal of the Albanian king Aswagan are highly revealing for the study of cultural and political ties between Iran and Caucasian Albania. The title inscriptions on the official seals of the head of the Christian Church of Albania and the Christian king of Albania, under whom the original Albanian script has been developed and introduced to serve the interests of the church in the first place, are written in Middle Persian language. This undoubtedly points to the significant role of the Middle Persian language and script among both the chief Albanian nobles and the religious leaders of the country, demonstrating Sasanian Iran's enormous cultural and political influence on Caucasian Albania. It is noteworthy, and no coincidence, that the central Christian symbol, a cross, on the catholicos' gem is accompanied on either side by images of the main Zoroastrian symbols, the crescent and the star, while the seal of the Christian king Aswagan depicts the Zoroastrian Sasanian symbol of "moon carriage" as a national emblem.<sup>971</sup>

The author of the *History of Albania* mentions, inter alia, that the Albanian catholicos Ukhtanes (655/668-680) was addressed as "godly archbishop of the east" in official correspondence.<sup>972</sup>

Caucasian Albania is quite often referred to as the "east," "eastern land," "eastern country" in Movses Kalankatuatsi's chronicle. For example, the author writes: "The holy apostle Thaddaeus was appointed for us easterners";<sup>973</sup> "Eliseus ... was ordained in the Holy Spirit by St. James, the brother of Our Lord, ... received the east as his diocese, ... commenced his preaching in Cholay";<sup>974</sup> "After the blessed St. Eliseus had commenced his apostolic mission from the far corners of the earth, he converted some among the eastern peoples of the north, but not all";<sup>975</sup> "In the days when God visited mankind ... he also led to the Faith the lands of the Orient which had been taught a little of the rising of the true Sun of Salvation";<sup>976</sup> "King Vachagan ... who brought salvation to ... us easterners."<sup>977</sup>

Mamedova states that the "eastern country" and Albania are synonymous in Movses Kalankatuatsi's work, understanding this name in the sense of "the eastern

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<sup>971</sup> Ibid., p. 474.

<sup>972</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 30, p. 134.

<sup>973</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 6, p. 5.

<sup>974</sup> Ibid.

<sup>975</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 9, p. 7-8.

<sup>976</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>977</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 23, p. 46-47.

edge of the Christian world in relation to Jerusalem.”<sup>978</sup>

### *II.3.5. The Dioceses of the Albanian Church in the 6th Century*<sup>979</sup>

The Universal Church consists of individual local churches, one of which was the Church of Caucasian Albania. Local churches, in turn, include bishoprics, i.e. dioceses combining parish churches and monasteries. This church structure was already formed by the end of its first centuries of history and has remained virtually unchanged ever since.

It is important to note that the administrative organization of the church is based on a territorial, rather than national, principle.<sup>980</sup> Under normal conditions, the Christians of any nationality living on the same territory make up one parish and are guided by one bishop, because, as Paul the Apostle said, “here there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all and in all.”<sup>981</sup> These rules are also enshrined in the ordinances of the Council of Aluen.<sup>982</sup>

Apostolic Canon 34 states that “the bishops of every nation must acknowledge him who is first among them . . .” but the historical context very clearly demonstrates that the “nation” in this canon means the territory occupied by a specific people. The provinces of the Roman Empire were composed of lands inhabited by the tribes, which were subsequently Hellenized or Romanized. The memory of peoples that used to dwell there was transmitted through names such as Dacia, Galatia, Thrace, or Numidia. The countless attempts made in history to put an ethnic or linguistic, rather than territorial, factor at the forefront of church organization, in particular in determining the jurisdiction of the Local Church, are canonically unlawful and have always caused serious complications and disorder. Understanding these principles helps us draw the canonical boundaries of the Albanian Church during

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<sup>972</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 531-532.

<sup>979</sup> Nikonorov Alexy, hegumen. *Dioceses of the Albanian Church by the sixth century. Ethnocultural heritage of Caucasian Albania* (collection of articles), No. 2, Baku, 2021. P. 125-137.

<sup>980</sup> Tsy-pin Vladislav, archpriest. *Kurs tserkovnogo prava* [The Course of Church Law], p. 276.

<sup>981</sup> The Epistle to the Colossians (3:11).

<sup>982</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50-54.



the various periods of its existence and set the diocesan borders in relation to the administrative ones.

The territorial demarcation of local churches is widely known to conform to the political and administrative organization, and to the state and administrative borders. Apart from obvious convenience, this principle is indirectly supported by the canons themselves. For instance, Canon 38 of the Council in Trullo reads, "If any city be renewed by imperial authority, or shall have been renewed, let the order of things ecclesiastical follow the civil and public models." Thus, based on church canons, the borders of the Albanian dioceses must coincide with the political and administrative structure of Caucasian Albania itself.

According to the *Geography* compiled by Anania Shirakatsi in the 7th century, the inner or left-bank Albania has six provinces (*gavars*). It should be mentioned that there are different copies and editions of the *Geography*, which contain an inconsistent number of left-bank Albanian provinces ranging from six to eleven. A comparison of all the manuscripts and versions of this geographical work leads to the conclusion that the left-bank Albania should be divided into six or even five provinces. This finding is supported by the evidence of Movses Kalankatuatsi, who names five ecclesiastical administrative units in total as dioceses of the Albanian Church on the left bank of the Kura. The provinces listed by Anania Shirakatsi are as follows: 1. Yekh- ni. 2. Bekh. 3. Kambyzene. 4. Shaki. 5. (V) ostan-i-Marzpan. 6. Balasagan. The first two provinces of Yekhni and Bekh are combined into one — Yekh- nibekh — in the two latest texts of the *Geography*. The Albanian historian's account suggests that there were one diocese and one bishop in this territory and their jurisdiction should have covered Kambyzene as well.<sup>983</sup> Some prefer to read both words in the name of the fifth province separately, considering them to be the names of different regions, but, according to Patkanov, when read together in Persian, *(v) ostan-i-marzpan* is translated as the "the *marzpan*'s province," i.e. in this case it is reasonable to assume that this word refers to the province of Cholay as the residence of Sasanian governors.<sup>984</sup>

The following provinces were located on the right bank of the Kura (from northwest to southeast): Orkhistene (Artsakh), Otene (Utik), and Pay- takaran.

<sup>983</sup> Hewsen Robert H. *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*. Chicago, 2001. Maps 62,64. P. 73, 75.

<sup>984</sup> Moisey Khorensky. *Armianskaya geografiya VII veka po R. K.* [The Armenian Geography of the 7th Century CE], p. 41.

It is most likely that Orkhistene encompassed the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, geographically including the eastern part of the Lesser Caucasus, the Karabakh Range, and the Karabakh Highlands. According to Anania Shirakatsi, the province consisted of 14 cantons. Hewsen places the diocese of Mec Irank in the northern part of this province (the modern-day Kalbajar District) and the diocese of Amaras and Haband in the southeast (the modern-day Khojavend District). However, we must also include the diocese of Mec Kueank (Mec Kolmank) in this province, which covered the territory of the present-day Aghdam District and was possibly centered in the Vankasar Monastery.

The province of Otene occupied a part of the Lesser Caucasus and the territory of lowland Karabakh, stretching along the right bank of the Kura River from the border with Iberia (Georgia) in the northwest to the Aras River in the southeast. Based on Anania Shirakatsi's *Geography*, the province consisted of 8 cantons. It included the archdiocese of Partaw (previously the diocese of Uti) and the diocese of Gardman (the modern-day Gadabay District). Hewsen places the diocese of Hashu (Yashu, Hosh), centered in Sham- kir, in the extreme northwest of the province that naturally bordered on the diocese of Partaw by the Kurekchay River.

The details of structural divisions of the Albanian Church can be found in the conciliar documents and official letters retained by the Albanian chronicler.

Movses Kalankatuatsi presents the letter of the Armenian catholicos Yovhannes II (557-574) to the Albanian catholicos Ter Abas (552-596) in Chapter 7 of Book 2 of the *History of Albania*. The letter concerning the confirmation of the faith was sent due to the spreading and growing influence of Nestorianism in Caucasian Albania.

In fact, the Armenian catholicos Yovhannes is known to have written two letters, in which he requests that the spiritual shepherds of the Eastern Land take the necessary measures against the Nestorians. One of them is this letter included by Movses Kalankatuatsi in Book Two of the *History of Albania*, the other one is addressed to Mihr-Artashir, ruler of Syunik, and Bishop Vrtanes. M. Ormanian attributes both letters,<sup>985</sup> preserved in the *Book of Letters*,<sup>986</sup> to the *marzpanate* period of Persian Suren (564-572) in Armenia, who was notorious for his cruelty.

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<sup>985</sup> *The Book of Letters*. Armenian text with Georgian translation by Z.N. Alexidze. Tbilisi, 1968. P. 1000  
<sup>986</sup> 78, 81.  
 others.

This letter is of interest for us, because it lists the names of Albanian bishops and, accordingly, the episcopal sees available in Albania at the time of this document's writing, i.e. by the mid-6th century:

**Greetings and blessings to my good, true, godly, and beloved brother and colleague the Lord Abas,<sup>987</sup> catholicos of Albania, and to Movses, bishop of Bakha- lat, Grigor, bishop of Kapalak, Hromik, bishop of Amaras, Timote, bishop of Balasakan, Ambakum, bishop of Shake, Yovhanik, bishop of Gardman, and Le- wond, bishop of Mec Kolmank, from Yovhannes, catholicos of Armenia, Abraham, bishop of Taron, Grigor, bishop of the *mardpet*, Stepannos, bishop of Tayk, Mashtots, bishop of the Khorkhorunik, Giwt, bishop of Vanand, Abdishoy, bishop of Asorestan, Pap, bishop of the Amatunik, Kristapor, bishop of the Rshtunik, Sekundos, bishop of Mokka, and all the other bishops of Armenia.<sup>988</sup>**

The text refers to eight Albanian bishops:

1. Ter Abas, catholicos of Albania (archbishop of Partaw).
2. Movses, bishop of Bakhalat.
3. Grigor, bishop of Kapalak.
4. Hromik, bishop of Amaras.
5. Timote, bishop of Balasakan.
6. Ambakum, bishop of Shaki.
7. Yovhanik, bishop of Gardman.
8. Lewond, bishop of Mec Kolmank.

All the listed dioceses were located both in the interfluvium of the Kura and Aras (Partaw- Barda, Amaras, Gardman, Mec Kueank) and on the left bank of the Kura (Kapolak-Qabala, Shaki, Bakhalat, and Balasakan).

It should be noted that the order of enumeration of bishops is probably related not to the precedence of sees (except for the archbishop of Partaw), but to the precedence of bishops themselves, as evidenced by the practice of later epistolary church documents.

Based on the information provided in the sources and the findings of the previous chapter, it can be argued that the Albanian Church also includ-

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<sup>987</sup> Ter Abas was the Catholicos of Aluank. Here he was called catholicos, although in the original letter (*Book of Letters*, p. 81) he was referred to as Bishop of Partaw. He was elevated to the catholicos throne of Aluank in 552. His reign lasted 44 years, i.e. until 596.

<sup>1002</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

ed the dioceses of the autonomous provinces of Lpinia and Chola, administered by the archbishop of Partaw, catholicos of Albania.<sup>989</sup>

In addition to these ecclesiastical administrative units, it is necessary to mention the diocese of the Huns that was under the jurisdiction of the head of the Albanian Church.<sup>990</sup>

The list is supplemented by the details of bishops, who participated in the Council of Aluen in 488: bishop of Hashu (Hosh, Yashu), bishops of Yeut, bishop of Uti, and bishop of Tsri.<sup>991 992</sup> We will discuss the issues associated with the dioceses of Hashu, Yeut, and Tsri below.

The Albanian historian also points out that Catholicos Abas was the bishop of Mec Irank before his election to the patriarchal throne<sup>1005</sup> and provides a document (a letter from the Armenian bishops compiled by Vrtanes Kertol in response to a message from Mkhitar, bishop of Amaras), referring to the bishop in this see: "To you ... the new disciples and historians of the modern age in the north who listen to all things with discrimination, above all that which concerns the cultivation of consistency in thought, to you, Lord Mkhitar, bishop of Amaras, Simeon, bishop of Mec Irank, and other likeminded bishops of the holy church, and to the nobles and others of the Albanian people."<sup>993</sup>

Thus, the ecclesiastical and administrative organization of the Albanian Church seems to be as follows:

1. Archdiocese of Partaw.
2. Diocese of Chola/Chora (province of the Maskuts).
3. Diocese of Lpinia.
4. Diocese of Kabala.
5. Diocese of Bakhalat and Bekh/Yekhni-Bekh.
6. Diocese of Shaki.
7. Diocese of Paytakaran and Balasagan.
8. Diocese of Amaras and Haband.
9. Diocese of Gardman.
10. Diocese of Uti.
11. Diocese of Mec Kueank.
12. Diocese of Mec Irank.
13. Diocese of Hashu (Hosh, Yashu).

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<sup>989</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 15, p. 103.

<sup>990</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapters 41,45, p. 160-166,169-171.

<sup>991</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50.

<sup>992</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>1007</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 49, p. 178.

14. Diocese of Tsri (Chilbk).
15. Diocese of the Huns.
16. Diocese of Yeut.

We can add to this list the metropolis of Syunik, which was actually under the jurisdiction of the Albanian Church before the reign of the Armenian catholicos Abraham I (607-615) in the second half of the 6th century, receiving ordination and holy myrrh from the Albanian primate:

**The Persians and the Greeks had divided Armenia and Lord Movses was on the throne of St. Gregory at Dwin, while a certain Yohan was set up close by on the Greek side in opposition. During this schism of the patriarchate, however, the people of Siwnik scorned it and submitted to neither side following the command of their bishop, the virtuous Petros, who, when he died, instructed his diocese to accept consecration and the holy chrism from the Albanians until such time as the see of St. Gregory should be reunited. Vrtanes was accordingly consecrated bishop by Zakaria, the holy patriarch of Albania, and Siwnik received the oil from the Albanians year after year until the opposition came to an end and Abraham ruled alone over the patriarchal see.<sup>994</sup>**

Now, let us take a closer look at the dioceses of the Albanian Church.

#### • Archdiocese of Partaw

Partaw (Barda), originally Perozapat, is a city thought to have been founded in the 5th century by the Albanian king Vache II at the behest of the Sasanian shahanshah Peroz and named after the latter.<sup>995</sup> The medieval city was located a few kilometers from modern-day Barda. According to Movses Kalankatuatsi's account, since its foundation Partaw has become the capital city of Caucasian Albania and the residence of the last Albanian kings, the Arsacids; then the great princes, the Mihranids; followed by the Persian governors, *marzpanes*, and the catholicoi of Albania from the 6th to the 9th centuries.

The Albanian chronicler reports this: "In the second year of Khosrov, king of kings, when they established the beginning of the Armenian era, the throne of the Albanian patriarchate was transferred from the town of Cholay

<sup>1008</sup>

Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 48, p. 176.

<sup>1009</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 15, p. 25.

to the capital Partaw.”<sup>996</sup> The researchers propose to correct the “second year of Khosrov” in the message to the twentieth one, since the first year of the Armenian calendar (551) corresponds to the twentieth year of the reign of Shahanshah Khosrow I Anushirvan (531-579).

The above chapter on the Council of Aluen includes Dzhaferov’s quite objective arguments that Partaw could have been founded already in the 4th century and had been the capital of the Albanian Kingdom and the residence of the primate of the Albanian Church by the early 5th century.

The author of Book 3 of the *History of Albania* indicates that the cathedral of the Albanian archbishops in Partaw was consecrated in honor of St. Gregory the Illuminator.<sup>997</sup> The relics of the holy martyr Manuk,<sup>998</sup> tortured to death in 712 under Abdul Aziz Bahili (ruler of Ganja and Shirvan), lay in this temple.

Several councils of the Albanian Church assembled in Partaw: the council of May 704<sup>999</sup> was convened at the request of the Armenian catholicos Yeghia Archishetsi, with the approval of Caliph Abd al-Malik, to try the Albanian catholicos Nerses Bakur. The council was attended by 4 Albanian bishops. It elected the new catholicos Simeon. The council resulted in the signing of a treaty between Albania, Armenia, and the Caliphate. The council of 768 was convoked by the Albanian catholicos David II (767-776).<sup>1000</sup>

The canonical territory of the diocese of Partaw included the following historical cantons of the right-bank province of Otene (Utik): Uti Aranjak and Aranrot (perhaps Aghue, Tri, and Rotparsean), which correspond to present-day Barda, Aghdam, and partially Tartar (perhaps partially Aghjaba-di and Beylagan) Districts of Azerbaijan.

Movses Kalankatuatsi also points out that there was a chorepiscopus in the archdiocese of Partaw in 680.<sup>1001</sup>

The compiler of Book 3 of the *History of Albania* has recorded a detailed list of archbishops who occupied the see of Partaw from 552 to the end of the 10th century (988).<sup>1002</sup> 32 prelates are documented for the given period.

<sup>996</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 4, p. 70.

<sup>997</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 16, p. 208.

<sup>998</sup> Ibid.

<sup>999</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapters 7-10, p. 192-198.

<sup>1000</sup> The council is mentioned in Matenadaran Manuscript No. 6409, p. 946. Quoted from: Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX w.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 223-226.

<sup>1001</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 32, p. 137.

<sup>1002</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228-231.

The Gis Monastery, founded by the apostolic father Eliseus, used to be located at the site of the diocese of Partaw, and at this very place was a famous village of Kalankatuk, from which the Albanian historian Movses Kalankatuatsi originated. The ruins of the basilica in Giaur Kala (6th century) have survived at the site of the former diocese of Partaw.

### • Archdiocese of Chola/Chora (province of the Maskuts)

Chola/Chora was a city and province of the same name in the northeast of Caucasian Albania, identified with Derbent and the region (kingdom) of the Maskuts. The historians note that Derbent has always been a significant and important city, a strategic stronghold of the Albanians and Sassanids in the Caucasus. Movses Kalankatuatsi relates that the Gospel was preached in Chola by St. Grigoris of Albania<sup>1003</sup> and Mesrop Mashtots.<sup>1004</sup> When the Kingdom of Albania was incorporated into the Sassanid Empire and the political center of the *marzpanate* of Albania was established in Chora from 428 to 552, the residence of the head of the Albanian Church moved to this city. After the capital and the patriarchal seat had been transferred to Partaw, the primate of the Albanian Church received the new title *Catholicos of Albania, Lpink, and Cholay*,<sup>1005</sup> making it clear that the city and the region, which had previously been the archdiocese of the Albanian catholicos in ecclesiastical terms, remained under his jurisdiction and archpastoral administration.

According to researchers, the cathedral of the Albanian primate in Chola (Derbent) could have been either the temple of the 5th-century citadel Naryn-Kala,<sup>1006</sup> turned into a water storage tank,<sup>1007</sup> or the 6th-century temple, which currently houses the Juma Mosque of Derbent.<sup>1008</sup>

<sup>1003</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 22-23.

<sup>1004</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 55.

<sup>1005</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 15, p. 103.

<sup>1006</sup> Kudryavtsev A. A. O khrisianstve v Derbente [On Christianity in Derbent]. *X Krupnovskiye chteniya po arkhologii Severnogo Kavkaza* [The 10th Krupnov Readings on the Archaeology of the North Caucasus]. Moscow, 1980. R 48-51.

<sup>1007</sup> There is still no reliable evidence that the ancient underground tank of the Naryn-Kala citadel used to be a temple.

<sup>1008</sup> Khanbabayev K.M. Khrisianstvo v Dagestane v IV-XVIII w. [Christianity in Dagestan in the 4th-18th centuries], *Sobraniye trudov Tsentra sistemnykh regionalnykh issledovaniy i prognozirovaniya ISPI RAN. Yuzhnorossiyskoye obozreniye* [The Collected Papers of the Center of Systematic Regional Studies and Forecasting of the Institute of Social and Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. South-Russian Review], Vol. 20, 2004; Arta- monov M.I. Drevny Derbent [Ancient Derbent], *Sovetskaya arkhologiya* [Soviet Archaeology], Vol. VIII, 1946. P. 143.

### • Diocese of Lpinia

The canonical authority of the primate of the Albanian Church outside his own diocese, which included Partaw (Barda) and its immediate surroundings, as well as Chora/Chola, the former capital of the *marzpanate*, also extended to Lpinia, a semi-independent province that became part of Caucasian Albania.<sup>1009</sup>

The location of Lpinia has not been determined in historical geography yet. Based on the analysis of various sources and opinions of researchers, we place it between inner Albania and Kaspiane in the area of Shemakha.

Sources point to the fact that Lpinia used to be a kingdom,<sup>1010</sup> which determined its special political position. Movses Kalankatuatsi attests that St. Mesrop Mashtots enlightened this province by preaching the Gospel.<sup>1011</sup>

As follows from the context of the *Albanian Chronicle*, the archbishop of Partaw, like the Eastern patriarchs, had the right of stauropegeion,<sup>1012</sup> actually retaining the canonical administration of various ecclesiastical regions (Partaw, Chora, Lpinia, Balasagan) with a special status within the Albanian state.

### • Diocese of Kabala

Kabala (Qabala, Kabalaka) was the ancient capital of Caucasian Albania that was first mentioned by the Roman author Pliny the Elder.<sup>1013</sup> From 510, the city served as the residence of Persian *marzpan*s for some time.<sup>1014</sup> From the early 4th century, i.e. from the time of the Christianization of Caucasian Albania, Kabala was the patriarchal seat of the Albanian Church. After the archiepiscopal see had been transferred to Chora (Derbent) following the move of the *marzpan*'s residence in 462, Kabala became an ordinary diocese headed by its bishop.<sup>1015</sup>

The jurisdiction of the diocese of Kabala applied to the following provinces

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<sup>1009</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 15, p. 103; Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>1010</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 3, p. 128; Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 2, p. 67.

<sup>1011</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 55.

<sup>1012</sup> Stauropegeion is a status assigned to the church units, monasteries, lavras, and brotherhoods, as well as cathedrals and theological schools, which makes them independent of local diocesan authorities and subordinate directly to the patriarch or synod.

<sup>1013</sup> Pliny. *Natural History*, Book VI, Chapter XI, p. 358.

<sup>1014</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i alban* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 253, 316.

<sup>1015</sup> Akopian A. A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources], p. 274.



(according to the extensive edition of Anania Shirakatsi's *Geography*): Ostan (Kabalak), Hambasi, Gelawu, and Hejeri.

Movses Kalankatuatsi mentions several Kabala bishops: Manase (487-488),<sup>1016</sup> Grigor (the second half of the 6th century),<sup>1017</sup> and Yovhannes (704).<sup>1018</sup> The author of Book 3 of the *History of Albania* also notes that three primates of the Albanian Church — the archbishops of Partaw — were elected to the patriarchal throne from the Kabala bishops: Matte (776-777), Dawit III (821-849), and Dawit IV (923-930).<sup>1019</sup>

### • Diocese of Bakhalat and Yekhni-Bekh

Movses, bishop of Bakhalat, was referred to only once in the letter from Catholicos Yovhannes in 568.<sup>1020</sup>

Yeremian identifies Bakhalat with the village of Bakhtalo (Bakhmatly) in the Zagatala District of Azerbaijan.<sup>1021</sup> Hewsen seems to agree with this point of view and places Bakhalat on his maps of Caucasian Albania in the historical province of Yekhni-Bekh (the modern-day Zagatala, Balakan, and Qakh Districts, as well as the eastern part of Kakheti),<sup>1022</sup> which is mentioned in Anania Shirakatsi's *Geography* among six Albanian provinces situated on the left bank of the Kura.<sup>1023</sup>

The diocese of Bakhalat also encompassed the territory of Kambysene, which was located south of Yekhni-Bekh beyond the Alazani River and therefore occupied the territory between the Greater Caucasus in the north and the Kura in the south, the Qabala and Alazani Rivers in the west and

<sup>1016</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50.

<sup>1017</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

<sup>1018</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapters 3,8, p. 190,194.

<sup>1019</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 230-231.

<sup>1020</sup> *The Book of Letters*, p. 81; Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

<sup>1021</sup> Yeremian S.T. Politicheskaya istoriya Albanii III – VII w. [The Political History of Albania in the 3rd-7th centuries]. *Ocherki istorii SSSR. III-IX w.* [Essays on the History of the USSR. The 3rd-9th centuries]. Moscow, 1958. P. 324.

<sup>1022</sup> Hewsen Robert H. *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, Maps 62,64, p. 73,75.

<sup>1023</sup> Ananias of Shirak. *The Geography*, Chapter V, §21, p. 59.

the Kurmukhchay River in the east. For the sake of objectivity, it should be noted that attempts are being made to locate Bakhalat in Artsakh, at the site of the village of Bata in the Yevlakh District,<sup>1024</sup> or in the province of Chola (Derbent).<sup>1025</sup>

The remains of nearly 20 temples and monuments have survived on the territory of the historical province of Yekhni-Bekh: the village of Bukhovlu (7th-8th centuries), the village of Pipan (7th-8th centuries), the village of Kum (5th-6th centuries), the village of Lekit (5th-6th centuries), Edti Kilse in the same village of Lekit (6th century), the Mamruk Church on Mount Armatay (4th-5th centuries), the village of Katekh (5th century, mentioned since 1020), the Ayritala Church in the village of Khanifa (5th-9th-14th centuries), the village of Mazymgaray (5th-6th centuries), the village of Mukha-kh (4th-5th centuries), the village of Pashan (4th-5th centuries), the village of Tyulyu (5th-7th centuries), the village of Khalatala (5th-9th centuries), St. George's Church in the village of Kurmukh (12th century), the Arylygbina temple complex in the village of Gullar (13th century), the village of Matsekh (Mazykh), the village of Gebizdere, the village of Yukhary Tala, and the village of Yukhary Chardakhlar.

#### • Diocese of Shaki

Shaki was a historical region of Caucasian Albania, the fourth of six provinces on the left bank of the Kura listed by Anania Shirakatsi. Describing this territory, the historians sometimes mix or confuse the province of Shaki on the left bank of the Kura with the area situated south of Shaki beyond the Kura, which is called Shakashen (the province of Otene) and attested to have been previously inhabited by Iranian-speaking Scythians, who joined the union of Albanian tribes. The region encompassed the territory of the modern-day Shaki and Oghuz Districts of Azerbaijan, enclosed by the Kurmukhchay and Alazani Rivers in the west and the Turyanchay (Turyan) River in the east, while reaching the Kura in the south.

The *History of Albania*, following the *Book of Letters*, mentions a number of prelates at the see of Shaki such as Bishop Ambakum<sup>1026</sup> (mid-6th century),

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<sup>1024</sup> Geyushev R.B. *Khristianstvo v Kavkazskoy Albanii* [Christianity in Caucasian Albania], p. 36-37.

<sup>1025</sup> Akopian A.A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources], p. 131.

<sup>1040</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

Bishop Eliazar<sup>1027</sup> elected to the patriarchal throne (680-686), and Lord Mi- kayel<sup>1028</sup> (705-742), who was a deacon in Shaki before being consecrated ca- tholikos of Albania.

Several monuments of the Albanian temple architecture have survived in the territory of the diocese of Shaki: the St. Eliseus Church in Kish (which may have been previously named after the Holy Mother of God) (1st-4th- 10th-12th centuries), a temple in the village of Dzhalut (5th-6th centuries), the Yagysh Arakela Church, a temple in Oghuz, the Orta-Zayzid Church (10th century), a temple in the village of Bideiz (12th century), and a church in the village of Emily (4th-5th centuries).

### • Diocese of Paytakaran and Balasagan

The province of Balasagan, identified with ancient Kaspiane by the historians, was situated in the southeast of inner Albania. There are two scholarly opinions on the location of this province. Some historians believe the lands of Bazgun – Balasagan to have stretched along the coast of the Caspian Sea from the Absheron Peninsula in the north to the mouth of the Kura in the south.<sup>1029</sup> Others equate Balasagan with the province of Paytakaran that occupied the territory of the Mughan plain, being surrounded by the Kura in the north (from the Kura-Aras confluence to the mouth) and bounded by the Talysh Mountains in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east.<sup>1030</sup> It has been suggested that Balasagan may have included both Paytakaran and the current Absheron Peninsula.<sup>1031</sup> At least Anania Shirakatsi, who compiled the geographical description of Asia and the Caucasus in the early 7th century, did not identify Balasagan with Paytakaran, naming the former among ancient Albanian provinces and the latter among those taken from Armenia.<sup>1032</sup>

Zacharias of Mytilene's *Chronicle* (555) calls this area Christian and says that it has its own king and language.<sup>1033</sup> This information is confirmed by Movses Kalankatuatsi.<sup>1034</sup> Since the reign of the Albanian king Vachagan III (487-510), the

<sup>1027</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 32, p. 137.

<sup>1028</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 230.

<sup>1029</sup> Hewsen Robert H. *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, Map 77; Ulubabian B.A. O grani tsakh drev- nego Agvanka [On the Borders of Ancient Aghuank], *Vestnik Yerevanskogo universiteta* [Bulletin of the Yerevan University], No. 1, 1977. P. 117; Idem. O lokalizatsii Balasakana [On the Location of Balasagan], p. 178-182.

<sup>1030</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 255.

<sup>1031</sup> Ashurbeyli S.A. *Gosudarstvo Shirvanshakhov* [The State of the Shirvanshakhs]. Baku, 1983. P.26.

<sup>1032</sup> Ananias of Shirak. *The Geography*, Chapter V, §21-22, p. 59A, Footnote 101A, p. 248.

<sup>1033</sup> Zachariah of Mitylene. *The Syriac Chronicle*, Book XII, Chapter VII, p. 328.

<sup>1034</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 2, p. 67.

province of Paytakaran has been part of Caucasian Albania. The capital city of the province, the eponymous Paytakaran (Beylagan), was located near the settlement of Oren-Kala (*Qronqala*) in Azerbaijan.<sup>1035</sup> However, some historians hold that the city of Paytakaran should be sought on the bank of the dried-up arm of the Aras, west of the modern city of Salyan.<sup>1036</sup>

The ruler of Paytakaran, the Maskut king Sanatrak, martyred St. Grigoris of Albania around 330.<sup>1037</sup> According to Koriun, Mesrop Mashtots was aided by Moushegh, Bishop of Balasagan, when preaching in the region, after which he “took leave of the Albanian King, the Bishop, and the Church” and went to Iberia.<sup>1038</sup> Mashtots’ sermon in Balasagan is mentioned by both Movses Khorenatsi<sup>1039</sup> and Movses Kalankatuatsi.<sup>1040</sup>

Analyzing the evidence contained in written sources, we find that Balasagan was an extremely important state, political, territorial, and administrative unit of the East Caucasus.

It is also known for the gem seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan, a seal which Gadzhiyev tends to date to the 6th century.<sup>1041</sup> This artifact may point at the province’s special position not only for the Albanian state, but also for the Albanian Church. The political situation and the size of the province, which has historically encompassed 12 cantons, give us reason to believe that Paytakaran — Balasagan could have been a metropolis within the Albanian catholicosate during its heyday.

Timote, bishop of Balasagan, is referred to in the letter to the Albanian catholicos Abas (552-596).<sup>1042</sup>

In addition to the diocese of the Albanian Church, there was a Nestori- an

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<sup>1035</sup> Mamed-zade K.M. *Stroitelnoye iskusstvo Azerbaydzhana* [The Architecture of Azerbaijan]. Baku, 1983. P. 25.

<sup>1036</sup> Arutyunian B.A. Gorod Paytakaran i yego lokalizatsiya [The City of Paytakaran and Its Location]. *Vestnik obshchestvennykh nauk AN ArmSSR* [Bulletin of the Social Sciences of the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR], No. 12. Yerevan, 1981. P. 61-76; Akopian A.A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources], p. 103-104.

<sup>1037</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 6, p. 13-14; Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*. Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 256; Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 22-23.

<sup>1038</sup> Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*, Chapter XVII, p. 41-42.

<sup>1039</sup> Moses Khorenatsi. *History of the Armenians*. Book 3, Chapter 60, p. 333.

<sup>1040</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 55 (the Albanian historian refers to Balasagan as Kaspk/Kaspiane here).

<sup>1041</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albani i Balasakana [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 465-479.

<sup>1042</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

diocese of the Persian Church of the East in Balasagan at the same time (540-554). We know the names of two bishops, John and James, from the documents of Nestorian councils.<sup>1043</sup> It can be assumed that the jurisdiction of the Albanian bishop extended to the Albanian province of Balasagan — Bazgun proper, while the Nestorian diocese was situated in Paytakaran administratively subordinate to Atrpatakan from time to time.

### • Diocese of Amaras and Haband

Haband and the village of Amaras were one of 12 cantons of the province of Orkhistene (Artsakh, Lesser Syunik, Khachen) which lay on the right bank of the Kura River and occupied the territory of the modern-day Khojav- end and Jabrayil Districts of Azerbaijan.

According to accounts from Faustus of Byzantium and Movses Kalankatuatsi, St. Gregory the Illuminator preached the gospel in Haband and founded a place of worship in Amaras.<sup>1044</sup> Gregory the Illuminator's grandson Grigoris, bishop of Albania and Iberia, was killed by the pagan Maskuts and buried in Amaras around 338. The relics of the holy martyr Grigoris were discovered in 489 under the Albanian king Vachagan III, who erected a chapel over them and restored the previous church, which had been destroyed by that time.<sup>1045</sup> In the early 5th century, Mesrop Mashtots set up the first school in Amaras. The diocese of Amaras appears to have been established during the reign of King Vachagan III. Describing the king's arrival in Amaras, Movses Kalankatuatsi emphasizes, "At that time there was no bishop in Amaras."<sup>1046</sup> The "king of the Romans" gave the Right Hand of St. Gregory the Illuminator stored in Constantinople to the bishop of Amaras.

<sup>1043</sup> Kasumova S.Y. *Khristianstvo v Azerbaydzhane v rannem Srednevekovye* [Christianity in Azerbaijan in the Early Middle Ages], p. 44.

<sup>1044</sup> Pawstos Buzand. *History of the Armenians*, Book 3, Chapter 6, p. 14; Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 21,23.

<sup>1045</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapters 21-22, p. 38-43.

<sup>1046</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 21, p. 42.

During the Middle Ages, Amaras was known as a monastery and large scriptorium. Amaras was frequently destroyed (demolished by Tamerlane in 1387) and restored many times. A vaulted tomb, made of drafted stones and covered with ornaments typical of the 5th century, has survived beneath the apse built in 1858.<sup>1047</sup>

The jurisdiction of the diocese of Amaras extended to the historical provinces of Miws-Haband, Sisakan-Ostan, Mukhank, and Kharchlawnk.

We know the following bishops of Amaras and Haband: Garnik<sup>1048</sup> (the turn of the 5th-6th centuries), Romik/Hromik<sup>1049</sup> (mid-6th century),<sup>1050</sup> Mkhitar<sup>1051</sup> (early 7th century), Sahak<sup>1052</sup> (the turn of the 7th-8th centuries), and Serop<sup>1053</sup> (the 2nd quarter of the 9th century).

Three primates of the Albanian Church occupied the see of Amaras before being elected to the patriarchal throne: Yovhan (644-655/668), Yovsep I (746-763), and Dawit (763-767).

Apart from the Amaras Monastery (4th-5th centuries), several monuments have survived on the historical territory of the diocese of Amaras until now: the Katarovank Monastery (5th-17th centuries), a complex on the top of Mount Ziyarat (Dizapayt) where the sons of the Maskut king Sanatruk — Moses, Daniel, Elias — as well as other Christians (the disciples of St. Grigoris of Albania) were martyred in the '30s of the 4th century; the Okhty Drni (Seven Doors) Church (6th-7th centuries), which is considered unique because of its intricate centric plan and belongs to a group of very rare round multi-apse buildings; the Bri Yeghtsi Monastery in the village of Chorakli (7th-12th-13th centuries); the Church of the Gtichavank (Seven Brothers) Monastery near the village of Tug (4th-13th centuries), which was under the special protection of the Arsacid princes; the Spitak Khach Monastery (Spitagh Tag) in the village of Chinarli (14th-18th centuries); the Gtich Taglar Monastery (13th century); and St. Jacob Kavak's Monastery.

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<sup>1047</sup> Kazarian A.Y. Amaras, p. 98.

<sup>i62</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 5, p. 70.

<sup>1049</sup> K.P. Patkanov refers to the bishop of Amaras as Movses.

<sup>1050</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 49, p. 178.

<sup>1052</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapters 3,8, p. 190,194.

<sup>1067</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 19, p. 215.

### • Diocese of Gardman

Gardman was one of eight cantons of the province of Otene (Utik), which occupied the territory of the modern-day Gadabay and Dashkasan Districts. The principality of Gardman had a strategically and politically important position on the western borders of Caucasian Albania. From the 6th to the 9th centuries, the canton was an ancestral estate of the Eranshahik princes of Albania from the Mihranid dynasty.<sup>1054</sup> The members of this dynasty bore the title “lord of Gardman and prince of Albania.”<sup>1055</sup>

St. Mesrop Mashtots, as attested by Koriun, preached in Gardman and was cordially welcomed by Prince Khours of Gardman.<sup>1056</sup>

In addition to Gardman itself, the diocese of Gardman had jurisdiction over the neighboring cantons of Kolt and Kustiparnes.

The Albanian chronicler recounts that the great prince Juansher built a magnificent temple in Gardman for “the entire land of Albania,” in which he addressed God with the words of a beautiful prayer filled with love for his country and people:

**O Lord, since Thou didst forgive Thy most sinful servant and grantedst him the cross from which, fastened by nails, Thou didst hang on earth, send into this temple the grace of Thy holy spirit, and adorn and beautify it as Thou didst the temple of Solomon with the spiritual cloud of Thy glory as it were thick darkness. Make it a house for the prayers and supplications of those who dwell on the shores of the sea in the east, that whosoever worships Thy countenance with offerings in this place may be heard by Thee from on high and his prayers be granted. If this entire land of Albania come with one accord to glorify Thy name in this house, mayst Thou by the divine power of the cross close the gates of the enemies and stop the marauders in their battles. Command a fructifying wind to blow through this land that the vine and the fig-tree and all the plants of the fields may bear fruit in abundant fertility and remain undisturbed in this beloved land.**<sup>1057</sup>

Dating from the 5th century, the diocese of Gardman was specified in the *List of Dioceses*,<sup>1058</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi’s work, and the documents of the Council of

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 17, p. 108-109.

<sup>1055</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 21, p. 117.

<sup>1056</sup> Koriun. *The Life of Mashtots*, Chapter XVIII, p. 42.

Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 25, p. 121.

<sup>1058</sup> The *List of Dioceses* created, as legend has it, by St. Gregory the Illuminator is a unique source preserved in Ukhtanes’ *History of Armenia* and compiled in reality between 385 and 428

<sup>1071</sup>

Partaw of 706/707.

Movses Kalankatuatsi's source refers to Bishops Yovhanik of Gardman<sup>1059</sup> (mid-6th century) and Eliazar<sup>1060</sup> (since 686), as well as the Albanian catholicoi, who previously occupied the see of Gardman: Nerses Bakur (686- 704), Teodoros (781-785), Gagik (948-958), and Petros (971-989).<sup>1061</sup> Step-panos, bishop of Gardman, is mentioned in the documents, together with Matusala, bishop of Syunik, as having joined the Dyophysite party after the Council of Theodosiopolis in 632.<sup>1062</sup> In the 10th century, during the period preceding the formation of the kingdom of Parisos in the region, three abbots from the Parisos Monastery, as evidenced by the author of Book Three of the *History of Albania*, were elected to the throne of the Albanian catholicoi: Dawit VI (965-971), and Movses III (989-995).

The following monuments have survived on the historical territory of the diocese of Gardman: the Ayrivank Church (7th-10th centuries), the ruins of the Khamshivank Monastery in the village of Beyuk-Karamurad (9th-10th-13th centuries), and the Charek Monastery on the left bank of the Shamkirchay River (13th century).

#### • Diocese of Uti

The bishop of Uti appears only once in the documents known to us, namely in the list of priests, who participated in the work of the Council of Aluen of 488.<sup>1063</sup> It was the time when the residence of the primate of the Albanian Church was in Chora; nevertheless, Movses Kalankatuatsi calls Shuphalishoy "archbishop of Partaw," which may seem anachronistic. If the generally accepted dating of the council is correct, then Shuphalishoy was not related to Partaw, and the presence of the bishop of Uti at the council points to the prelate, who canonically governed the vast right-bank region of Caucasian Albania that housed the summer residence of the Albanian kings.

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(Ukhtanes. *History of Armenia*, Part I, Chapter 70, p. 85-86).

<sup>1059</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 7, p. 72.

<sup>1060</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 190.

<sup>1061</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 229-231.

<sup>1062</sup> Garitte G. La narratio de rebus Armeniae, p. 44.

<sup>1063</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50.



On top of it, we must remember that the Albanian chronicler, who copied the acts of the Council of Aluen from archival documents kept in the royal or patriarchal library, missed or did not find the titles of two clerics involved in the conciliar meetings, Bishops Anania and Sahak. These names may have been erased or dropped out of the text used by the author of the *History of Albania* or his scribes. This fact suggests that there had been two more episcopal sees in Caucasian Albania by the 5th century and in an earlier period.

Incidentally, the Albanian chronicler refers to another diocese that should have been located in the province of Uti and was associated with a place called Gis during the reign of Catholicos Eliazar (680-686): "God sent a vision to the blessed patriarch Eliazar exhorting him not to delay and be late for the consecration of the cross of Christ, and Eliazar rose early in the morning and made haste to the appointed church in the diocese of the province (*nahang*) of Gis."<sup>1064</sup> This diocese must have been centered in Gis, a site consecrated by many important events for Albania and its Church.

#### • Diocese of Mec Irank

Mec Irank (Greater Arran, al-Misryan in al-Baladhuri's work<sup>1065</sup>) is one of 12 historical cantons of the right-bank province of Orkhistene (Artsakh). The canton occupied the lands of the present-day Kalbajar District of Azerbaijan.

The jurisdiction of the diocese of Mec Irank included three historical regions: Mec Arank, Parsakank, and Piank.

The Albanian historian lists among the bishops of Mec Irank such prelates as Simeon<sup>1066</sup> (early 7th century), Yovel<sup>1067</sup> (the last third of the 7th century), and Abas<sup>1068</sup> (552-596), who became the primate of the Albanian Church.

Later, starting from the 14th century, the diocese of Mec Irank was the seat of Albanian catholicoi and left us as a legacy their cathedral monastery Gandzasar (10th-13th centuries) named after St. John the Baptist, a masterpiece of the Albanian temple architecture.

Alongside the Gandzasar Monastery, the historical territory of the diocese of Mec Irank encompasses the Khutavank (Dadivank) Monastery erect-

<sup>1064</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 33, p. 141.

<sup>1065</sup> al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*, Part IV, Chapter I, p. 318.

<sup>1066</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 49, p. 178.

<sup>1067</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 29, p. 131.

<sup>1082</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

ed over the burial place of St. Dadi (Thaddaeus), a disciple of Thaddaeus the Apostle, in the 6th century and mentioned since the 9th century, although present-day structures date back to the 13th century. Another significant spiritual center of the diocese is the Aghoghlan Basilica Monastery constructed in the 5th-6th centuries. An equally important monument is the Yerek Mankunk Monastery built by Hasan Jalal's rivals, the Melik-Israyelian princes of Jraberd, also in the 13th century. It housed the anti-catholicosate of the Albanian Gandzasar.

- Diocese of Mec Kueank

Mec Kueank (Greater Kuank/Kolmank, al-Misfawan in al-Baladhuri's work<sup>1069</sup>) is one of 12 historical cantons of the right-bank province of Orkh- istene (Artsakh). The canton was situated on the territory of the present-day Aghdam and Tartar Districts of Azerbaijan and included, in addition to Mec Kueank, the historical areas of Vakunik and Berdajor.

This canton is mentioned by Movses Kalankatuatsi because of a silver reliquary hidden in its land and containing a piece of the Cross, which Mesrop Mashtots brought from Jerusalem; here his disciples, who may have organized a brotherhood or monastic abode, together with priests arriving from Jerusalem, were martyred by the Huns in the mountain gorge of Astel Blur and in the forest valley of Chlakh on the Holy Easter Day.<sup>1070</sup>

The Albanian chronicler lists the following bishops of Mec Kueank: Dawit<sup>1071</sup> (the last third of the 7th century), Israyel<sup>1072</sup> (the turn of the 7th-8th centuries), the illuminator of the Hunnic land, Samuel<sup>1073</sup> (before 877), and Misayel<sup>1074</sup> (since 877).

Four primates of the Albanian Church occupied the see of Mec Kueank before being elected to the patriarchal throne: Dawit II (767-776), Yovsep II (849-876), Samuel<sup>1075</sup> (876-893), and Sahak (930-948).

More monuments have survived on the historical territory of the diocese of Mec Kueank: the Havaptuk Monastery (12th century), the Hakoba-

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<sup>1069</sup> al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*, Part IV, Chapter I, p. 318.

<sup>1070</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapters 28-29, p. 56-58.

<sup>1071</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapters 29,37,46, p. 131-134,151,171.

<sup>1072</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapters 37-45, p. 151-171.

<sup>1073</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 21, p. 220.

<sup>1088</sup> Ibid.  
Ibid.

vank Monastery (853), the Harva Church (13th century), the Anapat Monastery (12th century), St. George's Churches, Karmir and Mekhraker, in the village of Kazanchi (13th century), etc.

The conciliar church of the Apostle Eliseus (Yeghishe Arakyal) Monastery, which was built in the 5th century (the present-day structure dates to the 12th-13th centuries) on the slope of Mount Murovdag and represented the burial place of Eliseus the Apostle and the Albanian king Vachagan III the Pious, may have served as the cathedral of the diocese of Mec Kueank. The church of the Vankasar Monastery (5th-7th centuries), erected, according to legend, by King Vachagan III on a hill near the bank of the Qarqarchay River in Askeran, could have been the diocese's main temple as well. The Vankasar Monastery was first documented by the head of the Georgian diocese of the Armenian Church, Archbishop Sargis Jalalyants (1819-1879), a famous writer and paleontologist: "On the top of the mountain, there are ruins of the monastery that, as tradition has it, used to be the diocesan center of this region."<sup>1076</sup>

- Diocese of Hashu(Hosh)

The diocese of Hashu extended its canonical jurisdiction to the cantons of Shakashen and Tuchkatak in Otene (Utik), which correspond to the present-day Shamkir, Tovuz, and Ganja Districts of Azerbaijan. The historian Hewsen locates the ancient Albanian temple center of Yashu Hosh (Utian: *klash* "moon") on the territory of the ancient Scythian kingdom, the historical Sakasena, which gave its name to the canton of Shakashen.<sup>1077</sup>

Kalankatuatsi refers to Yunan (Jonah), bishop of Hashu, as a member of the Council of Aluen of 488<sup>1078</sup> and then Bishop Simeon as a member the Council of Partaw of 704.<sup>1079</sup> The same Bishop Simeon is listed among the bishops of the Council of Partaw of 706/707.<sup>1080</sup>

The diocese must have lain in the city of Shamkhor, which al-Baladhuri mentions among the key political centers of Caucasian Albania along with

<sup>1076</sup> Jalalyants Sargis, archbishop. *Puteshestviye v Velikuyu Armeniyu* [Travel to Greater Armenia], Tiflis, 1842,1856.

<sup>1077</sup> Ananias of Shirak. *The Geography*, Commentary, Chapter VIC, Footnote 80, p. 145-146.

<sup>1078</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, BookI, Chapter26, p.50.

<sup>1079</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 8, p. 194.

<sup>1080</sup> Bartikian R.M. *Istochniki dlya izucheniya istorii pavlikianskogo dvizheniya* [Sources for Studying the History of the Paulician Movement], Yerevan, 1961. P. 32-33.

Barda, Derbent, and Beylagan.<sup>1081</sup> Bishop Barkhudarian stated in the 19th century that there had been a diocesan center in this area.<sup>1082</sup>

One of the most important religious sites of the diocese of Hashu was the Khoranashat Monastery of the Theotokos (1211-1222) in the village of Chinari, where the historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi and Vardapet Vanakan lived until 1225. Now, the monastery is situated a hundred meters from the Azerbaijani-Armenian border on the Armenian side.

Another influential spiritual center of the diocese was undoubtedly the capital's Berdovank Monastery, the "Fortress Monastery" in Shamkhor, which hosted a council summoned by the Albanian catholicos Mikayel against the Paulicians,<sup>1083</sup> as well as marriages between near relations, during the years 720 to 730.<sup>1084</sup> 7 Albanian bishops took part in the council's work.<sup>1085</sup>

The church in the village of Chaparli (4th-5th centuries) can be named among other temples whose remains have survived in the territory of the diocese of Hashu.

### • Diocese of Tsri and Chilbk

The diocese of Tsri is mentioned in the *History of Albania* only once, in the list of participants of the Council of Aluen of 488.<sup>1086</sup> The diocese was represented by Shmawon, a chorepiscopus.

We know from the *Albanian Chronicle* only that Tsri was an important or capital city of the Chilb country. Until now, the researchers have not been able to determine where exactly this "land of the Chilbs" was. It is only clear from the sources that the Lpins and Chilbs occupied the territory adjacent to Caucasian Albania from the northeast, closer to the mountainous part of Southern Dagestan, and lived next to the tribes listed by Elishe.<sup>1087</sup>

It has been suggested that the Chilbs may have dwelled in the highland area north of the Alazani Valley.<sup>1088</sup> Gadzhiyev locates them in the upper reaches of the

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<sup>1081</sup> al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*, Part IV, Chapter I, p. 319.

<sup>1082</sup> Barkhudarian Makar, bishop. *Artsakh. The Historical Review*. Baku, 1895. P. 44-45.

<sup>1083</sup> The Paulicians were a religious dualistic sect of the early Middle Ages. It may have originated in the territories of Eastern Anatolia inhabited by the Armenians in the 7th century and subsequently spread from Mesopotamia to the Balkans. Paulicianism was substantially influenced by earlier religious systems such as Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism.

<sup>1084</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 13, p. 204-205.

<sup>1085</sup> Bartikian R.M. Op. Cit., p. 32-33.

<sup>noo</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 50.

<sup>1087</sup> Eghishe. *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*, Chapter 4, p. 147.

<sup>1088</sup> Yeremian S.T. Moisey Kalankatuytsky o posolstve albanskogo knyazya Varaz-Trdata k khazarскому khakanu Alp-Ilitveru [Movses Kalankatuatsi on the Embassy of the Albanian Prince

Samur and on the surrounding slopes of the Main Caucasian Ridge, where the modern-day Tsakhurs are traditionally settled. He also ascribes the Tsakhurs' self-designation, *yiqby* (pi.), to the ethnonym *Chilb*.<sup>1089</sup>

After analyzing the story in the *Albanian Chronicle* about Bishop Is-rayel's mission to the Huns against information provided by the Arab historians, Semenov concludes that the land of the Chilbs should be regarded as Layzan (the shahdom of Layzan since the time of Shahanshah Khosrow I Anushirvan),<sup>1090</sup> which, as defined by Minorsky, corresponds to the Lahij Valley centered in Lahij.<sup>1091</sup> The researcher finds that the land of the Chilbs is Layzana, a mountainous area lying on both sides of the Konakhkend Pass in the Greater Caucasus.

However, the researcher Dzhabarov<sup>1092</sup> once observed that a fortress city called Tsri was referenced only by the Albanian historian Movses Kalankatuatsi, and, judging by his reports, this city had some special status and played a prominent role in the political and religious events of Caucasian Albania in the 4th-5th centuries. The city of Tsri was first mentioned in the story of the holy martyr Grigoris, who built a church there and deposited partial relics of the martyrs in it. Then Grigoris left a priest called Daniel in the church as a minister and, together with his disciples, went to the "country of the Maskutk," where he was captured and tortured to death.<sup>1093</sup>

The land of the Maskutk (Maskuts) is once again mentioned by the author of the *History of Albania* in connection with the city of Tsri. According to him, a certain Persian magian tried to desecrate the church in the city of Tsri, but died in great agony. This was witnessed by "Yunan, archbishop of

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Varaz-Trdat to the Khazar Khakan Alp-Ilituer], p. 137.

<sup>1089</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. Lpiniya (istoricheskiye fakty, lokalizatsiya, etnicheskaya prinadlezhnost) [Lpinia (Historical Facts, Location, Ethnicity)], p. 15-16.

<sup>1090</sup> Semenov I.G. O lokalizatsii Lpinov i chilbov [On the Location of the Lpins and Chilbs]. *Vest-nik Instituta istorii, arkhologii i etnografii DFITS RAN* [Bulletin of the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Dagestan Federal Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences], No. 3. Makhachkala, 2006. P. 3-8.

<sup>1091</sup> Minorsky V.F. *Istoriya Shirvana i Derbenta X-XI vekov* [A History of Sharvan and Darband in the 10th-11th centuries], p. 33.

<sup>1092</sup> Dzhabarov Y.R. Gorod Tsri i strana chilbov v "Istorii alban" Moiseya Kalankatuyskogo [The City of Tsri and the Land of the Chilbs in the History of the Albanians by Movses Kalankatuatsi], p. 65-80.

<sup>1093</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 22.

the Honk, who came from the country of the Maskutk.”<sup>1094</sup> The country of the Maskuts is known to have been located on the Caspian plain south of Derbent. Meanwhile, Movses Kalankatuatsi also mentions the city of Tsri in connection with the country of the Chilbk (Chilbs). The Chilbs, on the other hand, are said to have lived north of the Kura, in the foothills of the Greater Caucasus. Moreover, the researcher draws attention to the fact that the city of Tsri was ruled by Khochkorik, the Albanian governor of royal blood (King Esualen’s bastard) and the only one in the country to be mentioned by the Albanian chronicler. Then he describes the city as predominantly pagan, with a Persian element to it, before including a diocese that was, however, represented by a chorepiscopus. Movses Kalankatuatsi clarifies that the city of Tsri had strategic importance and was a citadel. To top it all off, Yunan (Jonah), bishop of the Huns, was in this city. Anania Shirakatsi, the author of the 7th century *Geography*, also mentions the Chilbs among the tribes of Asian Sarmatia. All this evidence, as well as details provided by Elishe, Faustus of Byzantium, and Movses Kalankatuatsi, lead to the conclusion that the author of the Albanian history understands Chor/Chol (Derbent) by Tsri and refers to the Chola people or a tribe dwelling near Chola and forming part of its population as the Chilbs.

- Diocese of the Huns

Another canonical territorial entity that we conventionally include in the jurisdiction of the Albanian Church is the missionary diocese of the Huns. The settlement area of the Huns-Sabirs adjoining Caucasian Albania in the northeast is well known. The Hunnic capital city of Varachan was located at the site of the Shah Senger settlement in the Kayakent District of Dagestan.<sup>1095</sup>

The Hunnic lands, which caused many political problems for Caucasian Albania, nevertheless received special care from the missionaries of the Albanian Church.

The following rule has been observed by the church in its life since ancient times: the church that converted a non-Christian people to Christianity in the territory not belonging to any of the local churches became the Mother Church, the kyriarchal Church, for the newly created community, diocese, or Church. This rule was expressed in Canon 131 (117) of the Council of

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Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 19, p. 33.

<sup>1109</sup> Gadzhiev M.S. Lpiniya (istoricheskiye fakty, lokalizatsiya, etnicheskaya prinadlezhnost) [Lpiniya (Historical Facts, Location, Ethnicity)], p. 15-16.

Carthage of 411, which said: "It was so decreed some years ago by a plenary council that whatever churches were erected in a diocese ... should pertain to the sees of those bishops through whom their return to Catholic unity was brought about..

We know that Christianity was introduced to the Huns by the bishops of the Albanian Church. The first Albanian bishop among the Huns is mentioned in Movses Kalankatuatsi's story about the events in the city of Tsri and in the list of primates of the Albanian Church, where the author places him before Lord Eremia, who stood at the origins of the Albanian script invented in the late 4th century. This bishop, Yunan (Jonah), is called "bishop of the Huns," whereas the time of his missionary work should be dated to the second half of the 4th century.<sup>1096</sup>

Zacharias of Mytilene provides information on "Kardutsat, bishop of the country of Arran," who not only engaged in missionary activities and the spiritual guidance of the Huns during the period from 537 to 551, but also took care to translate the texts of the Holy Scripture into the Hunnic language. This translation, according to the Syrian author, was completed in 544.<sup>1097</sup> Zacharias Rhetor himself translates the name of Bishop Kardutsat into Greek as Theokletos ("summoned by God").

Then the same author reports that Bishop Maku was among the Huns from 551 to 555 and after.

The Albanian bishop Israyel went on a mission to the land of the Huns in the "80s of the 7th century. Movses Kalankatuatsi devotes eight chapters of Book Two of his *Chronicle*, from 38 to 45, to the detailed account of this mission. The Albanian historian also relates that the Huns wished to establish a diocese in their country. Addressing Bishop Israyel, they said: "We beseech Your Holiness to agree to be our bishop and teacher and to found a patriarchal see in our town of Varachan."<sup>1098</sup> As a result, with the blessing of the Albanian catholicos Eliazar, "the blessed bishop, true to his gentle nature, brought prosperity to both sides, willingly undertaking to visit the Huns and tend the newly converted flock of Christ, and to abide firmly by the covenant and the conditions of the treaty."<sup>1099</sup> Later, the Hunnic diocese set up by the bishops of Caucasian Albania became one of the seven missionary diocesan areas to join the Doros Metropolis.<sup>1100</sup> It is still unknown when this metropolis was exactly

<sup>1096</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 19, p. 33; Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 228.

<sup>1097</sup> Zachariah of Mitylene. *The Syriac Chronicle*, Book XII, Chapter VII, p. 329-330.

<sup>1098</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 42, p. 167. Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 45, p. 171.

<sup>1100</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Istoriya Khazar* [The History of the Khazars], p. 93-94; Naumenko V.E. *Vizantiysko-khazarakiye otnosheniya v seredine IX v.* [The Byzantine-Khazar Relations in the

<sup>1113</sup> Mid-9th Century], *Khazary [The Khazars]*, Moscow-Jerusalem, 2005; Idem. *K voprosu o*

established, but the earliest possible date is thought to be 787 and the latest under consideration is the late 9th century. Three dioceses of this metropolis were located on the shores of the Caspian Sea: the Hunnic one, Khvalis, and Astil. The metropolis seems to have existed for a short period of time and no later than the 10th century.

### • Diocese of Yeut

The bishop of Yeut is mentioned only once among the participants of the Council of Aluen in the text of the *History of Albania*, with which Pat-kanov worked in the 19th century.<sup>1101</sup> His translation is known to have been made from a copy of the original taken by the priest O. Shakhmatuni in 1841 and then transferred to the Asiatic Museum in St. Petersburg. Smbatian, who published the *History of Albania* in 1984, excluded the name of this diocese from his translation. The latest translation used all known manuscripts of this work (11 manuscripts stored in the Matenadaran, as well as 3 microfilmed and photocopied ones). Hence, we must rule out the possibility that the diocese of Yeut has ever existed, especially since its name does not match any known toponym of Caucasian Albania.

We may infer that the spread of Christianity in Caucasian Albania was uneven, while the Albanian Church had stable positions in not every region, due to the difficult political situation. Meanwhile, the penetration of Christianity from cities into villages starting from the 4th century and the growing number of believers led to a rise in the administrative church units, dioceses, which reached at least 15 in the 6th century. It is still impossible, however, to find out exactly what territories the medieval dioceses of the Albanian Church occupied and how many Christians lived there, as this task requires additional research with the use of later sources for necessary analysis. Yet, after examining all the reports of the Albanian historian Movses Kalankatvatsi on the hierarchs and structural divisions of the Albanian Church, we

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kharaktere vizantiysko-khazarskikh otnosheny v kontse VIII — seredine IX w. [On the Nature of the Byzantine-Khazar Relations in the Late 8th — Mid-9th centuries], *Problemy istorii, filologii, kultury* [The Problems of History, Philology, and Culture], No. 12. Magnitogorsk, 2002. P. 544-568.

<sup>1101</sup> Movses Kaghankatvatsi. *Istoriya agvan* [History of the Aghuans], Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 66.



have presented for the first time a complete list of dioceses falling under the jurisdiction of the Albanian primate in the 6th century.

### *II.3.6. Albanian Monasteries on Sacred Land*

The tradition of pilgrimage has been evolving since time immemorial. Even in the pre-Christian period, the Caucasus, like any other religious milieu, had places of worship and temples of pagan gods, to which journeys and sacrifices were made and in which people sought the protection and blessing of higher forces.

Since the adoption of Christianity, despite significant changes in its doctrinal core, many ancient customs and traditions have been inherited by the new religion. This also applies to the tradition of pilgrimage to holy places.

It is believed that the Christian spiritual centers of the Caucasus, as elsewhere, occupy the same sites as pre-Christian sanctuaries from the early Middle Ages, when Christianity had only begun to spread. With regard to Caucasian Albania, these ancient spiritual centers, which appear to have emerged and formed during the unification of various Caucasian tribes with their own specific beliefs into a single Albanian confederation, were distributed across the country's different geographical areas by significance and characteristics. Local sources say that before the introduction of Christianity to the Caucasus, sanctuaries and temples were dedicated to various deities: Mihr, Aramazd, Baalshamin, Anahit (Nane), Tengri, etc.<sup>1102</sup> There were famous religious centers in Yashu Hosh near Shamkhor, Amaras, Shaki's Gis (Kish), Kurmukh, and other locations. Concurrently, Caucasian Albania established its own religious centers associated with the activities of Bartholomew the Apostle, the apostolic father Eliseus, St. Gregory the Illuminator, and the holy martyr Grigoris of Albania, as well as sites preserving the remains of the martyrs or various Christian relics such as Gis (Kish), Amaras, Yeghishe Arakyal, Katarovank, Aghoghlan, Khutavank, Gandzasar, etc.

Since the 4th century, the propagators of Christianity in Caucasian Albania have embarked on the widespread construction of churches. Movses Kalankatuatsi reports that Vachagan III the Pious, king of Albania, built as many churches as there were days in the year.<sup>1103</sup> Moreover, the preachers of

<sup>1116</sup>

Strabo. *The Geography of Strabo*, Book XI, Chapters IV-VII, p. 223-257; Agathangelos. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 10, §§784-786, 790, pp. 323-325, 329.

<sup>1117</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 22, p. 225.

the new religion had to constantly stay in contact with the world's Christian centers in order to correlate their activities. Thus they made pilgrimages to Caesarea, Palestine, and other corners of the Christian empire. The Albanian historian recounts the trip of St. Eliseus, the first apostle of Albania, to Jerusalem, where he was ordained bishop by James, brother of the Lord, and sent back to Albania.<sup>1104</sup> St. Grigoris of Albania received from his grandfather the shrines brought from Caesarea or Jerusalem, namely a precious vessel containing the blood of the chief priest Zacharias and the relics of the great martyr Pantaleon.<sup>1105</sup> Mashtots brought a piece of the Cross of Christ from Jerusalem to Albania himself.<sup>1106</sup> Later, Mashtots' Albanian disciples went to the Holy Land and returned with priests and blessing of the patriarch of Jerusalem, bringing precious ornaments and pieces of relics of various saints of the Lord.<sup>1107</sup>

All these passages from the *Albanian Chronicle* are indicative of strong spiritual ties between Caucasian Albania and Palestine that were established in the 1st century and started to develop more and more from the 4th century. In ancient times, as today, people attached great importance to visiting holy places not only in their homeland, but also in the cradle of Christianity, Jerusalem, in the Holy Land, on which the Savior had treaded. Naturally, it became necessary over time to set up special hospitality homes or hotels, in which pilgrims could find warm shelter and reliable protection after traveling a long and difficult road full of dangers and all kinds of hardships. We can judge by circumstantial evidence that national guesthouses appeared for this purpose in Palestine already in the early Middle Ages (or in the so-called Byzantine period). It is not surprising that some believers, who went to the holy places of Palestine, did not want to return home and decided to devote the rest of their lives to spiritual pursuits, prayer for their motherland at the Holy Sepulcher, and service to fellow countrymen arriving to the shrines from a distant homeland. The communities of such settlers created brotherhoods or sisterhoods, which gradually transformed into monastic abodes. Now the national diasporas were centered not just in hotels and shelters, but in monasteries with their own temples and sanctuaries. Donations poured in from homeland to these monasteries and helped them to exist, providing for themselves and those who came from their native country.

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<sup>1104</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 6, p. 5.

<sup>1105</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 14, p. 22.

<sup>1106</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 27, p. 54.

<sup>1121</sup> Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 28, p. 56.

Yet, the history of Caucasian communities in the Holy Land should be regarded as a dynamic, but gradual process. At the first stage, which began already in the 4th-5th centuries and was well documented by literary evidence, the presence of Caucasians was probably limited to multi-ethnic monastic institutions. Despite the origin of some key figures in the Palestinian monastic movement (Euthymius the Great<sup>1108</sup> and John the Silent<sup>1109</sup> hailed from Lesser Armenia, while Peter the Iberian<sup>1110</sup> was born in Georgia), their role at this stage was never confined to national communities. It seems from the analysis of historical sources and archaeological materials that the famous Iberian Monastery in Jerusalem, founded by Peter the Iberian, has never been, strictly speaking, a national monastery and has always been a shelter for members of different ethnic groups throughout its history. The presence of Caucasian monks in the lavras and coenobia of the Judean Desert is well supported by both literary evidence and manuscripts at a later stage. It is not entirely clear whether the creation of mono-ethnic spiritual centers was triggered by the Christological disputes or resulted from an overall increase in the number of Caucasians arriving in the Holy Land, which left them no choice but to establish their own religious centers for all those wishing to stay.<sup>1111</sup>

From the second half of the 6th century to the early 7th century, during the separation of the church and the beginning of oppression of the Mono-physites in the Byzantine Empire, there was a sharp decrease in the number of pilgrims coming to Jerusalem from the Caucasus in general and Caucasian Albania in particular, with their flow slowing and shifting to the Sinai, Thebes, Thebaid, and other places. This fact may be key to solving the question of the

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<sup>1108</sup> Euthymius the Great (c. 377-473) was a Christian saint and hieromonk. He was born in Mytilene. Along with Anthony the Great, Macarius the Great, and Pachomius the Great, Euthymius is considered an icon of eremitical life and one of the founders of cenobitic monasticism.

<sup>1109</sup> John the Silent or the Sabaite (c. 454-614) was a Christian saint, disciple of St. Sabbas the Sanctified, and interlocutor of St. John of the Ladder. He was born in Nicopolis. He lived in the various abodes of Asia Minor, in the monastery of St. Sabbas and Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.

<sup>1110</sup> Peter the Iberian (c. 411-491) was a Georgian prince and son of King Bosmarios, initially named Murvan (Murvanaz). In 423, he was sent as a political hostage to Constantinople, where he received philosophical, theological, and medical education under the patronage of Theodosius II's wife, Empress Eudocia. He set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem with his teacher Mithradates and became a monk under the name of Peter. In 430, he founded the monastery of the Georgians in Bethlehem and called it the Iberian Monastery. He accepted the priesthood in 445 and was the bishop of Maiuma for several months in 452. He established a hospital and treated patients in person until the Christians were expelled by the local ruler; from there Peter moved to Egypt, but then returned to the Middle East.

<sup>1111</sup> Tchekhanovets Y. The Caucasian Archaeology of the Holy Land. Armenian, Georgian and Albanian Communities between the Fourth and Eleventh centuries CE. *AIEA Newsletter*, No. 54, November 2018. P. 85-87.

discovery of palimpsests with Albanian lectionary exactly on the Sinai, in Saint Catherine's Monastery.

In the 7th century, in a letter addressed to Modestus, the *locum tenens* of the patriarchal see of Jerusalem (*locum tenens* in 614-628, patriarch in 632-634), Catholicos Komitas Aghtsetsi (615-628), recalling the persecution of the Monophysite Christians in the Caucasus by Modestus' predecessors, wrote:

**But know this, O beloved brother, no little consolation was conveyed to our people by the coming and going of those journeys. First, because they forgot all the troubles and sadness of this country. Secondly, because they cleansed their sins through repentance, fasts and mercy, through sleepless and unresting travelling by day and night. Thirdly, because they baptized their bodies in the water of holiness, in the fiery currents of the Jordan, whence the divine grace flowed to all the universe. For in the desire of their heart [the pilgrims] travelled around Mount Sinai, which in the times of Moses was close to God, [repeating] friend to friend the prophetic saying: "Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob."<sup>1112</sup>**

This period witnessed the appearance of two manuscripts with brief descriptions of Armenian and Albanian monasteries located in Jerusalem. They were compiled by Vardapet Anastas<sup>1113</sup> in the 7th century and deserve our full attention.

Vardapet Anastas was an Armenian historian, who described 70 (or 72, based on two of the ten surviving manuscripts) Caucasian monasteries in Jerusalem. Vardapet Anastas traveled to Jerusalem by order of Prince Hama-zasp Kamsarakan Pahlavuni and sent a letter to him, containing an overview of 70 Armenian monasteries built in Jerusalem by the Armenian *nakharars*. This primary source, presumably from the end of the 7th century, was published under the title *Two Manuscripts of Armenian Holy Places in Palestine* by Mekhitarist Ghevond Alishan in Paris in 1884.<sup>1114</sup> Unfortunately, as the publisher notes, many names are distorted in it. The names of some monasteries, however, can be clarified with the help of Movses Kalankatuatsi's work.

Especially valuable in Vardapet Anastas' letter are indications that all these

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<sup>1112</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 36, p. 74.

<sup>1113</sup> Anastas Vardapet. *On the Armenian Monasteries Built in the Holy City of Jerusalem*. Published by G. Alishan. Venice, 1896. P. 5-13 (in Armenian).

<sup>1114</sup> *Deux descriptions arméniennes des Lieux saints de Palestine*. Auteur (s) par Anastase d'Arménie et Nicolas, évêque d'Acquirmann. Traducteur Père Léonce (Ghevond) M. Alishan Année. Paris, 1884.

monasteries were built by noble princes during the reign of Tiridates (285-330) and St. Gregory the Illuminator (c. 252-326). Upon receiving the letter, Prince Hamazasp Kamsarakan went to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage to free the Monophysite monasteries of Jerusalem from the oppression of Chalcedonian Greeks. Even before Hamazasp, in the days of Emperor Justinian I (527-565), as can be seen from Vardapet Anastas' letter, the Caucasian princes collected seven *centenaria*,<sup>1115</sup> or 70,000 *dahekans*, and gave them to the emperor, delivering all their monasteries from canonical submission to the patriarchs of Jerusalem. Yet, the persecution of Monophysite monks intensified again during the time of the Armenian catholicos Hovhannes II (557- 574). 500 Armenian monks from Jerusalem sent a letter to their spiritual leader, in which they described the difficult state of monasteries and asked for advice on how to proceed: accept the confession of Patriarch Juvenal, i.e. the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon (which was forced on them by the Greek emperors and patriarchs of Jerusalem), or leave Jerusalem. The catholicos strictly forbade them to accept the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon, and many monks had to move to Caesarea, Egypt, and other places. The patriarchs ceased the oppression of Monophysite monasteries after Jerusalem was seized by the Arabs in 691. At the same time, there were no more revenues from those villages in the homeland that the princes had granted to the Jerusalem monasteries, resulting in their complete decline. Soon, only 15 out of 70 Armenian monasteries remained in the Holy Land.

In 1516, when Palestine became part of the Ottoman Empire, a new very difficult stage began in the life of all Christian communities in the Holy Land. As pointed out by Tchekhanovets in one of her interviews, the ethnic communities needed to mobilize efforts in time and find donors or benefactors who could help them pay high Turkish taxes and keep their churches and monasteries. The Armenians were among those communities that were lucky enough to succeed, while the Serbs and Georgians failed. Paradoxically,

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<sup>1115</sup> *Centenarium* was a large monetary unit amounting to 100 pounds, or 7,200 *hyperpyra*. *Centenarium* was a collection of gold coins weighing 100 *livres* (Greek *liters*) or Roman pounds. In the modern sense, *centenarium* weighed about 32.7 kg. In Latin, *centenarium* corresponded to the complex term *centumpondium*, i.e. something weighing 100 *livres* or pounds. The *centenarium* of gold represented a large sum. For example, Empress Eudoxia, the wife of Arcadius, is known to have donated two *centenaria* to build a church in 401, and this gift was considered very generous.

it turned out that both the Serbian and Georgian communities trusted the Greeks, their Orthodox brothers, who were no different from them in terms of church dogma. The Greeks paid their debts, but secured the Serbian and Georgian churches and monasteries for themselves and certainly did not return them in the end. When Serbia and Georgia found the money and people to come back to the Holy Land, no one was going to return their former property. As for the Armenians, who could not count on anyone but themselves, they set out to collect money from the wide diaspora, managed to pay off their debts, and even expanded their own territories. This time was marked by the intensive Islamization of the population in Caucasian Albania, and the church entrusted itself to the Etchmiadzin Catholicosate, being unable to make independent decisions and solve the issues of its presence and property in Palestine.

Returning to the lists of monasteries, we must specify that the earliest extant manuscripts of this work by Vardapet Anastas date back to the 16th century. The dating is still a matter of dispute, but usually the author's life and activity are attributed to the period between the 6th and 8th centuries. It is also questionable whether a report about such a substantial number of Mono-physite monasteries and temples in Jerusalem can be trusted. A.K. Sanjian has made a significant contribution to studying the authenticity of Vardapet Anastas' writing and finds "this work to be of dubious or exaggerated nature."<sup>1116</sup>

What is important for us is that the lists of Vardapet Anastas were used by his contemporary, the *History of Albania's* author Movses Kalankatuatsi, who selected from them only the monasteries related to the Albanians and interesting specifically to his reader. The comparison of information from Chapter 52 of Book Two of the *History of Albania* with Vardapet Anastas' manuscript shows that the Albanian chronicler used it for a certain purpose, choosing only the monasteries built by the Albanian princes: "...those monasteries built in the name of the Albanians in Jerusalem, according to that which we learned from [the letter of] the blessed Anastasius."<sup>1117</sup>

Movses Kalankatuatsi presents the following list of Albanian monasteries in the Holy Land:

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<sup>1116</sup> Sanjian A.K. Anastas Vardapet's List of Armenian Monasteries in Seventh-Century Jerusalem. A Critical Examination. *Le Museon. Revue d'Etudes Orientales*, LXXXII, 3-4, 1969. P. 265-292.

<sup>1131</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 52, p. 184.

1. The monastery of Panda, situated on the east side of the Mount of Olives, built first by a monk named Panon from Albania and held at the present time by an Albanian priest named Petros.
2. The monastery of Mruv, dedicated to the Forty Martyrs, close by in the same region and now held by the Arab.
3. The monastery of Partaw, "The Holy Mother of God," near the Tower of David; half is held by a woman named Mariam from Shamkhor, and half by the Arab.
4. The monastery of Kalankatuk in the same region; at present half is held by a Christian named Teodoros, an Arab, son of Abraham, scribe of Abul Kami, from Aliovit, from [the town of] Zarishat, and half by the wicked and evil Arab.
5. The monastery of Artsakh, "The Mother of God," situated to the south of St. Stephen's, now wholly held by the Arab.
6. The monastery of Amaras, "St. Gregory," half of which is held by a woman, and half by the Arab.
7. 8. 9. Three other Albanian monasteries forcibly taken by the Arab; their names are unknown.
10. Another Albanian monastery with the monasteries of the Araweank in the middle of the marketplace which now is held by the Arab.

Unfortunately, none of the Albanian monasteries listed by Vardapet Anastas and Moyses Kalankatuatsi has been discovered so far and neither can any monastery be reliably identified with one or another archaeological or historical complex in the Holy Land. Nevertheless, the reference to the first listed monastery of Panda as being located on the Mount of Olives, coupled with Vardapet Anastas' remark that this monastery was dedicated to John the Baptist, leads us to potentially identify this abode with the place where the Russian Convent of Ascension on the Mount of Olives is currently situated.

The history of the first documented works on the territory of the Mount of Olives is as follows: Archimandrite Antonin (Kapustin),<sup>1118</sup> head of the

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<sup>1118</sup> Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin (1817-1894) was a Byzantine scholar and church figure, whose name was associated with the heyday of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the Holy Land. He headed the mission in 1865. For his achievements Fr. Antonin was elected a member of numerous scholarly societies and institutions in Russia and Europe: the Athenian Archaeological Society (1854), the Odessa Society of History and Antiquities (1856), the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society (1857), the German Oriental Archaeological Society (1872), the Kiev Church Archaeological Society (1873), the St. Petersburg Theological Academy (1873), the Moscow Theological Academy (1888), etc. He received many state and church awards for his diligent work. The archimandrite was buried in the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives built by him in the Russian Convent of Ascension. The collection of manuscripts assembled by him (nearly 100 pieces) was bought by the Imperial

Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, acquired several land plots one by one at the top of the Mount of Olives in 1869 to 1871. The total area of the future Russian convent united 11 land plots purchased at different times and amounted to 53,748 square meters.<sup>1119</sup> Initial excavations revealed the fragments of a floor mosaic with images of animals and plants and a tomb. The size of the mosaic was 20 square meters: "At the northern edge of the mosaic, there is an inscription in Classical Armenian untouched by time, saying that "this is the grave of blessed Shushanik, mother of Artaban."<sup>1120</sup> Thus, Fr. Archimandrite unearthed the most magnificent monument of the 6th century."<sup>1121</sup> <sup>1122</sup> Vardapet Anastas mentions three different complexes on the Mount of Olives: the monastery of Panda in the name of John the Baptist, the monastery of the Mamikonians, also dedicated to John the Baptist, and the monastery of Kataetsots, in which the disciples listened to the Beatitudes (perhaps meaning the site of the future monastery of Pater Noster).<sup>1135</sup>

During reconnaissance excavations near the revered Stone of the Virgin (the place where, as legend has it, the Mother of God stood during the Ascension) on the plot, Archimandrite Antonin discovered "piles of golden mosaics and many pieces of white marble," as well as the bases of two 5th-6th century columns. It became clear that the conciliar church of the monastery destroyed during the Persian invasion in 614 had been situated here.<sup>1123</sup> A new temple was erected at the site of this ancient basilica by 1882.

The construction of the chapel to celebrate the Finding of the Head of John the Baptist on the same territory, northeast of the main temple, exposed the foundations of another Byzantine church with a mosaic floor that had a geometric ornament and images of birds, fish, animals, pomegranates, bunches of grapes, and other fruit.

At the eastern end of the convent grounds, just where Movses Kalankatuatsi seems to place the Albanian monastery of Panda, the remains of three Roman yellow

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Public Library in 1898-1899. His epistolary legacy is stored in various funds.

<sup>1119</sup> Dmitrevsky S.M. *Russkiye raskopki na Eleonskoy gore* [Russian Excavations on the Mount of Ohves], Moscow, 2006. P. 54-55.

<sup>1120</sup> S.V. Smbatian explains: "Blessed Shushanik was the mother of the outstanding commander Artavan Arshakuni, who served under the Persian king Khosrow and made many daring raids against the Byzantines, leading to the start of the Byzantine-Persian wars in 539. Three years later, however, he sided with the Greeks and joined Emperor Justinian I" (Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Aluank Country], Book II, Chapter 52, Note 199, p. 145).

<sup>1121</sup> Dmitrevsky S.M. *Russkiye raskopki na Eleonskoy gore* [Russian Excavations on the Mount of Ohves], p. 56.

<sup>1122</sup> Ter-Mkrtychian L.K. *Armyanskiye istochniki o Palestine, V-XVIII w.* [The Armenian Sources on Palestine, the 5th-18th centuries]. Moscow, 1991. P. 94-95.

<sup>1123</sup> Kapustin Antonin, archimandrite. *Dnevnik za 1873* [The 1873 Diary]. *RGIA* [The Russian State Historical Archive]. Fund 834, Inventory 4, Item 1126.



marble columns were uncovered, in addition to the fragment of an 8.5 x 10 m mosaic with images of a lamb, pheasant, duck, fish, and double bunches of grapes.<sup>1124</sup> An underground tomb divided into two parts by a narrow corridor was discovered there as well. The archaeologists attribute this tomb to the early Byzantine period. To the east of this place, a staircase leads to a large cave consisting of two chambers, one of which also has a surviving 1x0.72 m mosaic with an Armenian inscription: "Through the prayers of St. Isaiah and Reverend Fathers, I, Vagan (Es Vagan — A. N.), created this in remembrance for the forgiveness of sins."<sup>1125</sup>

Some linguists propose reading two words in the inscription *Es Vagan*, which in this case may point to the name of Esualen, king of Albania. Yet, as the Azerbaijani historian M.D. Khalilov notes, this theory does not take into account essential aspects: if we accept the written name as a form of *Esualen*, the absence of the title *king* in the inscription makes its connection with the Albanian king highly doubtful.<sup>1126</sup> At the same time, the reports of written sources regarding the location and builder of the monastery of Panda are also very contradictory. For example, Vardapet Anastas states this: "The monastery of Panda named after St. Karapet (the Forerunner), which is west of the Mount of Olives, was also built at public expense in the name of the cathedral in the city of Vagharshapat, and the Albanians have it to this day..."<sup>1127</sup> Unlike the Classical Armenian source, Movses Kalankatuatsi indicates in the *History of Albania* that the monastery of Panda was located to the east, rather than to the west of the Mount of Olives, and that it was built by a monk named Panon from Albania. But even this conflicting evidence does not allude to any connection between the monastery of Panda and the Albanian king Esualen. Tchekhanovets, who addresses the issue of Caucasian Christian communities in the Holy Land, adds that the critical approach to the sources, and particularly the renewed analysis of the archaeological data, shows the following: "The extant random identification of excavated sites with activity of known historical figures should be categorically rejected".<sup>1128</sup>

It can be assumed that during the Byzantine historical period, the members of ethnically different Christian communities may have located their own abodes next to each other in such a holy Christian site as the Mount of Olives, the place of the

<sup>1124</sup> Kondakov N.P. *Arkheologicheskoye putestvestiye po Sirii i Palestine* [Archaeological Travel across Syria and Palestine]. St. Petersburg, 1904. P. 257.

<sup>1125</sup> Dmitrevsky S.M. *Russkiye raskopki na Eleonskoy gore* [Russian Excavations on the Mount of Olives], p. 57-58.

<sup>1126</sup> Khalilov M.D. *Rannesrednevekovaya Albaniya i armyanskaya epigrafika* [Early Medieval Albania and Armenian Epigraphy]. *IRS-naslediye* [IRS Heritage], No. 6 (24). Baku, 2006. P.20.

<sup>1127</sup> Mnatsakanian A.S. *O literature Kavkazskoy Albanii* [On the Literature of Caucasian Albania]. Yerevan, 1969. P. 78.

<sup>1128</sup> Tchekhanovets Y. *The Caucasian Archaeology erf the Holy Land. Armenian, Georgian and Albanian Communities between the Fourth and Eleventh centuries CE*. Boston, 2018. P. 265.

Ascension of the Lord and the Finding of the Head of John the Baptist. And it is not surprising that some of them could have been dedicated to the same saint, with whom this place was directly associated. Theodosius' *Itinerarium* (c. 530) says that 24 churches were built on the Mount of Olives,<sup>1129</sup> while the Piacenza Pilgrim (c. 570) found here "a multitude of men and women living as recluses."<sup>1130</sup>

Still, we cannot rule out the suggestion that there was one large architectural complex on the summit of the Mount of Olives, which is usually identified with the Apostoleon. The *Life of Peter the Iberian* reports that in 438 Melania the Younger (383-439), using the money received from Lausus, the "Great Logothete of the Byzantine court," built a monastery with a church, known as the Apostoleon, and baths near the Imbomon (the place of the Savior's Ascension).<sup>1131</sup> At about the same time, after 442, Theodosius II's wife, the disgraced Empress Eudocia (c. 401-460), who sympathized and patronized the Monophysites, settled there.<sup>1132</sup>

If we identify the monastery of Panda on the Mount of Olives with the Apostoleon, then it must have been one of the richest monasteries in Jerusalem thanks to Empress Eudocia. The monastery is likely to have been damaged in 614 during the Persian invasion, after which the Caucasian Monophysite monks could have gained a foothold there. It was destroyed in 1187 during the capture of Jerusalem by Salah ad-Din after the crusaders had left

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<sup>1129</sup> Theodosius. On the Topography of the Holy Land. Translated by J.H. Bernard. *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*. Vol. 2. London, 1890. P. 10.

<sup>1130</sup> Antoninus Martyr. Of the Holy Places Visited by Antoninus Martyr about the Year A.D. 570. Translated by A. Stewart. *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society*. Vol. 2. London, 1890. P. 14

<sup>1131</sup> Zhitiye Petra Ivera tsarevicha-podvizhnika i episkopa Mayumskogo V v.: gruzinsky podlinnik [The Life of Peter the Iberian, Ascetic Prince and Bishop of Mamma, in the 5th Century: Georgian Original], Published and translated by N.Y. Marr. *Pravoslavny palestinitsky sbornik* [The Orthodox Palestinian Collection], Vol. XVI, No. 2 (47), 1896. P. 89.

<sup>1132</sup> Kartashev A.V. *Vselenskiye sobory* [The Ecumenical Councils], p. 375.

Palestine.<sup>1133</sup> At the same time, Tchekhanovets stresses that none of the sites known from historical sources has ever been discovered or can be securely identified.<sup>1134</sup>

As for the second-listed monastery of Mruv, Smbatian holds that there is an obvious distortion in its name, for this monastery is not mentioned in the ancient sources.<sup>1135</sup> Vardapet Anastas refers to it as the monastery of Myzha.

There are no other details of monasteries from the list in the *History of Albania*.

The following fact is noteworthy: the Albanian monasteries in the Holy Land bore the names of various provinces (Artsakh, Amaras) and cities (Partaw, Kalankatuk) of Caucasian Albania, which indicates that these monasteries were protected by the ecclesiastical and civil administration of one or another Albanian geographical area. The existence of nearly ten Albanian monastic abodes in Jerusalem is evidence of frequent pilgrimages by Christians from Caucasian Albania to the holy places of Palestine in the pre-Arab period.

The archaeologist Yana Tchekhanovets, an expert at the Israel Antiquities Authority, studies the history of Caucasian Christian communities in the Holy Land to locate the historical presence of each Caucasian community in ancient Palestine and understand their interrelations and the influence they had on the national churches of the Caucasus. In order to achieve this, the complete corpus of known literary and material evidence related to the activities of the Caucasian Christian communities of the Holy Land during the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods has been assembled and analyzed; certain long-known monastic complexes and particular finds were reviewed and reconsidered; a number of new identifications were proposed for Georgian and Armenian sites; and an association of material remains with the Albanian community was suggested for the first time. Despite the large amount of work accomplished, the researcher insists that the Caucasian historical and archaeological corpus remains incomplete: new archaeological and epigraphic data continue to accumulate, often adding to the map of Palestine not only isolated finds but whole new regions.

After analyzing the material collected, the scholar finds that the Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians may serve as a case study of national Christian communities in multiethnic Byzantine Palestine, being almost the only group archaeologically distinguishable from the Greek-speaking (and mainly Greek-writing) majority of the monastic population in the country. But attempts to confront the archaeological and historical data associated with the Christian Caucasian

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<sup>1133</sup> Vladimirsky A.V. *Saladin. Pobeditel krestonostsev* [Salah ad-Din. The Slayer of Crusaders], Moscow, 2013.

<sup>1134</sup> Tchekhanovets Y. *The Caucasian Archaeology of the Holy Land*, p. 265.

<sup>1149</sup> Moyses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Aluank Country], Book II, Chapter 52, Note 200, p. 145.

presence in the Holy Land have not yielded wished-for results: the different categories of evidence simply do not overlap.

A synthesis of the material analyzed by the archaeologist shows that in the Byzantine period, members of all three Caucasian communities were deeply involved in the life of the Church of Jerusalem, with local Christian population and pilgrims (though not necessarily their compatriots). Viewed against the background of historical evidence, the archaeological corpus associated with the Caucasian communities presents a very complex picture, quite different from the one traditionally presented by the national Armenian and Georgian research schools. Apparently, despite the dogmatic schisms, the Caucasian monastic communities were deeply involved in the life of the Jerusalem Church. The most striking is the epigraphic evidence showing the use of common Greek formulae, in the Armenian sites mainly, and the wide use of Greek language by both Armenians and Georgians. The Palestinian monastic traditions were followed in the daily activities of the Caucasian monasteries, in the architecture and decor, and even in the funeral rites.<sup>1136</sup>

Despite their origin, the Albanian monks, like other Caucasians, chose to live in the Byzantine Empire. They were foreigners as far as the local Christians were concerned, but they represented the Church of Jerusalem for visitors and pilgrims. They came here as modest suppliants to pray for their homeland, but found themselves among “the dwellers of this Holy Land,” claiming that they and their lives represented the truth of Christianity in the eyes of others.<sup>1137</sup>

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<sup>1136</sup> Tchekhanovets Y. *The Caucasian Archaeology of the Holy Land*, p. 264-267.

<sup>1137</sup> Wilken R.L. *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*. New Haven-London, 1992. P. 169-170.

### III. 1. OVERVIEW OF BOOK THREE OF THE HISTORY OF ALBANIA

Scholars ascribe Book Three of the *History of Albania* to the 10th century historian Movses Daskhurantsi.<sup>1138</sup>

This section of the work at hand describes the appearance of the Arabs on the historical stage. It informs us of the invasion of Arab tribes into Albania, Armenia, and Iberia from 698 to 877. Details about conditions in Caucasian Albania reflected in Book Three include relations with the Huns and events in church life in 705. The book ends with a list of Albanian rulers and catholicos.

Book Three of the *History of Albania* is divided into twenty-three chapters. They have the following titles:

1. The conquests of the Ishmaelites.
2. The emirs after the Prophet Muhammad.
3. Nerses Bakur, the Chalcedonian catholicos of Albania.
4. The letter of the Albanian synod to Elia, catholicos of Armenia.
5. The letter of the catholicos of Armenia to Calyph Abd al-Malik.
6. The reply of Abd al-Malik to Catholicos Elia.
7. The arrival of the Armenian catholicos to Partaw and the deposition of Nerses Bakur. The election of Simeon as catholicos of Albania.
8. The document of the Albanian synod concerning the unity of Armenian and Albanian churches.
9. The document of Elia, catholicos of Armenia, addressed to the Albanian church.
10. The list of names of Albanian princes (*nakharars*).
11. The conciliar canons of Catholicos Simeon.
12. The exaction of higher tribute from Varaz-Trdat. Catholicos Mikayel.
13. The council of Catholicos Mikayel against marriages between near relations.
14. The dogmatic canons of Catholicos Mikayel.
15. The political events after the death of Emperor Heraclius.
16. The Arab invasion of Armenia.
17. The Syunik bishop Stepannos.
18. Concerning the burning of Ilion and the foundation of Rome.
19. Concerning Baban in Syunik.

20. The campaigns of Caliph Ma'mun against Byzantium.
21. The siege of Partaw. Catholicos Samuel.
22. A short list of Albanian rulers.
23. The list of Albanian catholicoi, their dates and names.

Unlike previous sections, Book Three of the *History of Albania* is a holistic work stylistically, rather than structurally, which undoubtedly points to it being authored by a man from a different era. The author has access to a richer contemporary literary tradition, apparently using copies of historical works of his predecessors and contemporaries. The events described in Book Three are woven into the fabric of history common to the Caucasus and its political environment, but nevertheless do not always have a chronologically consistent presentation and logical explanation. In our opinion, it does not feel as if this work was penned by a more mature historian (in contrast to the compiler of the previous two books).

As with the first two books of the *History of Albania*, we divide the chapters of Book Three into the following sections:

- political history;
- ecclesiastical history;
- liturgical and canonical documents;
- hagiographic stories;
- epistolary genre;
- lists (diptychs).

Chapters 1,2,12,15,16,19, 20, and 21 can be attributed to the first section, which provides insight into the political context of current events.

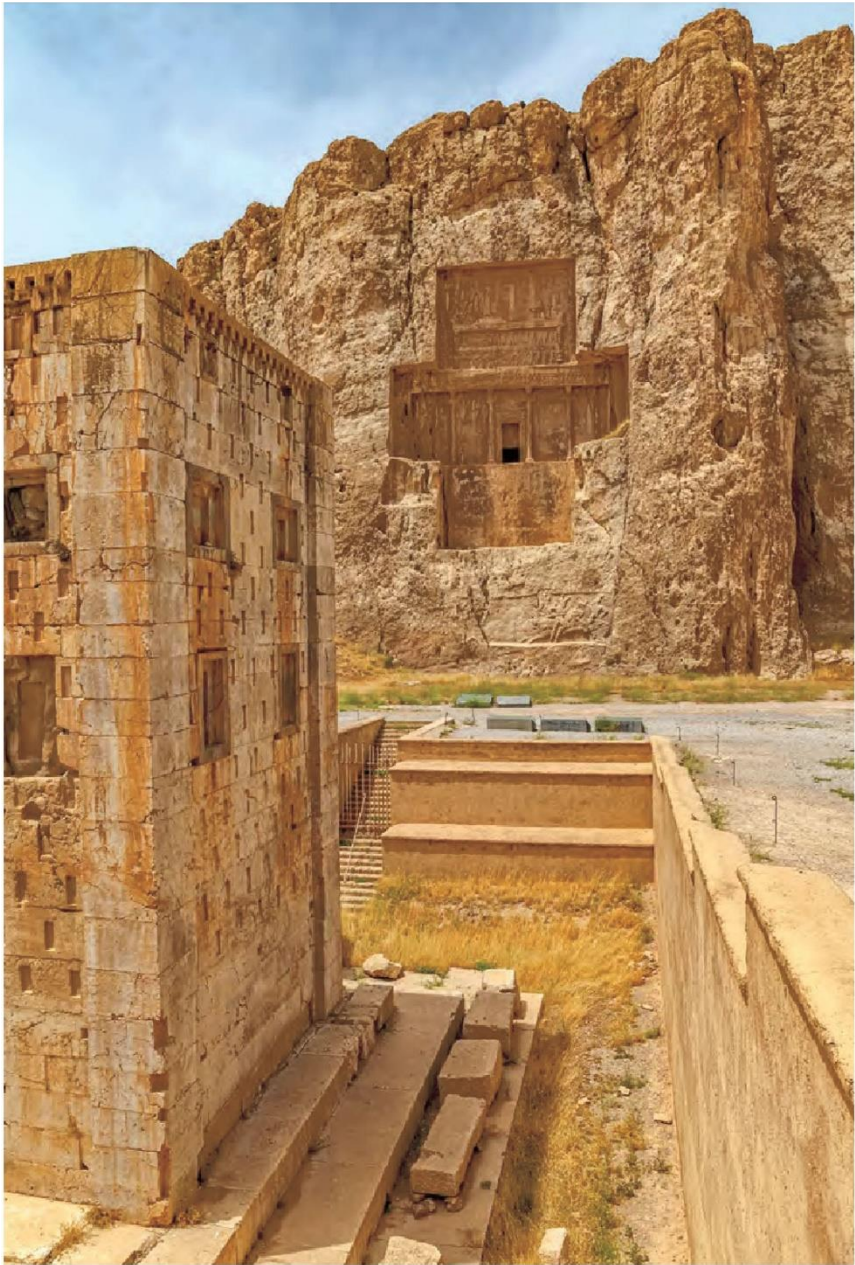
The events of ecclesiastical history are described in Chapters 3, 7,12,13, and 21.

Liturgical and canonical documents are represented in Chapters 4, 8, 9, 11,13, and 14.

Hagiographic stories are contained in Chapter 17.

The texts of letters are copied in Chapters 4,5, and 6.

Chapter 10, as well as the last two chapters, 22 and 23, are diptychs of Arab caliphs, Albanian rulers and primates of the Albanian Church.



The Achaemenid royal tomb Naqsh-e Rostam and the Cube of Zoroaster (5th century BCE) with Kartir's inscription (3rd century) that "he set up sacred fires... in Albania and Balasagan... up to the Gates of Albania." © Depositphotos



The Ateshgah Fire Temple on the Absheron Peninsula built at the site of burning natural gas outlets. © Depositphotos





The Khutavank (Dadivank) sanctuary from the early Middle Ages at the burial place of Dadi, a disciple of Thaddaeus the Apostle, in the Kalbajar District of Azerbaijan; the present-day complex dates back to the 12th-13th centuries. © Depositphotos

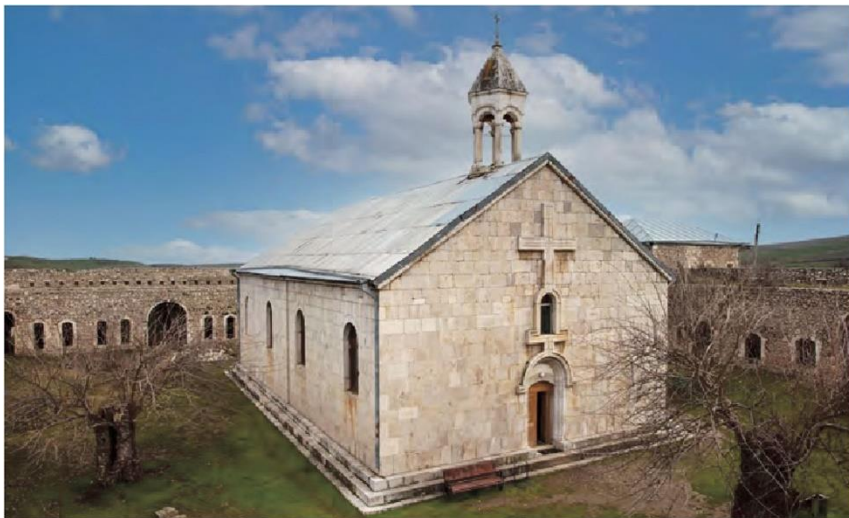


The Khutavank (Dadivank) Monastery  
(photo by I. Shirayev)



St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai in Egypt  
(4th century), in which Albanian palimpsests were discovered  
(photo by A. Levin).





he Amaras Monastery founded in the 4th century at the burial place of St Grigoris of Albania; the diocesan center of the Albanian Church (hoto by I. Shirayayev).



The 7th-14th century Udi temple Kala Gergets in the name of St. Eliseus in Oghuz (photo by D. Svechnikov).



St. George the Victorious' Basilica in the 4th-6th century Aghoghlan Monastery (Tsitsernavank) in the Lachin District of Azerbaijan. © Depositphotos

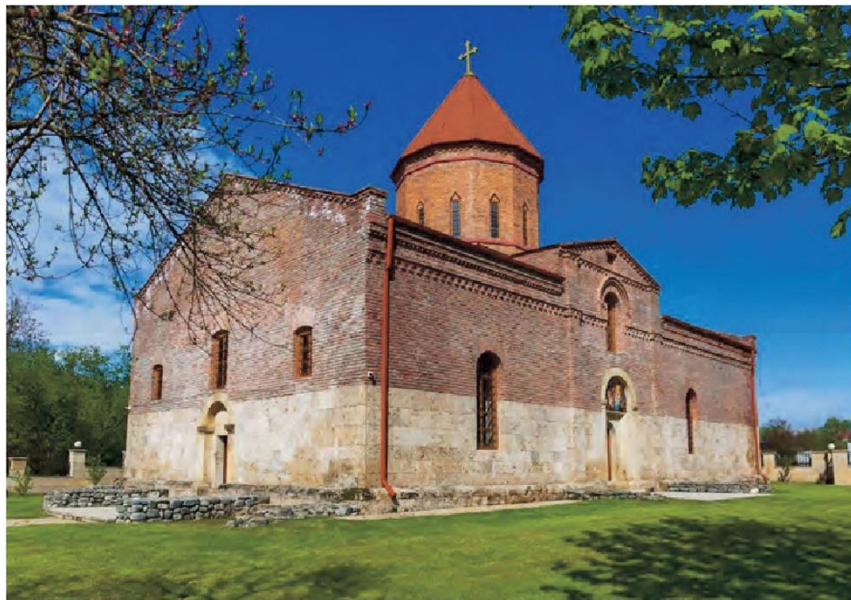


The ancient Sasanian citadel Naryn-Kala, part of the Derbent fortress, which was intended to block the so-called Caspian Gates to the Persian state; the northeastern border of Caucasian Albania (photo by E. Odareyev).



The annual Orthodox prayer to Bartholomew the Apostle at the foot of the Maiden Tower in the historical center of Baku on the foundations of the Apostle Chapel (photo by D. Svechnikov).





The Bulun Church of the Theotokos in the Udi village of Nij in the Qabala District and the first Orthodox liturgy in it held by Archimandrite Ale>y (Nikonorov) in 2022 (photo by D. Svechnikov).



The Church of Apostle Eliseus (probably named after the Holy Mother of God) in the village of Kish in the Shaki District of Azerbaijan (the current 12th century building at the site of a more ancient shrine). © Depositphotos





The 5th-7th Vankasar Church in the Aghdam District of Azerbaijan founded, as legend has it, by the Albanian king Vachagan III. ©Alamy





The 12th-13th century medieval monastery complex Goshavank (Nor Getik) founded by Mkhitar Gosh; Kirakos Gandzaketsi was its famous resident. © Shutterstock



The view of the southern slope of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem from the bell tower of the Russian Convent of Ascension; the likely location of the Albanian Monastery of Pand in the name of St. John the Baptist {photo by P. Platonov}.



The Sacrament of Baptism of the Albanian-Udi Christian community members (photo by D. Svechnikov).

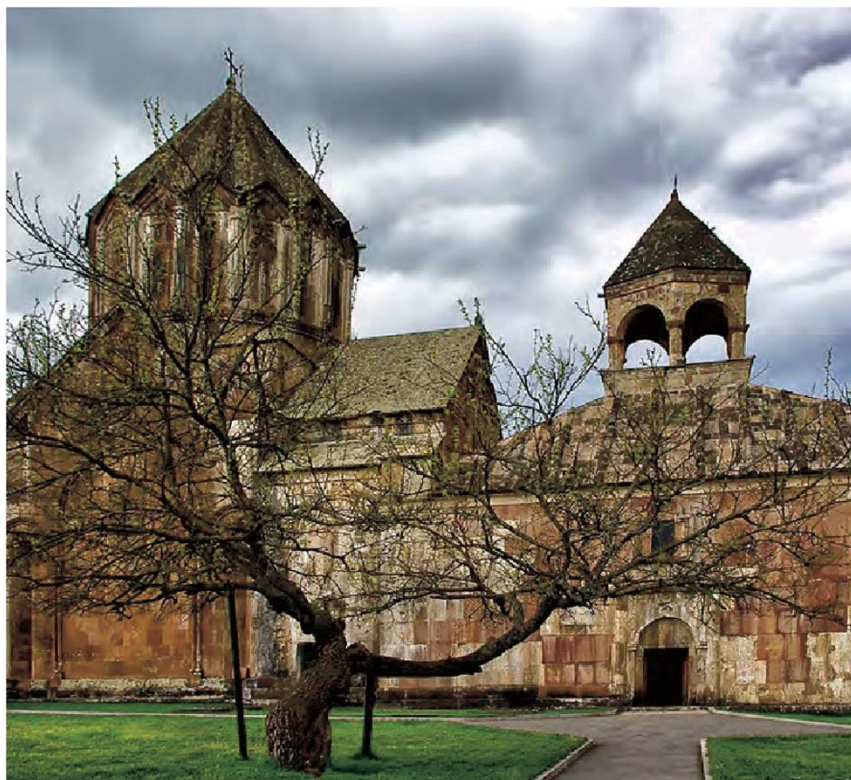




The monastery complex in the name of St. Nina, Equal of the Apostles, which consisted of 5 churches, 5th-8th-13th centuries, near the village of Lekit in the Qakh District of Azerbaijan (photo by I. Kengerli),



The Gandzasar Monastery named after St. John the Baptist, which was first mentioned in the 12th century. The current cathedral was consecrated in 1240. The monastery is the burial place of Prince Hasan Jalal of Khachen. It has been the residence of Albanian catholicos since the 14th century. © Dreamstime



The Gandzasar Monastery in the Kalbajar District of Azerbaijan (photo by I. Shirayev).





The Jotari Church of St. Eliseusin the Udi village of Nij in the Qabala District and the first Orthodox liturgy in it held by Arch imand rite Ale>y (Nikonorov) in 2022 (photo by D. Svechnikov).

## III.2. THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE CAUCASIAN REGION IN THE 7th-8th CENTURIES

### III.2.1. *The Arab Conquests in the 7th Century*

Even at the height of his success, Persian shah Khosrow II (590-628) received a letter from Arabia. One religious Arab leader ordered him to renounce his own religion and accept instead the religion of an Arab prophet. This prophet's name was Muhammad. Khosrow II tore up the letter and probably forgot about him. But while the shahanshah was descending from the apex of his power into an abyss of disgrace and ruin, Muhammad was gradually uniting the militant Arab tribes around him, inspiring them with fervent faith in a new religion, confidence in the righteousness of their deeds, and instant rewards in paradise for those who fought and died for the holy cause. The religion was called Islam ("submission" to the will of Allah), and the believers were called Muslims ("those who submitted").

While Arabia was gathering strength, Persia was weakening. After Khosrow II's death, a period of anarchy ensued, when the kings were proclaimed and deposed one by one.

Kalankatuatsi writes about Kavad II (628), Khosrow II's son and successor to the throne, as follows:

**He took the place of his father King Khosrov and was kind and merciful to all the kingdom and his subjects, and he sought peace with his fellow kings. He sent all the men who had been in the prison of his father's court back to their homes and wrote letters to all the regions of his kingdom bidding them live in joy and gladness. He exonerated all localities in his kingdom from all royal tribute and tolls (*harks ew maks arkuni*) for three years, and endeavored to act in such a way that no one need gird his sword about him throughout the whole of his reign. But because our sins, committed in unguided and troubled times, must needs inflict a wound upon us, his good intentions were in vain and perished. His life came to an end after seven months, the parricide returned to his fathers and the kingdom was to be taken from the house of Sasan and delivered into the hands of the sons of Ismael.**<sup>1139</sup>

Further, Khosrow II's grandson Yazdegerd III (632-651) was placed on the throne in 632. He was only fifteen years old and had no real power. Yet, in the year of his coronation, Muhammad died, and the prospect of further conquests seemed to evaporate before they began. But Muhammad was succeeded by his elderly father-in-law Abu Bakr. He became the first Caliph ("heir"). Abu Bakr sent new letters, one to Yazdegerd III and the other to Emperor Heraclius (610-641), inviting them to convert to Islam. Both were ignored. Then the Muslims made their move. They were confronted by two enemies. The Arab leaders decided, however, to attack both of their great opponents at the same time. The Byzantine Empire and Persia had just gone through a fierce twenty-year war, ravaging each other's territories in turns. Both were exhausted and reduced to empty shells, which seemed indestructible from the outside, but were helpless within.<sup>1140</sup> As a result, the Arabs took away the Byzantine provinces, which had just been saved from Persian conquerors, with little effort. By 636, they had taken possession of Syria and Judea, with Jerusalem and the True Cross being lost again, this time forever. By 640, the Arabs had conquered Egypt.

At the end of his days, Heraclius saw the fruits of his great victory being destroyed, but could not find the strength to organize another counter-offensive. The grand endeavors of the 620s devastated him and the empire itself. He died in 641.<sup>1141</sup>

Of course, Constantinople did not lose everything. It retained Asia Minor and its European provinces, whose borders were assaulted by the Arab armies to no avail. Nevertheless, after the Arab conquests no one could speak of the Byzantine Empire any longer, although Heraclius' heirs certainly still called themselves Roman emperors and their subjects Roman people until the very end of the empire's history.

Meanwhile, the Arabs also attacked Persia. The pretext was ready to hand, because Khosrow II had destroyed the Arab Kingdom of Al-Hirah a quarter-century before. The Arabs declared themselves the avengers of Al-Hirah, sent an army to the northeast, occupied it, and marched to the Euphrates. The surprised and indignant Persians, busy with Yazdegerd III's coronation, hastily assembled an army to punish the nomads and crushed them in the so-called Battle of the Bridge in 634. The Arabs did not accept the defeat, but, feeling confidence in imminent victory over the Byzantines on

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Kennedy H. *The Great Arab Conquests*. Philadelphia, 2007. P. 70.

<sup>1155</sup> Velichko A.M. *Istoriya vizantiyskikh imperatorov* [The History of the Byzantine Emperors], Vol. II, p. 306-308.



the other flank, sent a larger army to Persia. The shahanshah, who was trying to resist the first Arab campaigns, requested that the governors of subordinate countries and regions send additional detachments. The shahanshah's call was heard by hundreds of thousands of volunteers, led by local rulers, who flocked from all over, including Caucasian Albania. The sources indicate that the number of troops arriving in Iran ranged between 60,000 to 120,000.<sup>1142</sup> In 634, Yazdegerd appointed Rostam Farrokhzad, known for his martial prowess and called the ruler of Media and Atrpatakan by local sources, as commander-in-chief of the Persian army.<sup>1143</sup>

On the eve of the Arab invasion, a vast territory "from the borders of Iberia to the gates of the Huns" in Caucasian Albania was governed by Juansher, the younger son of Varaz Grigor, the first ruler of the Mihranid dynasty. According to Movses Kalankatuatsi, the commander Juansher, who headed the military units consisting of Albanians, showed courage and valor in the first battles against the Arabs. The 80,000-member army of the commander-in-chief Rostam and the 3,000-member army of Juansher were joined by the 3,000-member regiment of the Armenian commander Mushegh Mamikonian and the 1,000-member detachment of Prince Grigor of Syunik in the fight for the Sassanid capital, Ctesiphon, in 637.<sup>1144</sup> Many South Caucasus soldiers were killed in this bloody battle (including the commander Rostam, Prince Grigor of Syunik and his son), which ended in the Arab victory, the capture of Ctesiphon, and the escape of Yazdegerd III.<sup>1145</sup> The severely wounded Juansher, prince of Albania, fought the Arabs for a long time, but, realizing that the struggle was futile and the Sasanian Empire had already collapsed, returned home in 639 or 640. The Persians fortified themselves in Nahavand, about 80 km south of Ecbatana, which used to be the capital of Media. Here the Arabs achieved victory in 642. The fleeing Yazdegerd III was killed in 651 after nineteen years of a reign consisting of almost continuous retreats and defeats.

Just a quarter-century after Khosrow II stood on the shore of the Bosphorus and looked at the domes and towers of Constantinople across a milewide strait, his empire disappeared from the world map forever.

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<sup>1142</sup> al-Kufi. *Kitab al-Futuh*. Hyderabad, 1968-1975. Part I.P. 201; at-Tabari. *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir At-Tabari*. Edited by M. de Goeje. Leiden, 1879-1890. Vol.I. P. 2615.

<sup>1143</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 41, p. 92.

<sup>1144</sup> Ibid., Chapter 42, p. 98-99.

<sup>1159</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

By the mid-7th century, the South Caucasus, including the territory of Caucasian Albania, as well as most of the Middle East, had fallen into the orbit of the Arab Caliphate. The real invasions of Arab troops into Transcaucasia began as early as 643.<sup>1146</sup> As can be seen from a comparative analysis of sources of that period, the Arabs were able to conquer only the southern and Caspian lands of Albania up to Derbent in 643 to 644 during the reign of Caliph Umar (632-644).

However, between 644 and 645, after the death of Caliph Umar, the inhabitants of the Transcaucasian regions took advantage of the political instability, rebelled, and refused to fulfill the conditions of treaties agreed with the Arabs.<sup>1147</sup> This led to the second Arab campaign in Transcaucasia, which started with the advance of the army under the leadership of al-Walid ibn Uqba, the commander appointed by the new caliph Uthman (644-656).<sup>1148</sup>

In 652, the previous border between the Byzantine Empire and the former Persian and now Arab possessions changed, moving far to the west.

The details of events in the Caucasus in the second half of the 7th century can be found in the Arab sources. For example, the historian Ahmad ibn Atham al-Kufi<sup>1149</sup> (early 10th century), who wrote a work<sup>1150</sup> with the same title as that of al-Baladhuri (9th century), indicates, describing the conquest of Salman ibn Rabiah, that the Arab commander "began to kill those who resisted him, conquer the cities and fortresses that he passed, and devastate the country until he came to Baylaqan in the country of Arran," then he continued his campaign to the land of the Khazars.<sup>1151</sup> But the governance bodies, locally established by the Arabs to collect the taxes stipulated in the treaties, were not sophisticated enough. For this reason, in the early years of Arab conquests, the governor's position was actually replaced by the "amil," a tax official. Any developments inside the country and in the center of the Caliphate ended with attempts of local population to get rid of external dependence, leading to the cancellation of peace treaties concluded with many cities of the South Caucasus in a short time. During another confrontation in 652

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<sup>1146</sup> at-Tabari. *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir At-Tabari*, Vol. I, p. 2804.

<sup>1147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1148</sup> Volixanli Nails, *drob Xilafoti v3 Azarbaycan*. Baku, 1994. P. 129.

<sup>1149</sup> Abu Muhammad Ahmad ibn Ah al-Kufi was one of the greatest Arab historians of his time, known as "Ibn Atham Kufi" (died in 926/927). His books *at-Tarikh* ("History") and *al-Fu-tuh* ("Conquests") are considered valuable sources on the history of Islam. The latter work contains interesting information related to Azerbaijan. His frequent references to the Shiite traditions distinguish him from other historians.

<sup>1150</sup> al-Kufi. *Kitab al-Futuh*. Beirut, 1991.

<sup>1165</sup> al-Kufi. *Kitab al-Futuh*, Vol. 2, p. 343-344.

or 653, after the murder of the Arab commander Salman ibn Rabiah, many regions of the South Caucasus ceased submitting to the Arabs. This, however, did not last long. Already two years later, Caliph Uthman sent new forces to the South Caucasus, led by Habib ibn Maslama, who was well aware of the situation in the region. The historian al-Kufi notes that Habib with an army of 6,000 organized the second campaign to Khilat and Siraj-Tayra (Shirak) and sent a letter to Jurzana (Georgia), demanding to restore the conditions of the peace treaty previously concluded with the ruler of this country. The local historian Ghewond confirms that the Arabs carried out a new campaign only

10 years later, “in the thirty-sixth year of their rule.”<sup>1152</sup>

By this time, the scope of Arab conquests in the South Caucasus had expanded and already covered all the historical lands of Caucasian Albania and neighboring countries, including Tiflis, Derbent, and all Caspian regions. Hence, the residence of the Caliphate’s representative moved from Dabil (Dvin) to Barda (Partaw), the capital city of Albania, from 640. Huzai-fah ibn al-Yaman al-Absi was appointed to the governor’s position by decree of Caliph Uthman. Yet, within a short period of time Silah bin Zafir was temporarily appointed to replace him by the caliph’s new decree. According to al-Kufi, Silah bin Zafir, who officially served as a governor and ruled the country for one year, “... began to humiliate and embarrass the local rulers until they submitted to him with obedience and loyalty.”<sup>1153</sup> Local sources note that during relentless struggle against the Arab oppression, Theodore Rshtuni, ruler of Eastern Armenia, concluded a treaty with the Arabs and had Armenia, Iberia, Albania, and Syunik up to the Caucasus Mountains and the Gates of Chora come under his administration.<sup>1154</sup> However, the remark available in the source — “he (i.e. Theodore Rshtuni — A. N.) had made a pact... to bring that land into subjection”<sup>1155</sup> — indicates that not only was the South Caucasus beyond the control of Theodore Rshtuni, but the Caliphate had not been able to build up its authority in these places yet, although ten years had already passed since the beginning of the Arab invasion.

After Caliph Uthman’s assassination in 656, during the reign of Ali (656-661) and Muawiyah (661-680), the South Caucasus entered a relatively peaceful time, which lasted about a quarter-century. Caucasian Albania soon restored ties with Byzantium. As a reward for this, Emperor Constans

11 (641-668) sent the Albanian prince Juansher “very great gifts: a throne carved in silver with a gilded back, robes of spun gold, and the sword with pearl-studded

<sup>1152</sup> Ghewond. *History*, Chapter 3, p. 4.

<sup>1153</sup> al-Kufi. *Kitab al-Futuh*, Vol. 2, p. 346.

<sup>1154</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 49, p. 143.

<sup>1155</sup> Ibid.

scabbard which he himself wore. He made him a first patrician, and ordered the titles of patrician, consul, ex-praefect, general, and illustis sufficient for 12,000 men to be sent that Juansher might bestow them upon whomsoever he wished.”<sup>1156</sup> The emperor gave to him “all the villages and regions which had belonged to the first kings of Albania ... as an inheritance from generation to generation, and he appointed him to govern all the eastern people as king.”<sup>1157</sup>

According to Theophanes, in the 17th year of Constans II’s reign, i.e. in 657/658, Caliph Muawiyah signed a peace treaty with Byzantium at the cost of paying 1,000 dinars, a horse, and a slave to the emperor per day.<sup>1158</sup> The Arab historians are silent about this humiliating treaty for Muslims, but Sebeos has a brief account of it. The latter even adds that about 15,000 Arab soldiers “believed in Christ and were baptized.”<sup>1159</sup>

Thus, Caucasian Albania supposedly found itself in a semi-vassal state to Byzantium, while the northern borders of the Caliphate did not extend beyond the Aras and Kura valleys.<sup>1160</sup>

After the Greeks were defeated by the Arabs on the Euphrates in 662, Armenia had to recognize the Caliphate’s hegemony. By that point, Caucasian Albania had been subjected to another Khazar invasion, who had reached the shores of the Kura.<sup>1161</sup> In the winter of 664/665, the Khazars raided Albania again, but this time they crossed the Kura and went to the shores of the Aras. Here they “took prisoner and held captive in their camp beyond the river Kur and on the banks of the Araxes not only the autochthonous population, but also those from the provinces of Ayrarat and Siwnastan [Siwnik] who had come to afford their flocks and herds winter pasture.”<sup>1162</sup> Following this event, Juansher entered into negotiations with the Khazars and made peace with them, according to which the *khagan* returned the booty and prisoners, and the Albanian prince took his daughter to wife.<sup>1163</sup>

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<sup>1156</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 20, p. 116 – 117.

<sup>1157</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 22, p. 119.

<sup>1158</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, A. D. 658-659, p. 46.

<sup>1159</sup> Sebeos. *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, Chapter 52, p. 154.

<sup>1160</sup> Shaginian A.K. *Armeniya nakanune arabskogo zavoyevaniya* [Armenia on the Eve of the Arab Conquest], St. Petersburg, 2003. P. 90.

<sup>1161</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 23, p. 120.

<sup>1162</sup> Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 26, p. 123.

<sup>1163</sup> Ibid.

Meanwhile, Caliph Muawiyah launched a series of campaigns against Byzantium, which lasted until his death, but they were very briefly reported in the sources, with few exceptions. Constans II was assassinated by the conspirators in 668, and his son Constantine IV Pogonatus (669-685) soon became the emperor. In 678, the caliph was again forced to make peace with Byzantium for 30 years, on favorable terms for the Greeks.<sup>1164</sup> The analysis of hostilities between the Caliphate and Byzantium reported in the sources leads us to the conclusion that the emperor found himself in a difficult situation and was in no position to intervene in the affairs of Caucasian Albania. Muawiyah, on the other hand, was so busy with an intense struggle that he was content with receiving tribute from Albania and, as a matter of fact, had to recognize its independence.

In 680, shortly after Prince Juansher's assassination, his nephew Varaz-Trdat I (680-705) became the ruler and was recognized by Caliph Yazid I (680-683), whereas the Khazars invaded Caucasian Albania again.<sup>1165</sup>

After the end of the nominal reign of Varaz-Trdat, the last ruler of the Mihranid dynasty of Albania, the Arabs finally subjugated the entire Transcaucasian region. Caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705) carried out administrative reforms, resulting in the region's new administrative organization. The administrative name *Azerbaijan*, which united the Caspian regions of Iran and the South Caucasus as a whole (during the Sassanid period), was replaced by the administrative name *Arminia* under the Arabs, referring to all territories conquered by them (Albania, Kartli-Iberia, Armenia, Dagestan, and Nakh-chivan). This name, assigned to all the above-mentioned countries, stemmed from the pre-Arab administrative system of Byzantine Armenia established after the reform of Emperor Justinian I in the mid-6th century and inherited by the Arab occupation authorities. There were also other objective reasons for the appearance of this name: first, the territory of Armenia itself was the first South Caucasian country conquered by the Arabs during the Mesopotamian campaign, when they took possession of the Armenian lands subject to Byzantium; second, the Arabs set up the residence of their first Caucasian governor in Dabil (Dvin), the main city of Armenia in the given period. Nevertheless, the pre-Arab (Sasanian) name of the territories in the South Caucasus – Azerbaijan/Adurbadagan/Atropatakan – was preserved in the sources of that time.

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Velichko A.M. *Istoriya vizantiyskikh imperatorov* [The History of the Byzantine Emperors], Vol. II, p. 348.

<sup>1179</sup>

Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 2, Chapter 36, p. 150.

Arminia I and Arminia II of the Arab administrative organization covered the territory stretching from Tiflis and Derbent in the north to the Aras River in the south, from the Lesser Caucasus mountains in the west to the Caspian Sea in the east. The Arabs started to use the name *Arran* for the historical Albanian lands. In addition to historical Albania, the lands of Syunik-Nakhchivan were included in the Arab province of Arran.<sup>1166</sup>

### III.2.2. *The Arab Conquests in the 8th Century*

The 8th century began. The Albanian prince Varaz-Trdat was in Byzantine captivity, and his nephew Sheroy (699-705) ruled the country. Both Arab and Caucasian sources contain the details of a difficult political situation that followed the internecine wars during the reign of Caliph Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (685-705) and his son al-Walid (705-715) in the early years of the 8th century, as well as evidence of opposition by local forces to the Arabs, Muhammad ibn Marwan's violent politics, and bloody battles with varying success. According to al-Baladhuri, after Muhammad ibn Marwan (693-709) had been appointed governor of the North, he marched with an army against the rebellious population of Arminia and "won the victory, slaughtering and taking captives. Thus, he subdued the land."<sup>1167</sup> In 705, he lured all the nobles of Transcaucasian peoples with their families into the cities of Nakhchivan and Khram under the pretext of compiling the lists to pay tribute. Here the chiefs of the richest families were thrown into prison, tormented, and tortured until they agreed to be redeemed for their weight in gold. Yet, after receiving the ransom, the Arabs executed their prisoners on the gallows. As for the remaining nobles and their relatives who submitted to the demands of conquerors and gathered in the amount of 800 people (according to the chronicles) in Nakhchivan and 400 people in Khram, the Arabs locked them in the churches, lit a fire, and burned them alive.<sup>1168</sup> Al-Ya'qubi<sup>1169</sup> also confirms this event "in the churches in the province of Khilat."<sup>1170</sup> Al-Kufi,

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1166 Aliyev I.G. *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana* [The History of Azerbaijan]. Baku, 1995. P. 195-196.

1167 al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*, Part IV, Chapter I, p. 322.

1168 Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 16, p. 208.

1169 Ahmad ibn Abu Ya'qub ibn Jafar ibn Wadih al-Katib al-Abbasi al-Ya'qubi (died in 897 or 905) was an Arab historian, geographer, and traveler, one of the first representatives of the pragmatic trend in the historical Arab literature. He wrote *Tarikh* ("History"), one of the first works on world history in the Arab literature.

1170 al-Ja'qubi. *Tarikh*. Edited by M. Houtsma. Leiden, 1883. Vol. 2. P. 324-325.

who differs from his contemporaries with more detailed reports, notes that Marwan defeated the Byzantine-Armenian forces and burned churches, but does not specify the exact location of the incident, assuming the placement of Marwan's troops "inside Arminia."<sup>1171</sup>

From this time, the Caliphate started making attempts to Arabize Caucasian Albania. The first settlers represented by the Arab administration were followed by the entire tribes that began to inhabit the newly acquired territories. According to al-Ya'qubi, they belonged to a group of northern Nizariyyah clans from the Rabi'ah and Mudar tribes.<sup>1172</sup>

In 750, the powerful Umayyads were replaced in the Caliphate by the Abbasids, who embarked on a policy of settling the Yemenites in Azerbaijan and Arran, gradually ousting the northern Arabian tribes from the Caucasus and replacing them with members of the Central and South Arabian tribes.

Soon, as noted by Bunyatov, almost all Arab tribes, both northern and southern, found themselves settled in Azerbaijan and Arran. And since there had always been hostility between these tribes, their old feud flared up very quickly. The feud was even more exacerbated in Azerbaijan and Arran because of the best lands and grounds. This, however, did not bother the caliphs and central government at all, for they were probably more interested in splitting up, rather than rallying, the forces of even closely related tribes, not to mention the tribes of different confederations.<sup>1173</sup>

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<sup>1171</sup> al-Kufi. *Kitab al-Futuh*, Vol. 6, p. 352.

<sup>1172</sup> al-Ja'qubi. *Tarikh*, Vol. 2, p. 515-516.

<sup>1173</sup> Bunyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydžhan v VII-IX w.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 86 and further.

### III.3. THE CHURCH OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA IN THE ARAB PERIOD

In general, the relevant research literature on the history of Caucasian Albania superficially addresses the issue regarding the state of the church and the position of the Albanian Christians during the Arab annexation of the South Caucasus. Therefore, we will try to restore the historical scene for the period in question based on the evidence of Arab and local sources.

Indeed, Islam took away almost the entire East from Christianity in less than a century. Eventually, Christianity remained in this region only in the form of ethnic and religious minorities. It should be noted that the ethno-confessional nature of Eastern Church organization is deeply rooted in history. Hence, the ethnic groups living in the Caucasus faced ongoing political and cultural pressure from large empires. Politically, they constantly fell victim to conflicts between Rome and Parthia, then Rome and Byzantium, then Byzantium and Sasanian Persia. Culturally, according to A.V. Zhuravsky, the process of Hellenization could not completely undermine the autochthonous cultural traditions, which were most evident with the advent of Christianity. It is no coincidence that the conversion of small peoples of the Middle East to Christianity was marked by the flourishing of their national cultures.<sup>1174</sup>

Yet, the small peoples of the entire Middle East and the Caucasus enlightened by Christianity ended up facing two great Christian empires, Rome and Byzantium, which still sought to bring them under their political and spiritual influence, albeit in a different capacity. These peoples found the desired form of seclusion in the heterodox denominations of Christianity. Most Syrians, Assyrians, Copts, Armenians, and Caucasian Albanians did not recognize the Christological dogmas of the Council of Chalcedon of 451 and formed their own domestic Monophysite, Nestorian, Jacobite, and somewhat later Monothelite churches. It was not so much theological as national and political interests and aspirations that lay at the heart of the self-identification of Eastern Churches.

By the second half of the 6th century, Christianity had been deeply entrenched in Caucasian Albania and neighboring countries, leading to the formation of the single church management system; territories, like the flock subordinate to the Albanian catholicos, were strictly limited by the canonical boundaries of dioceses; services and sermons were conducted in their native

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<sup>1188</sup> Zhuravsky A.V. *Khristianstvo i islam: sotsiokulturnye problemy dialoga* [Christianity and Islam: Sociocultural Problems of Dialogue]. Moscow, 1990. P. 81.



Albanian language; the church helped the Albanian rulers to solve complex political issues. For a long period, from the 4th to the 8th centuries, Christianity in Caucasian Albania acted as a national religion, whose protection meant maintaining its political and ethno-cultural integrity.

Before the 5th century, the Albanian Church followed the Byzantine Orthodox Church in adopting the resolutions of the first three Ecumenical Councils, but the Council of Chalcedon of 451 caused a deep dogmatic and political split. In the subsequent period, the Albanian Church, like Albania itself, often turned to Byzantium, accepting the doctrinal principles of the Christian empire. This fact suggests that the Monophysitism of the Albanian Church was not stable.<sup>1175</sup> Byzantium could not completely return Caucasian Albania to the orbit of its influence due to the strategic position of the country, which was at the intersection of two powerful empires, Persia and Byzantium – constantly fighting for supremacy in the East, as well as near the gates to the northern barbarians, the Huns-Khazars, who troubled both empires and were used first by one, then by the other, as pawns against the opposite side.

The ensuing emergence of Islam and its rapid and firm establishment in the vast Asian and African territories during the military and religious expansion of the Arabs ultimately determined the fortunes of Eastern Christianity. The latter faced the new religion with almost no resistance. This was due, first, to early Islam being tolerant of the acts of faith of Christians (as long as they remained politically loyal) and, second, to the Muslims protecting them from the claims and persecution of Byzantium, which was intolerant of Monophysite and Nestorian doctrines. Thus, the territory of Caucasian Albania fell under the influence of the Arab Caliphate from the 7th century.

The first incursions of Arab troops into Transcaucasia are usually dated to 643.<sup>1176</sup> This stage of the conquest ended with the conclusion of the first peace treaty, governing the relations between the local population and the administration of the Caliphate.<sup>1177</sup> The Christian and Jewish population – with regard to life, property, and religion – as well as those fire worshippers (during the first period of conquests) who did not resist the Arabs and recognized the one Divine Power, all received immunity in return for paying a poll tax, *jizyah*.<sup>1178</sup> All converts to Islam were granted benefits; the local population involved in the Arab campaigns was freed from the

<sup>1175</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Kavkazskaya Albaniya i albany* [Caucasian Albania and the Albanians], p. 552.

<sup>1176</sup> at-Tabari. *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir At-Tabari*. Vol. I, p. 2804.

<sup>1177</sup> Ghewond. *History*, Chapter 2, p. 2.

<sup>1178</sup> *Jizyah* is an annual poll tax levied on the adult and free non-Muslim males in Islamic states (excluding monks). The *jizyah* amount remains the same throughout the life of a non-Muslim and is determined depending on the social class.

obligation of taxes.<sup>1179</sup> The financial incentive for conversion to Islam worked better than brute force. Persia quickly turned from Zoroastrianism to Islam, and Syria and Egypt moved away from Christianity just as fast. Certainly, not all Zoroastrians adopted Islam, nor did all Christians. They continued to live as before under the relatively mild rule of the early Muslims.

The analysis of hostilities between the Caliphate and Byzantium from 663 to 679 reported in the sources leads us to the conclusion that the emperor found himself in a difficult situation and was not in a position to intervene in the affairs of Transcaucasian countries. Caliph Muawiyah, on the other hand, was so busy with the intense struggle against the Greeks that he was content with receiving a tribute from the Caucasian countries and, as a matter of fact, had to recognize their independence. It should be noted that there were neither Arab nor Greek troops in Caucasian Albania at that time.<sup>1180</sup>

Later, with the political and theological consolidation of Islam and growth of anti-Christian sentiments in its milieu, the bulk of Middle Eastern Christians converted to Islam, while those remaining faithful to their religion were mostly Arabized. In addition to the Armenians, who barely succumbed to Arabization, the Albanian Christians retained their ethnic characteristics to a greater or lesser extent, but gradually assimilated linguistically, switching to the Armenian language in liturgical life.

Basically, the status of Christians was already defined in the Quran: "Fight against those who ... do not adopt the religion of truth — from those who were given the Scripture — until they give the jizyah (tribute) willingly while they are humbled" (Quran 9:29). The Christians were therefore entitled to exist as a foreign religious community provided that they paid a poll tax, jizyah, and recognized their subordinate social status to the Muslims. Such status was governed by a set of regulations developed by the Muslim jurists in the 8th-11th centuries. Depending on the era and place, these regulations were observed more or less strictly, but their essence remained unchanged and was aimed at obtaining additional income from the non-Muslim population, removing Christians from public administration, and protecting Islam from the ideological influence of Christianity (it was prohibited to read and interpret the Quran, disparage the Prophet, or try to convert a Muslim). From the time of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847-861), the Christians also had to wear distinctive signs on their clothes. Similarly to Iran, the Christians in Caucasian Albania wore a special leather belt, the *zunnar*. The *dhimmi* (non-Muslims) could not

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<sup>1179</sup> *Azərbaycan tarixi*. VII cild, h. II. Baku, 1998. P. 159-162.

<sup>1180</sup> Shaginian A.K. *Armeniya nakanune arabского zavoyevaniya* [Armenia on the Eve of the Arab Conquest], p. 94.

ride horses, only mules. When meeting Muslims, they had to dismount and give way.<sup>1181</sup>

We can learn from the sources about a treaty concluded by the Arabs with the population of Caucasian Albania and its conditions. Although the text of the treaty has not survived, it was probably similar to that concluded with the population of Dvin:

**In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful. This is a treaty of Habib ibn-Maslamah with the Christians, Magians and Jews of Dabil, including those present and absent. I have granted you safety for your lives, possessions, churches, places of worship, and city wall. Thus ye are safe and we are bound to fulfil our covenant, so long as ye fulfil yours and pay poll-tax and *kharaj*.<sup>1182</sup> Thereunto Allah is witness; and it suffices to have him for witness. Signed by Habib ibn- Maslamah.<sup>1183</sup>**

Thus, the Christians and Jews were siloed into separate communities and kept in a strictly subordinate position to the Muslim *ummah*. The specifics of Muslim statehood prompted the development of solely religious law in the Caliphate. The legislation was derived not from any government agency or public official, but from a religious doctrine. Even the caliph (or sultan) could not amend or abolish any part of the Sharia, being only the guardian and enforcer of the sacred law.<sup>1184</sup>

It is quite understandable that the principles of Sharia could not apply to the Jews and Christians, except for those determining their status in the Muslim state. Each religious community adhered to its own legal and reli-

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<sup>1181</sup> Petrushevsky I.P. *Islam v Irane v VII-XV vv.* [Islam in Iran in the 7th-15th centuries]. Leningrad, 1966. P. 184-185.

<sup>1182</sup> *Kharaj* was a state land tax levied in the Near and Middle East countries in the Middle Ages and Modern Times. It was first introduced by the Sassanids. *Kharaj* was initially collected from the conquered non-Muslim population and then from the Muslims in the Arab Caliphate.

<sup>1183</sup> al-Baladhuri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*, Part IV, Chapter I, p. 314-315.

<sup>1184</sup> Ivanov N.A. O tipologicheskikh osobennostyakh arabo-osmanskogo feodalizma [On the Typological Features of Arab-Ottoman Feudalism], *Narody Azii i Afriki* [The Peoples of Asia and Africa], No. 3. Moscow, 1978. P. 58.

gious standards, which governed both its spiritual and social life, resulting in not only no equality before the law, but also no idea of national identity. This state of affairs may have eventually led to the Albanian Church's dependence on Etchmiadzin.

In fact, the Arab conquest of the Middle East, North Africa, and other territories opened up a new chapter in the history of Christianity. The Copts, Syrian Jacobites, Armenians, and Albanians became a religious minority in the greater world of Islam and, doomed to many centuries of heroic but lonely struggle for survival, gradually lost their sense of belonging to a world larger than their own. As noted by Meyendorff, the long resistance of these peoples against Chalcedon had understandably left them with bitter memories of the Byzantine empire, although their theology, their carefully preserved liturgical traditions and their spirituality owed much to the period when they fully shared the life of the Universal Church. Their faithfulness to that Tradition and Christology was elucidated by the consensus of modern scholarship beginning in the 19th century. It becomes increasingly embarrassing to use the term "Monophysite" to designate these ancient churches, since the term has acquired a pejorative connotation during centuries of polemics.<sup>1185</sup>

### III.3.1. *Catholicos Nerses Bakur*

Internecine wars for the throne started in the Caliphate at the end of the 7th century. When the uprising of the anticaliph Abd Allah ibn az-Zubayr had been suppressed, Marwan I, the founder of the Marwanid dynasty, came to power. Marwan I ruled the state for only one year (684-685), after which his son Abd al-Malik (685-705) became a caliph. At this point in time, the Armenians, Georgians, and Albanians ceased to pay tribute to the Arabs after 30 years of obedience.<sup>1186</sup>

In 685, Caliph Abd al-Malik made a truce with Emperor Justinian II (685-711), under which the taxes collected from Albania, Georgia, and Armenia were to be divided equally between the Caliphate and Byzantium.<sup>1187</sup> Transcaucasia once again found itself under the influence of two powerful rivals, each of which acted at its own discretion by carrying out attacks, mercilessly plundering and taking the population captive, and destroying cultural

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<sup>1185</sup> Meyendorff John, protopresbyter. *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions*, Epilogue, p. 375.

<sup>1186</sup> Ghewond. *History*, Chapter 4, p. 6.

<sup>1201</sup> Kulakovsky Y.A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium]. Vol. III. St. Petersburg, 1876. P. 251.

and material artefacts. As a result, following the conclusion of the armistice agreement between Abd al-Malik and Justinian II, Caucasian Albania had to pay tribute to three states: Khazaria, the Caliphate, and Byzantium.<sup>1188</sup>

In 689, the Byzantines launched a military campaign in the South Caucasus led by the emperor himself, who divided his army into three forces and sent them to each of the Transcaucasian countries. This undertaking brought about the consolidation of Byzantine positions in the region. The Albanian prince Varaz-Trdat received the title of exarch from Justinian.<sup>1189</sup>

After the settlement of relations with the Khazars, Varaz-Trdat decided to stop paying the excessive tribute to Byzantium. To this end, he, together with his sons Gagik and Vardan, went to Constantinople for negotiations in 699. Here Emperor Tiberius III (698-705) arrested the Albanians, allegedly for Varaz-Trdat's rapprochement with the Caliphate and termination of all relations with the empire. Tiberius III left Varaz-Trdat's sons as hostages, but did not immediately release the prince himself, keeping him in Constantinople for five years until 704.

Caucasian Albania soon witnessed events leading to the Caliphate's direct involvement. The Albanian chronicler relates that Nerses Bakur, bishop of Gardman and allegedly a consistent Chalcedonian, persuaded Varaz-Trdat's wife, Princess Spram, to "proclaim him patriarch of Albania," for the throne of the catholicos remained vacant after Eliazar's death (in 686). Thus, after being promoted by Princess Spram, Nerses Bakur was elected to the primatial throne of the Albanian Church at the synod of Albanian bishops in 686 (686-704). During Varaz-Trdat's stay in Byzantium, Catholicos Nerses decided to oppose the princely policy of rapprochement with the Caliphate. With Spram's support, he cultivated the idea of cementing Orthodoxy in the country.<sup>1190</sup>

This story, however, contains many unsaid, but obvious points that raise certain questions. How could a Chalcedonian bishop end up in a Monophysite environment? Why did the great princess go along with Nerses against the wishes of her relatives and associates? Why did Varaz-Trdat himself, ostensibly wanting to get closer to the Caliphate, go to the court of the Byzantine emperor instead of the caliph and even take his children with him? All these questions can be answered as follows. Probably realizing that it was impos-

<sup>1188</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 12, p. 202.

<sup>1189</sup> Shaginian A.K. *Armeniya nakanune arabskogo zavoyevaniya* [Armenia on the Eve of the Arab Conquest], p. 99.

<sup>1190</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 189-190.

sible to pay tribute to several parties at once, the Albanian prince decided to go to Tiberius III and enlist his support in this matter against the Arabs and Khazars, especially since the empire demonstrated its strength before, during two Byzantine campaigns in the Caucasus, in 686 and 689: "He killed the Saracens there and subjected it to the Romans, as he did Iberia, Albania, Boukania (Mughan -?), and Media. Making them tributary, he sent the Emperor a large sum of money."<sup>1191</sup> Already executing military operations in the Caucasus, the emperor attacked the Arabs on the Syrian border. This confrontation resulted in a peace treaty being signed at the end of 689, which, as indirectly evidenced by the Syrian and Greek sources, included a clause on the Transcaucasian countries. For instance, Michael the Syrian reports that Abd al-Malik abandoned Armenia, Kartli, and Albania in favor of Byzantium.<sup>1192</sup> In 699, in the same year that the Albanian prince Varaz-Trdat went to Constantinople, Emperor Tiberius III launched a new invasion into Northern Syria, where, according to Theophanes of Byzantium, he won a glorious victory, capturing a large amount of booty and killing up to 200,000 Arabs.<sup>1193</sup>

Tiberius decided that the Albanian prince and his sons, who were in his hands, served as a good reason for consolidating Byzantium's positions in Caucasian Albania through religious unity. An envoy must have been sent to Princess Spram to explain the emperor's wish to her. Garnering the support of her protegee, Catholicos Nerses, Spram began to act. However, there was another contender for the throne of the great prince of Albania, Varaz-Trdat's nephew, Prince Sheroy. It was not so difficult for him to organize opposition to the alliance of Princess Spram and Catholicos Nerses and, with the aid of the Armenian catholicos Yeghia, draw the attention of the Arabs to the problem.

Still, the Albanian historian presents the situation in a slightly different light. Movses Kalankatuatsi reports that before carrying out his reforms, Catholicos Nerses removed Israyel, bishop of Mec Kueank, and Eliazar, bishop of Gardman, from their diocesan sees.<sup>1194</sup> Nerses consecrated a certain Zaka-ria, his accomplice, bishop of Mec Irank. Further, the catholicos and the great princess began to move decisively, persecuting and expelling the adherents of the Monophysite confession from the country, replacing them with the Orthodox (Chalcedonians). The rapid moves of Catholicos Nerses were confronted by a group of influential nobles of Caucasian Albania, led by Prince Sheroy, who was an ardent opponent of the Chalcedonian doctrine. Prince

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<sup>1191</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, A. D. 686-687, p. 62.

<sup>1192</sup> Kulakovskiy Y. A. *Istoriya Vizantii* [The History of Byzantium]. Vol. III, p. 240.

<sup>1193</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, A. D. 700-701, p. 69.

<sup>1208</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 190.

Sheroy, known for his pro-Arab views, managed to break the resistance of Princess Spram and Catholicos Nerses Bakur and ascend the throne of the great prince of Albania (c. 699-705).<sup>1195</sup> In doing so, Sheroy and, accordingly, the Monophysite confession received support from Yovhannes, bishop of Ka-palak; Sahak, bishop of Amaras; and Simeon, bishop of Hosh.<sup>1196</sup>

While Varaz-Trdat was in Byzantine captivity, the situation in the Caucasus started to change in favor of the Caliphate. In 701, the Arabs led by Muhammad ibn Marwan, one of the most prominent generals of the Caliphate (during the period of 690-710), took the Armenian capital Dvin and left a garrison of 62,000 soldiers there, after which they moved towards Sevan and, passing through Albania, reached Derbent.<sup>1197</sup> This event finally established the presence of the Arabs in the South Caucasus, which became an administrative unit of the Caliphate called *Arminia* and centered in Dvin.<sup>1198</sup>

These political circumstances explain the position of Prince Sheroy, who, together with Monophysite bishops, asked the Armenian catholicos Yeghia I Archishetsi (703-717)<sup>1199</sup> for help in a special letter:

**Homage to the Lord Elia, catholicos of Armenia, from the united synod of Albania.**

**Our fathers shared the one orthodox faith with your fathers for the salvation of their souls. Owing to the indulgence of the Lord God the world-destroying heresy of Chalcedon has waxed strong and has spread through the universe, but till now our countries have remained unadulterated by this heresy.**

**Now, however, Nerses, whom we took to be a good shepherd, has turned wolf and has begun to tear asunder the rational flock of Christ. We have accordingly decided to advise Your Holiness that you might visit us as you visit your own members and heal our injuries.**

<sup>1195</sup> Mamedova ED. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 212.

<sup>1196</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 3, p. 190.

<sup>1197</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 16, p. 207-210.

<sup>1198</sup> Shaginian A.K. *Armeniya nakanune arabского zavoyevaniya* [Armenia on the Eve of the Arab Conquest], p. 104.

<sup>1199</sup> Yeghia I Archishetsi (703-717) was formerly a bishop in the canton of Bznunig. He supported the ideology of Catholicos Sahak II and was considered his political and spiritual ally. After being elected catholicos in 703, he pursued a policy of reconciliation with the Arabs to prevent further devastating raids on Armenia. On the other hand, he fought against Chalcedonism spread by the Byzantine Church in Armenia.

**Greetings in the Lord.<sup>1200</sup>**

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<sup>1200</sup><sup>1208</sup>Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 4, p. 191.



The Armenian catholicos seized the opportunity to report it to the caliph and present the situation as if the Albanians were entering into an alliance with Byzantium against the Caliphate. Below is the correspondence between the Armenian catholicos Yeghia and Caliph Abd al-Malik.

The letter of Yeghia, catholicos of Armenia, to Abd al-Malik Amir Mumin:

**To the conqueror of the universe, Abdlay Amir Mumin, from Elia, patriarch of Armenia.**

**By the power of Almighty God we hold our vassal country subject to your suzerainty. We and the Albanians worship the divinity of Christ. He who is now catholicos of Albania and has his throne in Partaw has come to an agreement with the emperor of Greece, mentions him in his prayers and forces the land to adopt his faith and unite with him. Let this now be known to you, and do not hesitate to act in this matter, for he is in league with a noblewoman. Order those who wished to sin against God to be punished upon your great authority as their deeds deserve.<sup>1201</sup>**

The reply of Abd al-Malik Amir Mumin to the letter of Yeghia, catholicos of Armenia:

**I have read your friendly letter, Elia, man of God, *djathliq* (catholicos) of the Armenian people, and I have sent my faithful servant with a great army to you. Regarding the rebellion of the Albanians against our authority, we have commanded them to be corrected in accordance with your religion. Our servant shall execute our punishment at Partaw in your presence; he will throw Nerses and the woman who is his accomplice into irons and will bring them to the royal court in ignominy that I may make them an example for all rebels to see.<sup>1202</sup>**

After receiving the letter from the Armenian catholicos, Caliph Abd al-Malik ordered him to convene a council in Partaw (Barda). Catholicos Yeghia, with the support of the army sent by the caliph, arrived in Partaw for the trial of Nerses and Spram. Lord Nerses attempted to hide from Yeghia, but Prince Sheroy seized certain close associates of the Albanian catholicos and, learning from them where Nerses stayed, found and imprisoned him. Nerses was unable to answer the charges against him at

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Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 5, p. 191.

1216 Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 6, p. 192.

Yeghia's trial, and as punishment, according to the historian, "they inflicted grievous wounds upon him in accordance with the royal command." Lord Nerses "was bound foot to foot with the woman (Princess Spram — A. N.) prior to being sent into exile. Because of these things, however, he would not eat for eight days, and he died. He had himself buried in the same chains and he cursed Sheroy for being the cause of his and Spram's misfortune on account of the dispute between him (Sheroy) and Spram concerning the question of authority."<sup>1203</sup>

Lord Nerses headed the patriarchal see of Albania from 686 to 704. The author of the *History of Albania* specifies the details: "Nerses occupied the patriarchal throne for fourteen years as an orthodox priest, and for three and a half years as a heretic."<sup>1204</sup>

The same Council of Partaw, which anathematized Lord Nerses, elected a new primate of the Albanian Church, the former archdeacon Simeon (704-705). He ordered all the books of Nerses to be thrown into the Terter River in the boxes.

The story of the Armenians' report to the caliph and the condemnation of Lord Nerses is confirmed by another 9th century source:

**Then, drawing on his wisdom and the charity of his heart, the great Elia wrote a letter to the Ishmaelite caliph "Umar,<sup>1205</sup> informing him [of the following], "There is a bishop here in our country, and also a princess, his accomplice, who have been disobedient to your majesty, and do not join us (the Armenian Church — A. N.), who always remember and proclaim your name in our prayers. To the contrary, they are publicly announcing [the name of] the king of the Greeks, and are contriving to return our land to him. Should you not hasten to remove them from our midst, they will very soon detach themselves [from you], and surrender to the Greeks with respect to their taxes and all of their transactions." Reading this letter, the caliph gratefully honored the envoy that had been sent by the great patriarch, and sent his chief eunuch with orders to bring immediately Nerses along with the princess (Spram — A. N.).<sup>1206</sup>**

Malachia Ormanian, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, emphasizes the role of the catholicos of Yeghia in suppressing the "heresy" of the Albanian catholicos in his book *The Church of Armenia*:<sup>1207</sup> "The most salient feature of the

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<sup>1203</sup> Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 7, p. 192.

<sup>1204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1205</sup> The author confuses Umar with Abd al-Malik.

<sup>1206</sup> Yovhannes Draskhanakertsi. *History of Armenia*, Chapter XXII, p. 109-110.

<sup>1207</sup> Ormanian M. *The Church of Armenia: Her History, Doctrine, Rule, Discipline, Liturgy, Literature, and Existing Condition*. Translated by M. Gregory. London, 1912.

patriarchate of his successor, Eghia (Elias) of Ardjesch (703-717), was the zeal he displayed to retain Caspian Albania in the communion of the Armenian Church.”<sup>1208</sup>

Shortly after these sad circumstances, the curse of Catholicos Nerses came true, and punishment befell Prince Sheroy. Meanwhile, the Arabs, who had finally gained a foothold in the Transcaucasian countries and put an end to the former power of Byzantium, apparently no longer needed the support of local nobility. This can explain the tragic events that occurred probably in 705, when 800 Caucasian *nakharars* were assembled in the churches of Nakhchivan and Khram under the pretext of being listed for salary receipt, and then burned. This fact is mentioned not only by the local sources,<sup>1209</sup> but also by the Arab,<sup>1210</sup> Greek,<sup>1211</sup> and Syrian<sup>1212</sup> ones. Prince Sheroy, along with the remaining princes and nobles of Albania, was taken by the caliph’s representatives to Syria.<sup>1213</sup> In Damascus, Sheroy was secretly executed. Caucasian Albania lost its semi-independent position and fell under the full control of the Arabs.<sup>1214</sup>

The Armenian Church, according to the historian Buniyatov, subsequently received the support of the Caliphate in deposing the Albanian clergy from office and starting an intensified Armenization (ethnic, cultural, and religious) of Albanians living in the country’s mountainous areas inaccessible to the Arabs.<sup>1215 1216</sup> However, there is an objection to this statement: “The catholicos took this step (reported on Nerses to the Arab authorities — A.N.) at the behest of the princes and spiritual leaders of Aghuank... Reliable facts ... from historical sources demonstrate that in this case the struggle was not between the Armenian and Aghuanian churches, but on the part of the Armenian and Aghuanian churches against Chalcedonism.”<sup>1230</sup>

After the Albanian catholicos Simeon was ordained at the same Council of Partaw of 705, the following was decided: “Concerning the consecration of our catholicos; ... now, since this consecration has been performed in an inexperienced and indiscriminating manner, in such a way that our country became schismatic, we have resolved before God and Your Holiness [Yeghia — A. N.] that the consecration of the patriarchs of Albania shall be performed by the see of St. Gregory with the

<sup>1208</sup> Ibid., Chapter X, p. 45.

<sup>1209</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 16, p. 208.

<sup>1210</sup> al-Ja’qubi. *Tarikh*, p. 324-325.

<sup>1211</sup> Theophanes. *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, A. D. 703-704, p. 70.

<sup>1212</sup> Michel le Syrien. *Chronique*. Public et traduit par J. Chabot. Paris, 1899-1910. Vol. II. P. 479.

<sup>1213</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 16, p. 208.

<sup>1214</sup> Shaginian A.K. *Armeniya nakanune arabskogo zavoyevaniya* [Armenia on the Eve of the Arab Conquest], p. 105.

<sup>1215</sup> Buniyatov Z.M. *Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX vv.* [Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries], p. 92 and further.

assent of this country..”<sup>1217</sup> Thus, the Albanian Church lost its independence and had to rely on the Armenian catholicosate. In addition to the newly elected Simeon, only three bishops, who were convinced Monophysites, signed the conciliar decision from the Albanian side. The supporters of the convicted Nerses may have been removed from the sees, or they chose not to attend the council.

Mamedova characterizes the outcome of the events of 705 as follows: “The Albanian Church was defeated in an attempt to confront the Arab Caliphate and the Armenian Monophysite Church that actively helped it. She never managed to turn into a fully consolidating and organizing force of the people, which the Armenian Church was at that time.”<sup>1218</sup>

Yet, D.M. Timokhin notes, comparing the translations of Kirakos Gandzaketsi’s text, that “the Armenian Church sought to subjugate the Albanian Church, which, however, does not imply that it managed to achieve this goal in the 8th century.”<sup>1219</sup> As an example illustrating this point of view, the researcher cites Kirakos Gandzaketsi’s work, in which the author recounts the events of 1081 as follows: “King Kiwrike of the Bagratids was the son of Dawit, son of Derenik, who built the famous monasteries of Haghat and Sanahin. When Kiwrike saw that lord Grigoris had left his throne and gone to Rome, he called to him lord Yovsep, *katoghikos* of Aghbania/Aghuania, and had him ordain lord Barsegh *katoghikos* of Armenia..”<sup>1220</sup> It seems odd that there was a catholicos in a church that had lost its independence, but even more strange is that he, meaning the head of the church that had lost its independence, ordained the catholicos of the Armenian Church, under which he should have been subordinate. The researcher concludes from the above that, according to Kirakos Gandzaketsi, the Albanian Church did not lose its independence back in the 11th century; therefore, the rest of the logical chain, including the loss of its own script, language, and ethnic identity, which the Armenian researchers insist on, is meaningless and does not correspond to historical

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mo Mnatsakanian A.S., Sevak P.S. Po povodu knigi Z. Bunyatova “Azerbaydzhan v VII-IX w.” [Regarding Z. Bunyatov’s Book “Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th centuries”]. *Istoriko-filologicheskoy zhurnal* [Historical and Philological Journal], No. 1. Yerevan, 1967. P. 298. mi Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 8, p. 195.

<sup>1218</sup> Mamedova F.D. *Politicheskaya istoriya i istoricheskaya geografiya Kavkazskoy Albanii* [The Political History and Historical Geography of Caucasian Albania], p. 237.

<sup>1219</sup> Timokhin D.M. K probleme interpretatsii istochnikov: istoriograficheskaya diskussiya o proiskhozhdenii truda Kirakosa Gandzaketsi [On the Problem of Interpreting the Sources: Historiographic Discussion of Origin of Kirakos Gandzaketsi’s Work]. *Transkavkazika. Yuzhny Kavkaz: istoriya, religiya, obshchestvo* [Transcaucasica. The South Caucasus: History, Religion, Society]. Compiled by Z.V. Kananchev. Vol. 3. Moscow, 2016. P. 65.

<sup>1220</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 1, p. 89.

realities.<sup>1221</sup>

### III.3.2. The Canons of Catholicos Simeon

After Lord Nerses had been deposed, the newly elected catholicos Simeon continued the work of the Council of Partaw. The author of Book Three of the *History of Albania* indicates the time of the council: "In the eighty- fifth year of the Tachiks and the 148th year of the Armenians."<sup>1222</sup> It should be noted that these dates do not coincide. The eighty-fifth year of the Hijra corresponds to 707, whereas the 148th year of the Armenian calendar is 699. Since the events described above occurred during the reign of Caliph Abd al-Malik and Catholicos Yeghia (703-717), they should be dated, in the opinion of Smbatian, as the years 704 to 705.

As a result, the Council of Partaw adopted the following ordinances:

1. Not to allow unworthy and military men to acquire authority in the Church; to fornicators, adulterers, murderers, thieves, liars, perjurers, robbers, and evil-eyed and grasping men, and especially to soldiers and cavalymen and tax collectors, let no one dare give authority in the Church, or its bread and income;<sup>1223</sup> for by divine law only blameless priests who make the offerings and the ministers of the altar may use what the people offer to the house of God on account of their sins; for

<sup>1221</sup> Kananchev Z.V. Die albanische Schrift — zum Problem "Mesrop Maschtoc". *The Creation of the Caucasian Alphabets as Phenomenon of Cultural History*. Referate des Internationalen Symposions (Wien, 1-4 Dezember 2005). Vienna, 2011. P. 57-65.

<sup>1222</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 8, p. 196.

<sup>1223</sup> Income: *khas* "a tax of livestock products and sacrifices offered to God." "After you take the breast of the ram for Aaron's ordination, wave it before the Lord as a wave offering, and it will be your share. Consecrate those parts of the ordination ram that belong to Aaron and his sons: the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented" (Exodus 29:26-27).

the gifts belong to them, as does praying to God day and night for peace in the country and remission of sins and health of body and soul.

2. The churches of God are free and under the authority of no one but the bishops and those to whom they give them, that is, blameless and true holy priests, and not unworthy soldiers; let no one henceforth dare give them to these latter.<sup>1224</sup>

The reasons for passing these canons are given by Catholicos Simeon himself: "Concerning this the godly Kshik, abbot<sup>1225</sup> of the monastery of Ner-smihr, has written to say that Varaz-Trdat, prince of Albania, had given a small village to the holy cross to administer for the sake of his soul, but that now a cavalryman called Pusan-Veh, a layman living in debauchery, produces documents to the effect that the prince of Albania gave him the church together with the office of prior because he had been his tutor."<sup>1226</sup>

The canons of Catholicos Simeon and the Council of Partaw clearly show three main positions:

- the church is free and independent of secular institutions;
- only the clergy have authority over the church and in the church;
- the clergy support themselves by their own ministry.

These provisions, arising from the conciliar resolutions of 705, can be explained by the Church's own doctrine set forth by the archpriest Vladislav Tsy-pin, a modern church historian and expert in canon law, on the basis of canons and comments of authoritative canonists.<sup>1227</sup>

The church is a God-established institution, and its origin is otherworldly; but in its human nature it dwells on earth, and in this respect the church is placed in ordinary living conditions and needs the earthly material means required for public worship (temple, liturgical vessels, ornaments, vestments, etc.). In addition, the church includes clergy, for whom temple service and church administration are a part of daily professional routines. As such, the clergy, apart from their ministry in the Church, are practically unable to fend for themselves and make a living in general or find it difficult to do so, therefore the church must have the resources to support them.

<sup>1224</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 11, p. 199- 200.

<sup>1225</sup> Abbot: *tanuter* "a famous and well-to-do man, as well as an urban and rural elder."

<sup>1226</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 11, p. 200- 201.

Tsy-pin Vladislav, archpriest. *Kurs tserkovnogo prava* [The Course of Church Law], p. 588, 591-592, 608-609.

The ancient canons do not answer the question of who owns the property used for religious purposes in the Church. Given that church property was basically inalienable in Byzantium and in the West until the late Middle Ages, this issue was of no practical importance. At any rate, there were various doctrines about the subject of church property going back to the first centuries of ecclesiastical history. The Roman law provided a basis for the doctrine, under which church property intended solely for ecclesiastical needs belonged to God.

In the first three centuries, neither the Universal Church nor individual ecclesiastical institutions, be they dioceses or parishes, had the rights accorded to legal entities in the Roman Empire, although they did dispose of some property. The Christian communities were then classified as unlawful associations (*collegia illicita*), and any new persecution of Christians usually began with looting the church property, whose protection was not prescribed by national statutes. But after the Edict of Milan was issued in 313, the church obtained the right to acquire ownership of property by will, as a gift, or through purchase. The land holdings of episcopal sees and, in particular, monasteries grew significantly in size. At the same time, the inviolability of church property and institutions in Byzantium was protected by national statutes. Moyses Kalankatuatsi presents a lot of evidence in his chronicle regarding the way that the Albanian kings and *nakharars* granted land plots and even entire villages to the Albanian Church, its dioceses, parishes, and monasteries starting from the 4th century. But Caucasian Albania does not seem to have enacted any state laws that could regulate the issues of church property. Therefore, such issues had to be considered at the councils, which are known to have always gathered *nakharars* and elders in addition to hierarchs and clerics.

In any case, church property can only be protected by national laws, and the nature of such protection depends on the status of the church in the eyes of the state. The Church itself ontologically has neither authority nor right to defend its heritage with coercive sanctions, although it does possess means of a different, spiritual nature.

Nevertheless, the church established a procedure for disposal of church property by church officials during the era of Ecumenical Councils.

As for the issue of clergy maintenance discussed at the Council of Partaw, it has been unambiguously addressed since ancient times. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul the Apostle instructs the church community to

support pastors itself: “Do you not know that those who perform the temple services eat what belongs to the temple, and those who minister at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord ordered that those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). Apostolic Canon 41 repeats the same thought of the apostle and grants bishops and all clerics in general the right to receive maintenance from their flock:

**We ordain that the bishop have authority over the goods of the Church: for if he is to be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more are temporal possessions to be entrusted to him. He is therefore to administer them all of his own authority, and supply those who need, through the presbyters and deacons, in the fear of God, and with all reverence. He may also, if need be, take what is required for his own necessary wants, and for the brethren to whom he has to show hospitality, so that he may not be in any want. For the law of God has ordained, that they who wait at the altar should be nourished of the altar. Neither does any soldier bear arms against an enemy at his own cost.**

It appears that the author of Book Three of the *History of Albania* did not outline all canons adopted by the Council of Partaw. Obviously, the conciliar resolutions were supposed to reflect church problems stemming from the difficult political situation which preceded the convocation of the council.

### ***III.3.3. Catholicos Mikayel. Council against Marriages between Near Relations***

Catholicos Simeon headed the Albanian Church for only a year and a half. In 705, he was succeeded by Catholicos Mikayel (705-742). He ministered for about thirty-five years.

During his priesthood, there was marriage between near relations when the Albanian prince Varazoy (son of Vakhtang and grandson of Varazman) “married his first cousin Vardanuhi, also the grandchild of Varazman.”<sup>1228</sup> To add to the confusion, this marriage was indirectly blessed by Table (720-731), catholicos of Iberia, against the will of the Albanian catholicos Mikayel.

The Albanian primate had to convene a council for the trial of the incest case. He invited Solomon, a respected theologian and prior of the Makenots Monastery,

<sup>1242</sup>



to the council. The Makenatsots/Makenots/Makenis Monastery

(7th-13th centuries) dedicated to the Virgin Mary was considered a major religious and intellectual center of Syunik. It was in the village of Makenis (Kyzyl-vank) in the *gavar* of Gegharkunik in the southeast of Lake Gelam (Sevan), 180 km from Shamkhor (Shamkir) and 200 km from Partaw (Barda). This monastery was home to Metropolitan Stepannos of Syunik (c. 680-735) who is mentioned by the author of Book Three of the *History of Albania*. The council assembled in the Berdovank Monastery in Shamkhor. It excommunicated Prince Varazoy and sent a special letter to the catholicos of Iberia:

**Why have you dared to violate the canons of the disciples of the holy apostles who assembled in Antioch and excommunicated Paul of Samosata from the Holy Church and laid down the following canon: "Let no one take a relation to wife"? There is also the canonical command of St. Athanasius to the effect that "it is not marriage but fornication"; and the blessed Basil said the same concerning this act. Now, we who are an orthodox council curse you along with all heretics, and offer manifold praises to Christ the just judge.**<sup>1229</sup>

The ancient church tradition has it that a decision to marry is not enough for marriage to take place — it needs to be sanctioned by the Church. The Church's marriage law proceeds from the fact that marriage is a sacrament for Christians, so it formulates the conditions to be observed for the conclusion of ecclesiastical marriage. One obstacle that makes marriage impossible in certain cases is the too proximate relationship between two people wishing to make an alliance.<sup>1230</sup> This principle is set out in Canon 10 of the Council of Aluen of 488:

"A man may not marry a woman related to him in the third degree; he may not marry his brother's wife."<sup>1231</sup>

At the same time, Catholicos Mikayel, in his ruling on Prince Varazoy's case, refers to more credible canonical ordinances for the Universal Church. He mentions the Council of Antioch. There were, however, 28 Local Councils in Antioch during the period from the 4th to the 6th centuries.<sup>1232</sup> Since the canonical ruling of the Albanian catholicos specifies that the fathers "assembled in Antioch and excommunicated Paul of Samosata from the holy Church," we can attribute this remark to one of the early Councils of Antioch

<sup>1229</sup> Ibid., p.204-205.

<sup>1230</sup> Tsy-pin Vladislav, archpriest. *Kurs tserkovnogo prava* [The Course of Church Law], p. 551.

<sup>1231</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 1, Chapter 26, p. 52.

<sup>1246</sup> E.G. P. Antiokhiyskiye sobory [The Councils of Antioch], *Pravoslavnyaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. II. Moscow, 2001. P. 530-534.

of 268 listed by Eusebius of Caesarea,<sup>1233</sup> whose canons unfortunately have not survived.

The ruling of Catholicos Mikayel also cites the canons of St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 295-373) and Basil the Great (c. 330-379).

A huge number of dogmatic, polemical, ascetic, and moral works have been inherited from St. Athanasius by the Church, but his reasoning about obstacles to marriage cannot be understood from these works. Yet, the authority of Athanasius the Great in the church was so great that his name was used for writings that did not actually belong to him.<sup>1234</sup> Many such works were included in the *Armenian Book of Canons*. Here, according to the translator of Movses Kalankatuatsi's *Chronicle*, we are dealing with the canons of Athanasius of Alexandria compiled in the form of questions and answers.<sup>1235</sup> Canons 16 and 17 of Athanasius from the Armenian collection apply to marriages between near relations. When asked if anyone can marry the daughter of a brother or sister and whether relatives can marry at all, he expressly prohibits it. Unquestionably, this canonical collection was also used by the Albanian catholicos. Still, it is known that the canons of Archbishop Timothy of Alexandria (c. 380-385), ascribed to his teacher Athanasius of Alexandria, were translated into Armenian.<sup>1236</sup> The following was stated in the questions and answers of St. Timothy under No. 11:

“Question: If a clergyman be called to celebrate a marriage, and have heard that it is illegal or incestuous, for example if the one who wants to marry is the sister of the deceased wife; ought he to comply, and perform the oblation?

Answer: No; say firmly: if a clergyman hears about the illegality of marriage and if the marriage is indeed illegal, he must not be partaker of other men's sins.”

As for Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, his Canon 68 states this:

“The conjugation in matrimony of human beings within the prohibited degrees, if it be detected, shall be punished with the sentences of adulterers, on the ground that it falls in the same class of sinful acts affecting human beings.”

Thus, St. Basil prescribes that the relatives who have married should be punished as for adultery. It means that anyone who marries, knowing that there is a canonical obstacle by kinship, is to be excommunicated for fifteen years.

I.V. Kuznetsov notes in his ethnographic study that the family life of

<sup>1233</sup> Eusebius. *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. II, Book VII, Chapters XXIX-XXX, p. 213-227.

<sup>1234</sup> Nikiforov M.V. Afanasy I Veliky [Athanasius I the Great]. *Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya* [The Orthodox Encyclopedia], Vol. IV. Moscow, 2002. P. 22-49.

<sup>1235</sup> Movses Kalankatuatsi. *Istoriya strany Aluank* [The History of the Aluank Country], p. 158, Note 31.

<sup>1236</sup> Vardanian N., Shirinian M.E. *Kniga kanonov* [The Book of Canons], p. 77-80.

descendants of Albanian Christians, the Udi, includes (in contrast to the descendants of Zoroastrians) a strict ban on marrying even distant and nonblood relatives.<sup>1237</sup>

In Chapter 14 of Book Three of the *History of Abania*, the author provides the theological research of Catholicos Mikayel against “the duophysite sect.”<sup>1238</sup> In this document, St. Mikayel appears to us as a polymath, theologian, and expert in the Holy Scripture and works of the Eastern fathers.

In general, the Albanian historian dedicates Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of Book Three of his work to Catholicos Mikayel.

### III. 3.4. The Primates of the Albanian Church

Chapter 24 of Book Three of the *History of Albania* lists the primates of the Albanian Church. Preceding this register, the author reports the following:

“It would be fit and proper to draw up an accurate record of the names of the patriarchs, but since [the documents containing details of] the works and dates and names of our spiritual leaders who succeeded each other from the beginning have been burned,... we have set forth what little we do know of the many things [which could be known] for the enlightenment of those who are interested in this question.”<sup>1239</sup>

In addition, the list of the Albanian primates can be found in the works of Kirakos Gandzaketsi,<sup>1240</sup> Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi,<sup>1241</sup> and Mkhitar Gosh.<sup>1242</sup> We have clarified and corrected it based on previous publications<sup>1243</sup> and Gadzhiyev’s study.<sup>1244</sup>

After comparing and adjusting the registers, the list of the primates of the

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<sup>1237</sup> Kuznetsov I.V. *Pontiysko-kavkazskiy issledovaniya* [Pontic-Caucasian Studies], Krasnodar, 2008. P. 192.

<sup>1238</sup> Movses Daskhurantsi. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians*, Book 3, Chapter 14, p. 205.

<sup>1239</sup> *Ibid.*, Book 3, Chapter 23, p. 227-228.

<sup>1240</sup> Kirakos Gandzaketsi. *History of the Armenians*, Chapter 10, p. 155-165.

<sup>1241</sup> Mkhitar Ayrivanetsi’s *History of the Armenians*. Edited by Mkrtich Emin. Moscow, 1860. P. 19.

<sup>1242</sup> Mkhitar Gosh. *The Albanian Chronicle*. Translated by C. J. F. Dowsett. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*. Cambridge, 1958. P. 476-481.

<sup>1243</sup> Dum-Tragut Jasmine, Gippert Jost. *Caucasian Albania in Medieval Armenian Sources (5th-13th centuries)*. *Caucasian Albania*. Edited by Jost Gippert and Jasmine Dum-Tragut. Berlin-Boston, 2023. P. 79-82; Akopian A.A. *Albaniya-Aluank v greko-latinskikh i drevnearmyanskikh istochnikakh* [Albania-Aluank in the Greco-Latin and Ancient Armenian Sources], p. 277; Nikonorov Alexy, hieromonk. *Istoriya khristianstva v Kavkazskoy Albani* [The History of Christianity in Caucasian Albania], p. 179-182.

<sup>1244</sup> Gadzhiyev M.S. *Atributsiya gemmy-pechaty velikogo katolikosa Albanii i Balasakana* [The Attribution of the Gem Seal of the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasagan], p. 472-473.

Albanian Church is as follows:

- St Eliseus (Elishay, Elisha) (50/53-60/70);
- St Grigoris (c. 325-330);
- Shuphalishoy (late 5th century), “archbishop of Partaw,” “catholicos, who came ... from Jerusalem,” “patriarch,” member of the Council of Aluen;
- Matthew (Matteos);
- Isaac (Sahak);
- Moses (Movses);
- Pant (Pand, Panon);
- Lazar;
- Grigoris;
- Zakaria;
- Dawit;
- John (Yovhannes, Yovhan), “bishop of the Huns”;
- Eremia (the turn of the 4th-5th centuries), the reformer of the Albanian script;
- Abas (552-596), bishop of Mec Iran, who was the first to officially bear the title of catholicos and transferred the see from Cholay (Derbent) to Partaw in 552;
- Viroy (596-629);
- Zakaria I (629-644), presbyter of Partaw;
- John I (Yovhan, Yovhannes) (644-655/668), bishop of Amaras;
- Ukhtanes (655/668-680);
- Eliazar (680-686), bishop of Shaki;
- Nerses I Bakur (686-704), bishop of Gardman, the last Chalcedonian primate of Albania;
- Simeon I (704-705), the former archdeacon of the patriarchal see;
- Michael (Mikayel) (705-742), the former deacon of Shaki;
- Anastas I (742-746);
- Joseph I (Yovsep) (746-763), the former bishop of Amaras;
- Dawit I (763-767), the former bishop of Amaras;
- Dawit II (767-776), the former bishop of Mec Kueank;
- Matthew I (Matteos, Matte) (776-777), the former bishop of Kabala;
- Moses I (Movses) (777-779);
- Aharon (779-781);
- Solomon I (781);
- Theodoras (781-785), the former bishop of Gardman;
- Solomon II (785-796);
- John II (Yovhan, Yohvannes) (796-821);

- Moses II (Movses) (821);
- Dawit III (821-849), the former bishop of Kabala;
- Joseph II (Yovsep) (849-876), the former bishop of Mec Kueank;
- Samuel (876-893), the former bishop of Mec Kueank;
- Jonah (Yunan, Yovhan) (893-902), the former bishop of Dvin;
- Simeon II (902-923), the former chorepiscopus of the patriarchal see;
- Dawit IV (923-930), the former prior of the Theotokos monastery of Parisos;
- Isaac (Sahak) (930-948), the former bishop of Mec Kueank;
- Gagik (948-958), the former bishop of Gardman;
- Dawit V (958-965), the former bishop of Qabala;
- Dawit VI (965-971), the former prior of the Theotokos monastery of Parisos;
- Peter I (Petros) (971-989), the former bishop of Gardman;
- Moses III (Movses) (989-995), the former prior of the Theotokos monastery of Parisos.

Thus, the *History of Albania* lists 46 primates of the Albanian Church in the period from the 1st to the 10th centuries inclusively.

## CONCLUSION

The main challenge in examining the history of Caucasian Albania and its church in historiography is that there are two diametrically opposed views on the territorial borders of the Albanian state and the canonical status of the Albanian Church. The first is explored in the Introduction: Background and Scope of the Study. The second, related to the jurisdiction of the Church of Caucasian Albania, is clarified by comparing the political realities of the period at hand with source reports. As for the internal territorial jurisdiction of the Albanian Church, this issue is illuminated by analyzing conciliar documents, intra-church correspondence, and references to specific Albanian hierarchs in the historical records. It appears that the borders of the Albanian Church and the number of its dioceses were unstable.

This study has been divided into three sections in line with the tripartite division of the subject, Movses Kalankatuatsi's work *History of Albania*.

The chronological framework of Book One of the *History of Albania* covers the period from biblical times to the 5th century. This part of Kalankatuatsi's work is divided into thirty chapters and contains general information providing insight into the emergence of the Albanian ethnic group, the formation of the Albanian statehood, Albanian rulers, lands, and natural resources of the country. It also mentions political events from the age of the independent Albanian kings. In this section, the author also presents valuable evidence of the Christianization of the Albanians, as well as some hagiographie information, folk tales, and epistolary documents.

Kalankatuatsi's Book One differs from Book Two, the major part of his work, in the manner of its narration: the language and style of this section are determined by the sources used by the historian. Here our author really serves as an editor who expresses his religious and political views by including certain facts to add a new dimension to the narrative, if deemed necessary, while ignoring others. At the same time, he reveals his literary tastes by including many hagiographie materials and details of folktale in his account. Thus, the dry language of chronicle runs side by side with exuberant and emotional church rhetoric, which is typical of hagiographie prose and medieval authors.

When analyzing the chapters of Book One, we should keep in mind that information presented in relation to the political realities of Caucasian Albania and church life applies to events that took place more than 200 years before the life of the author himself and, consequently, reached him in the form of a retelling (the events may have been recorded in one form or another,

then redacted by him). Given that we have almost no other sources of local origin synchronous to the events described by Kalankatuatsi, we cannot trust every aspect of narration by the Albanian author and must treat his stories with great caution. Only those details that align with data from other sources can be deemed reliable.

It should be noted, however, that the first six centuries of the Christian period in Caucasian Albania unquestionably witnessed events of utmost significance:

- the evangelical preaching of the Apostolic Age;
- the adoption of the Christian religion by the Albanian royal court in the 4th century;
- the missionary work of Christian preachers affecting the formation of the Albanian Church (St. Gregory the Illuminator, the holy martyr Grigoris of Albania, the vardapet Mesrop Mashtots, etc.);
- the invention (emergence) of the writing system during the reign of King Esualen;
- the influence of Christianity on different areas of social and political life in Caucasian Albania (unification of government institutions, development of general religious practices, fight against religious and political separatism, organization of schools, etc.);
- martyr testimonies as the product of Christian ideas present in Albanian society;
- the establishment of the country's own canon law;
- missionary work in the milieu of neighboring peoples.

These phenomena have been critically examined in this monograph, and as we have seen, even if we challenge the historical details of some characters, such as St. Eliseus, Grigoris, King Urnayr, etc., it remains clear that these personalities — engaged in evangelical preaching and Christian state-building — were a real part of Albanian history. While it might be possible to doubt the reliability of reports on the activities of Mesrop Mashtots, Kings Esualen and Vachagan III, the results of their efforts cannot be questioned. Assuming Kalankatuatsi could have exaggerated the martyrdom episodes of certain holy passion-bearers, it hardly seems unlikely that there were Christian martyrs and pietists in Caucasian Albania.

The first section of the present monograph describes the religious situation in Caucasian Albania before the expansion of Christianity to give an understanding of the soil in which the evangelistic seeds were sown. The role of the Caucasus' Jewish diaspora in spreading Christianity and the possibility of apostolic preaching have been considered. The view that Caucasian Albania converted to Christianity as a response and reaction to the religious reforms of Sasanian Iran has been reviewed



and supported. When Iran started a large religious expansion, Caucasian Albania contrasted Iranism with Christianity. And while the Iranian religion dictated aggression, the religion of Transcaucasian countries dictated resistance. The opposition of Christianity to Zoroastrianism was not so much political as ideological.

After comparing the historical realities of the 4th century, this study has found the propagation of Christianity in Caucasian Albania to have been inextricably linked to the general course of events in the Caucasus, namely in Armenia, Albania, and Iberia. The three centuries that followed the apostolic preaching provided fertile ground for a new religious system to be simultaneously adopted in entire regions and states as a privileged religion.

When Christianity in Caucasian Albania rose to the status of an official religion, the Christian communities in Asia Minor had not been administratively divided into spheres of influence under different churches. Their distribution and names were of a geographical rather than administrative nature, while the boundaries of churches might or might not coincide. The primacy of local churches, not yet based on any real political force, was only determined by tradition for the time being. The Church of Caucasian Albania should have remained outside this division as enjoying a state status, but it also belonged to the general Christian Church and, as such, was among the Anatolian episcopates. Therefore, it is quite understandable why the first Albanian bishop was ordained by St. Gregory the Illuminator. This shows that the church, although recognized by the state, had yet to acquire “statehood” and was essentially non-national.

The question of canonical ties between the Albanian Church and Caesarea or Jerusalem is still open to debate. As of today, there is no hard, documented evidence pointing to canonical relations or cooperation between these churches. Researchers must rely on circumstantial facts.

In the 5th century, Caucasian Albania got its own alphabet, which must have contributed to the further development of church life and improvement in the country's liturgical and educational practices. The Albanian king Es- ualen, Archbishop Jeremiah and the translator Benjamin played a crucial role. At the same time, Mesrop Mashtots was mostly remembered in Caucasian Albania as a preacher. A small number of written artifacts discovered in Albanian raises tantalizing but unresolved questions about the role of the written Albanian language in the life of the Church and Albania in general during the late Middle Ages.

This study has examined in detail the information provided by Kalankatuatsi on the life and activities of the Albanian kings Vache II and Vachagan III the Pious, one of the most outstanding statesmen of Caucasian Albania. The acts and ordinances of the Council of Aluen convoked by the Albanian Church have been analyzed, and a new classification of conciliar canons proposed by comparing them with canons of Ecumenical and Local Councils, as well as canons of Apostolic Fathers.

Book Two of Kalankatuatsi's work, covered in the second section of the present monograph, contains an abundance of detail on the history of Caucasian Albania in the 6th-8th centuries. This book describes the Persian-Byzantine and Persian-Arab wars and presents the history of the Mihranid family, whose rule was established over Albania after the fall of the Albanian Arsacids, including the reign of Juansher and Varaz-Trdat of the Mihranids. It also depicts the activity of the Albanian catholicos Viroy during the invasion and conquest of the country by the Khazars. Here the author provides valuable evidence of the Albanian clergy's missionary preaching among the Huns-Khazars, as well as examples of the epistolary and poetic genres. Book Two ends with two chapters providing a list of religious structures serving as Christian shrines in Palestine, as well as a catalogue of Albanian monasteries in Jerusalem.

Kalankatuatsi acts not only as an annalist, but also as a skillful compiler of documents of Albanian origin falling into his hands: the tales of Mashtots and his disciples, the accounts of Vachagan, the stories of Catholicos Viroy, the chronicles of Bishop Israyel, and others.

Book Two is divided into fifty-two chapters. Careful examination of the text reveals that while Book One is a compilation based on numerous sources, Book Two consists primarily of history contemporary to the author, most often written not only by an eyewitness but by a direct participant in the events described. In terms of literary content, it is the core and most interesting part of Kalankatuatsi's work, for here he acts as an independent author. The text is of an expressive and fictional nature that stands out from the rest of the *History* and shares features with other histories from the Caucasian region. The chronological framework of Book Two of the *History of Albania* covers the period from the year 552 to a year between 703 and 711.

The monograph examines and analyzes the ecclesiastical, historical, and dogmatic situation prevailing in Persia by the 6th century. Caucasian Albania was under its direct political and, consequently, religious influence in that historical period. During the era following the reign of the Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527-565), Christianity in Transcaucasia was affected by various theological systems: Chalcedonism, Monophysitism, Nestorianism, and Jacobitism. While

acknowledging pragmatic factors (ethnic and cultural differences, opposition to Byzantine imperial power, the need to survive under the Persian and later Muslim conquest) usually mentioned by historians as the reasons for the canonical and doctrinal isolation of the Albanian Church from the Byzantine Church, it should nevertheless be understood that the Caucasian hierarchs rejected unity inside the Orthodox Church out of firm conviction, as evidenced by the dogmatic letters of Albanian hierarchs.

One of the sections of the second part of this monograph discusses the doctrinal orientation of the Albanian Church. The Articles of Faith of the Albanian Church provided by Kalankatuatsi are analyzed theologically with reference to the political preconditions for the separation of Caucasian Christians from the Orthodox East as the ultimate cause of the tragic split from the Ecumenical Orthodoxy.

At the same time, given the historical realities of that period, it is likely that Emperor Heraclius might have succeeded in reuniting the Albanian Church with Eastern Orthodoxy after all, something the Albanian Church occasionally leaned towards until the early 8th century. All this, however, was unfortunately overshadowed by the start of Arab conquests and the spread of Monothelitism.

This work also focuses on the appearance of the Huns-Khazars in the North Caucasus and the preaching of Albanian missionaries among them.

It addresses in detail issues related to the titles of primates of the Albanian Church and canonical division of Albania into administrative church units, or dioceses. This is important due to the problem of identifying the sphere of church influence in Caucasian Albania. We have found that the total number of Albanian Church dioceses may have reached sixteen and encompassed the territories of both inner Albania and the Kura-Aras interfluvium, as well as Lpinia, Chola, Balasagan, and the Kingdom of the Huns-Khazars.

In Book Two of the *History of Albania*, Kalankatuatsi gives an important place to Prince Juansher, a potential patron and contemporary of the Albanian chronicler.

As we have seen, Kalankatuatsi keeps a detailed accounting of all events, utilizing various comparisons, epithets, and metaphors. He also makes extensive use of images, parables, and expressions from the Holy Scripture in his work. With respect to regularities underlying the historical development of both human society in general and Caucasian Albania in particular, Kalankatuatsi interprets them by relying on the standards of Christian historiography. He holds that all events, fortunes of peoples, kings, and statesmen,

as well as natural disasters are dependent on Divine Providence and human attention to it.

Book Three of the *History of Albania*, covered in the third section of our research, is ascribed to the 10th century historian Movses Daskhurantsi. It is divided into twenty-four chapters.

This part of the source at hand describes the appearance of the Arabs on the historical scene. It describes the invasion of Arab tribes into the South Caucasus from 698 to 877. The facts of the domestic life of Caucasian Albania reflected in Book Three include relations with the Huns and the events of church life in 705. The book ends with a list of Albanian rulers and catholicoi.

As we have witnessed, the Islamization of the Caucasian region marked the beginning of the end of the independent Albanian Church. The split of the Arab Caliphate (749-1258) is known to have started in the 9th century. This disintegration process took place in the context of powerful anti-feudal popular movements and frequent palace coups, slowly but inevitably progressing during the whole 9th century. From the middle of the century, the signs of collapse became particularly evident on the outskirts of the Caliphate with the emergence of more or less stable government entities, which were often only nominally dependent on central authority.

Caucasian Albania was one such outskirt, constituting together with Georgia and Armenia the northern vicegerency, whose Arab rulers were often appointed the governors of Azerbaijan, the northwestern province of Iran. At this point in time, the Albanian Church faced probably the most dramatic moment in its history: in 705, the reign of the Mihranids, the Great Princes of Caucasian Albania, was cut short, resulting in the immediate loss of independence and submission of the Albanian Church to the Armenian catholicosate.

This study demonstrates that the Albanian Church could not turn into a fully consolidating and organizing force of the people for various reasons, and therefore it was defeated in an attempt to resist the Arab Caliphate. Yet Christian tradition, as rightly noted by Fr. John Meyendorff, cannot be evaluated only in terms of its “successes” or its “failures.” Indeed, this must be so, because “the true power of Christ will be manifested to the world only on the *last day*, while the *present* power of the Kingdom is fully revealed only to the eyes of faith.”<sup>1259</sup>

Our review of the Albanian Church’s life in the historical context is certainly not a story of success. In this monograph, we have only tried to trace the path of development of Christian consciousness in Albanian society and follow the

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<sup>1259</sup> John Meyendorff, protopresbyter. *Rome, Constantinople, Moscow. Historical and Theological Studies*. Crestwood, 1996. Chapter 10. P. 181.

evolution of the local church organism. It is quite another matter how these historic realities can find their place in the modern interpretation of historic fortunes of the church and peoples inhabiting the Caucasus.

Some preliminary conclusion, however, can be made now: historically the Christians all over the world were often looking for a substitute for the original and basic criterion that the church was in itself otherworldly and Christian statehood had nothing to do with the Gospel while the Christian solution for social issues was not absolute or complete. Substitutes were represented by the Roman, Byzantine, and Russian Empires at various points. There were many historical examples of such empires brought about by nationalism. Still, the historical and spiritual mistakes were finally perceived exactly as mistakes.

This book is the first serious attempt in the historiography of Caucasian Albania to cover the history of the Albanian Church based on Movses Kalankatuatsi's only Albanian source by comparing it with the works of Caucasian, Persian, Syrian, Byzantine, and Arab historians.

The scholarly novelty of this monograph lies in the complex comparative study of Albanian and Caucasian communities. We have analyzed the content of Movses Kalankatuatsi's *History of Albania* as it related to the operation of the local church and reconstructed the canonical structure of the Albanian National Church and its institutions. Relying on specific historical records, we have shown the method of investigation and development of Christianity in the milieu of the Albanian tribe confederation and identified the characteristics of the geopolitical position of Caucasian Albania, which predetermined its historical trajectory and the destiny of the Albanian Church.

By employing a wide range of sources, using the current scholarly literature, and applying a complex comparative method, we have managed to recreate the most compelling historical picture of the Church of Caucasian Albania from the 1st to the 9th century.

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## Archimandrite Alexy (Nikonorov)

<sup>235</sup> Magus or *mobed* is a priest in Zoroastrianism. The Zoroastrians believe *mobeds* to have descended from the first disciples of the prophet Zarathustra. Only a healthy man from the *mobed* family, who has not committed inexcusable sins, can become a *mobed*. If a *mobed* has been defiled by the sin of *tanapohl* before initiation, he loses an opportunity to undergo initiation. Only his great-grandson can become a *mobed* again. Before initiation, a future *mobed* must complete studies, pass exams, serve as a *herbad*, and go through the purification and initiation rites, which takes 10 to 15 years. Before initiation, the candidate must marry a Zoroastrian woman, whose parents are also Zoroastrians. It is allowed for the “the first recorded decree prohibited the Persians, Huns, Alans, and other barbarians to pass through the gorge called Hortuson and through the Caspian Gate to enter the territory under the Roman rule.” Quoted from: Trever K.V. *Ocherki po istorii i kulture Kavkazskoy*

The *Book of Letters* is a 6th century theological collection. It compiles the works of the ancient Armenian authors Yovhannes Gabeleantsi, Movses Elvardetsi, Grigor Kertog, and