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# SOME OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEMS OF ZANGEZUR'S HISTORY

(ZENGEZUR TARİHİNİN YAZIMIYLA İLGİLİ BAZI SORUNLAR)

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**Abstract:** *Zangezur, the mountainous region that now makes up the southern territory of Armenia and separates the main territory of Azerbaijan from Nakhchivan, has long been a subject of debate in historiography over the ownership of these lands by these two countries. It is no secret that Armenian historiography has been trying to justify in academic circles the alleged exclusivity of the region's Armenian population and its belonging to "Greater Armenia" almost since the ancient period. Many books have been published in Armenia and beyond in which the region of Zangezur is presented as a so-called Armenian region, contrary to scientific and historical literature and numerous primary sources. The irrefutable evidence and numerous reliable facts presented in this article expose the falsifications and invalidity of these theories concerning the history of Zangezur of the 7-12th centuries.*

**Keywords:** *Zangezur, Syunik, Albania, South Caucasus, historiography, sources*

**Öz:** *Günümüzde Ermenistan'ın güney topraklarını teşkil eden ve Azerbaycan'ın anakara topraklarını Nahcivan'dan ayıran dağlık bölge Zengezur, bu iki ülke arasında söz konusu toprakların kime ait olduğuyla*

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*ilgili tarih yazımında uzun süredir bir tartışma konusu olmuştur. Ermeni tarih yazımının neredeyse antik dönemden bu yana bölgede sadece Ermeni nüfusu bulunduğu ve bölgenin “Büyük Ermenistan’a” ait olduğunu akademik çevrelerde kanıtlamaya çalıştığı gizli bir bilgi değildir. Ermenistan ve ötesinde, bilimsel ve tarihi literatüre ve sayısız birincil kaynağa aykırı bir şekilde Zengezur bölgesini sözde bir Ermeni bölgesi olarak tanıtan pek çok kitap yayınlanmıştır. Bu makalede sunulan, aksi iddia edilemez deliller ve sayısız güvenilir olgular, Zengezur’un 7-12’nci yüzyıl tarihiyle ilgili söz konusu iddiaların çarpıtmalarını ve geçersizliğini ifşa etmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Zengezur, Sünik, Albanya, Güney Kafkasya, tarih yazımı, kaynaklar

## Introduction

According to written sources from the 14th century in the early Middle Ages, the territory referred to as Zangezur mainly occupied the right bank regions (south of the Kura River) of Caucasian Albania - *Sisakan* entirely and Utik, Artsakh, Paytakaran partly. In ancient and early medieval sources (Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Persian, etc.), the region of Zangezur was referred to as *Syunik*, *Syuni*, *Sivnieti*, *Sivnik*, *Sisakan*, *Sisajan* (*as-Sisajan*). Some gaps in the study of that topic in the historiography, due to objective and subjective reasons, make a more comprehensive and objective scientific study of Zangezur necessary.

From the 19th century, and in particular in the second half of the century, information about Zangezur, or rather Syunik, can be found in the books of Armenian authors such as H. Shahatunyants, A. Sedrakyan, S. Jalalyants, M. Gyumushkhanetsi, G. Alishan, M. Smbatyants, and N. Adontz, written in Armenian with few exceptions.<sup>1</sup> In the 1930-50s, already in the Soviet period, the *Syunik/Sisakan* theme was again introduced into scientific discourse by Armenian authors A. Abrahamyan, B. Harutyunyan, A. Utmazyan and T. Sahakyan.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, in contrast to Utmazyan's work, which was aimed at Armenian-speaking readers, other authors' works on the class struggle and national movement in Zangezur-Syunik were written in Russian. The serious changes that took place in the political life of Soviet Armenia in the mid-1960s had a major impact on Armenian historiography. According to Russian Professor V.A. Shnirelman:

“Since then, it has become particularly important for Armenian historians to prove the autochthony of Armenians in and the Armenian Plateau, to trace the origins of their statehood and to demonstrate that

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1 G. Alishan, “Միսական” [Sisakan], Venice, 1893 (in Armenian) ; S. Jalalyants, *Ճանապարհորդությունն ի Մեծն Հայաստան*, Մաս Ա (Տփղիս, 1842), *Ճանապարհորդությունն ի Մեծն Հայաստան*, Մաս Բ (Տփղիս, 1858) [*A Voyage to the Kingdom of Greater Armenia*, Tiflis, Part I - 1842, Part II - 1858] (in Armenian) ; *History of Events Taken Place at the Monastery of Sevan by Manuel Vardapet of Gümüşhane* [Kiwmiwšpanatsi], Vagharshapat, 1871 (in Armenian) ; Ar. Sedrakyan, “Հնութիւնք հայրենեաց ի գա-ւաւին Երնջակու”, Վաղարշապատ, 1872 [“Native Antiquities in the Yernjak Region”] (in Armenian) ; M. Smbatyants, “Տեղագիր Գեղարքունի ծովագարդ զավառի” (Վաղարշապատ, 1895) [“Topography of Gegharkunik sea-dwelling province” (Vagharshapat, 1895)] (in Armenian) ; O. Shakhkhatunian, “ստորագրութիւն կաթողիկէ էջ մի միմինի եւ հիւզ գաւառացն արարատայե” (h. 2, 1842) V.2, Echmiadzin, 1842 (in Armenian).

2 А.Г. Абрамян, “Крестьянское движение в Сисакане”, Исторические записки Института истории АН СССР, 1938 (№3): 60-75; Б. Арутюнян, “Крестьянские волнения в Сюнии в X в”, Ученые записки Ереванского Государственного Педагогического Института, т.2 (1950): 14-36; Т.М. Саакян, “Крестьянские восстания в Сюнике в X веке”, Известия АН Армянской ССР, 1956, (№3): 37-44 ; А.М. Utmazyan, *Մյունիքը IX-X դարերում* (Երևան, 1958) [*Syunik in the IX-X centuries* (Yerevan: Yerevan University Publishing House, 1958)] (in Armenian).

from the second half of the first millennium BC up to 1915, Armenians were the dominant majority in the Armenian Plateau”.<sup>3</sup>

It was during these years that the history of Zangezur-Syunik, especially its ancient and medieval period, began to be written in Russian, English and other languages as well (majority of works still published in Armenian). In these works, the subject of Zangezur was either a direct object of study or was covered in connection with the history of Albania-Aqvan, which Armenian historians referred to as the “Eastern Region” of Armenia .<sup>4</sup>

In Azerbaijani historiography, the period of early medieval history of Zangezur is covered in the books of academician Ziya Buniyadov, correspondent member of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences Farida Mammadova, Akif Muradverdiyev, in a collective monograph prepared by the Institute of History named after A. Bakikhanov of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (edited by academician Yagub Mahmudov) as well as in book of Musa Urud.<sup>5</sup> However, in all these publications (excluding the book by A. Muradverdiyev), the early medieval history of Zangezur was not a specific subject of the authors’ study, but rather addressed in the context of the specific topic they were investigating.

### Syunik as “native” Armenian lands

In books of Armenian authors, which differ from each other in titles and the main topic of research, a large part of Caucasian Albania, including Sisakan-Syunik, is presented as “native” Armenian lands. Almost all Armenian authors adhere to this thesis, which is outlined in historian G.M. Grigoryan’s book as follows:

3 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти. Мифы, идентичность и политика в Закавказье* (Москва: ИКЦ, «Академкнига», 2003): 68.

4 Т. Hakobyan, *Սյունիքի թագավորությունը: Պատմա-աշխարհագրական առումով* [*The Syunik Kingdom in Historical-Geographical Context*] (in Armenian) (Yerevan: Mitk’. 1966) ; Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв* (Ереван: АН АрмССР, 1990) ; А.Ш. Мнацаканян, *О литературе Кавказской Албании* (Ереван, 1963) ; Т.М. Sahakyan, “Սյունյաց թագավորութիւնն հիմնումը և նրա քաղաքական դերը XI դա- րում”, *ՊԲՀ*, № 3 (1966): 221-228 [Historical and Philological Journal] (in Armenian) ; В.А. Ulubabyan, *Դրվագներ Հայոց Արևելից կողմանց լատմության (V-VII դարեր)* (Երևան, 1981) [*Essays on the History of the Eastern Region of Armenia (V-VII centuries)*] (Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the ArmSSR, 1981)] (in Armenian) ; Hewsen H. Robert, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

5 З.М. Бунятов, “Азербайджан в VII-IX века”, В кн.: *Избранные сочинения в 3-х томах*. Т.1 (Баку: Элм, 1999) ; Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны* (Баку: ЦИКА, 2003) ; Musa Urud, *Zəngəzur (elmi-publistik nəşr)* (Bakı: Nurlar, 2005) ; A. Muradverdiyev, *Zəngəzur tariximizin yaddaşı* (Bakı: Xəzər, 2007) ; *Qubadlı: Qədim Azərbaycan torpağı Zəngəzurun qapısı* (Bakı: Turxan, 2013) ; Nailə Vəlixanlı, *Zəngəzur - ərəblərdən monqollaradək* (Bakı: Təhsil, 2021).

“The eastern part of (the interfluve) has been an Armenian territory with an Armenian population since ancient times... The indigenous inhabitants of Artsakh, Utik and Syunik have been Armenians for centuries and remain so until the present day... There was no ‘Syunik’ or ‘Artsakh’ language. These ‘languages’ are still large-scale dialects of the national Armenian language”.<sup>6</sup>

It should also be noted that Grigoryan, naming such conclusions as “historical truth”, considers the studies of Azerbaijani scholars Z. Buniatov, I. Aliyev, D. Akhundov, F. Mamedova on political history and historical geography, language, culture of Caucasian Albania, including Syunik, as “anti-science” and attempts to prove that these authors are “distorting” historical facts.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Grigoryan accuses academician Buniatov, who “for the first time in science”<sup>8</sup> presented Syunik as a region of, of “distortion of historical facts” and making “unsubstantiated statements”<sup>9</sup>.

Repeating the thoughts of previous authors (G. Alishan, T. Hakobyan, A. Mnatsakanyan, B. Ulubabayan and others) about Utik, Artsakh and other Albanian provinces, Grigoryan also writes that “Syunik has never been part of Caucasian Albania. It has always been part of ...”.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he considers “incorrect” the opinions of scholars such as C.W. Trever, J. Markwart, N. Adontz<sup>11</sup> regarding the borders of Caucasian Albania.<sup>12</sup> Like “all Armenian authors”, who, according to Grigoryan, rely on the data of ancient and early medieval historians, he also claims that the right-bank part of the (the interfluve of the Kura-Arax) was part of the Great Armenia from the 2nd century BC to the 5th century AD under the name “Armenian Aqvanq”.<sup>13</sup> That is, it is concluded that all of the right bank, including Syunik, Utik and Artsakh, belonged to even before the advent of Christianity.

6 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 38.

7 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 22 ; Farida Mammadova, a well-known researcher of the history of Caucasian Albania, for more details, see: Ф.Дж. Мамедова, *Политическая история и историческая география Кавказской Албании (III и. до и. э.-VIII в. и.э.)* (Баку: Элм, 1986): 54-84 ; Ф.Дж. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и Албаны* (Баку: ЦИКА, 2005): 144-214.

8 Ф.Дж. Мамедова, *Политическая история и историческая...*, 70.

9 З.М. Бунятов, “Азербайджан в VII-IX века”, 117 ; Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 16.

10 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 16.

11 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании* (Москва-Ленинград: Издательство АН СССР, 1959) ; J. Markwart, *Eransahr nach der Geographie Moses Chorenaci* (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1901) ; Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана. Политическое состояние на основе Нахарарского строя* (Санкт-Петербург: типография Императорской Академии наук, 1908).

12 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 18.

13 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 18.

It should be noted that the 13th century author Stepannos Orbelian, who wrote “a specially dedicated book on the ancient records” about the Sisakan genus, especially noted the difficulties he experienced while making the history of “our country”, as he himself called Sisakan. According to him:

“Having searched through many works, we found no written record of these topics left as a praiseworthy monument to posterity. I do not know whether [such accounts] were never written, or whether they were lost through so many destructions and robberies.... My brothers, as I longed to treat this subject for such a long time, I engaged in research that took me to places near and far, to monasteries and to coffers containing testaments, and among scholars educated in historical facts. But I found [almost] no memory of the [earliest] traditions specific to this land [of Siwnik’]. Thus from all the historians of I gathered everything I discovered that was accurate [about the earliest times]. Similarly there was a small amount of information available in the homilies of Petros, Bishop of Siwnik’, about Babak [Babik]who had been the lord of Siwnik’. There was also [information taken] from ancient letters written by the kings [g48] of , the princes of Siwnik’, the Armenian kat’oghikoi and the bishops of Siwnik’, which had remained from ancient times preserved in a grotto in the blessed monastery of the patriarchs of Tat’ev. [Information was also gleaned from] inscriptions on the churches and from the colophons of books. Here and there I found a number, a date or day of the year relating to some or other actions or words of princes and bishops, to building, ruin, rules and regulations and prerogatives of the Holy See, about generous gifts made to the blessed churches. This information I incorporated into the body of this History.”<sup>14</sup>

Apparently, the scarcity, or rather absence, of information about the ancient history of Syunik-Sisakan forced Stepannos, who held an important spiritual post of metropolitan in his homeland, to limit himself mainly to the information of early medieval Armenian historians (F. Buzand, M. Khorenatsi, Egishe, Ghevond and others) and to repeat what they had written.

The absence of a mention of Sisakan in the “ancient monuments” is also confirmed by N. Adontz, who, incidentally, noted that the equivalence of names Syunik and Sisakan, according to one of the main sources Stepannos Orbelian - Moses Khorenatsi<sup>15</sup>, is “obscure” and “we cannot say anything

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14 Step’annos Orbelean, *History of the State of Sisakan*, translated by Robert Bedrosian from the Classical Armenian text of K. Shahnazarean (Paris, 1860), <https://rbedrosian.com/SO/so1.htm>

15 Moses Khorenatsi, also known as Moses of Chorene, the author of the *History of the Armenians*. The exact period during which Movses lived and wrote has been the subject of debate among scholars since the 19th century, with some scholars dating him to the 7th to 9th centuries rather than the 5th. Aram Topchyan, *The Problem of the Greek Sources of Movsēs Xorenac’* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006): 5–14, notes 21–22, 31–33.

definite in what relation they [Syunik and Sisakan] were between themselves and with the Saks...".<sup>16</sup>

In Armenian historiography, the inclusion of Syunik into Armenia is explicitly based on the Greek historian Strabo's accounts from 189 BC. According to these accounts, two Armenian rulers, Artaxias (Artashes) and Zariadr (Zareh), "who devoted themselves to territorial conquest"<sup>17</sup>, managed to expand at the expense of neighboring territories. "One says that Armenia was originally a small country... by annexing lands from the surrounding nations as follows: Caspiane, Faunitida [Phaunitis] and Basoropeda from the Medes"<sup>18</sup>, "where various population groups lived, but no Armenians were amongst them".<sup>19</sup> As can be seen, the name of Syunik is absent among the areas mentioned, but Armenian researchers, having read Faunitida as "Saunitis", identified it with Syunik. Even the Armenian-origin American historian Robert Hewsen acknowledged the "phonetic discrepancy" between the two names and considered this a mistake on the part of the manuscript's copyist.<sup>20</sup> Referring to this information of Strabo, V. Shnirelman writes that the conquest policy of the Armenian rulers covered the left bank of the Arax River, including Syunik (apparently referring to the identity of Syunik to Faunitida), noting at the same time: "although the details of this conquest policy remain unknown".<sup>21</sup>

Recalling that the Armenian King Tigranes II (95-55 BC), taking advantage of the conflict between the Parthian and Roman Empires, launched an offensive from the province of Sophen near the Euphrates and, among other directions, expanded his territories eastwards,<sup>22</sup> Shnirelman admits that "sources are silent about Tigran's conquest of Caucasian Albania".<sup>23</sup>

Incidentally, one piece of information relating to the period of the military campaigns mentioned by Strabo attracts attention in terms of assessing the complex events that rapidly unfolded in that era. Thus, the Greek author reported that in the 1st century BC, the state of Atropatena, covering the

16 Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 422-423.

17 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти...*, 42.

18 Страбон, *География*. в 17 книгах. Перевод и комментарии Г.А. Стратоновского (Москва: Наука, 1964), XI, XIV: 5.

19 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти...*, 43.

20 Hewsen H. Robert, *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, 190.

21 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти...*, 42, 43.

22 See: *История армянского народа*. Под ред. М.Г.Нерсисяна (Ереван: Ереванский университет, 1980): 42.

23 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти...*, 42. It is interesting that in Chapter IV of his work (p. 62) V. Shnirelman, contrary to what he wrote earlier, emphasizes that the real fame of Tigran II was brought by his "joining" Artsakh and Utik - regions of Caucasian Albania situated between the rivers Kura and Arax (Araks).

southern lands of historical Azerbaijan, “they are frequently plundered” by “its powerful neighbours - the Armenians and Parthians”, but at the same time “they [Atropatenians] resist however, and recover what has been taken away”.<sup>24</sup>

Tigran II’s “powerful, though not long-lasting state”<sup>25</sup>, created as a result of “accidental conquests”<sup>26</sup>, did not last long indeed: after the Roman attacks in 60 BC, the Armenian ruler lost practically all of his conquered lands. Despite this, Armenian historiography continued to present Armenia, deprived of all its annexed lands, as an independent state. In this connection, Shnirelman, referring to the maps drawn by S.T. Yeremyan and included in the two-volume of the “History of the Armenian People”<sup>27</sup>, writes: “On these [maps] the right bank of the Kura River with the provinces of Gogarene, Sakasena, Artsakh, Utik, Syunik and Caspian (Paytakaran) were represented as parts of Greater Armenia from the 2nd century BC. In other words, the Armenian state included the lands of present-day Georgia and Azerbaijan”.<sup>28</sup> It is well known from history that the struggle for hegemony in the Near East between Rome and Parthia, which started before 1 BC, ended with the Arsacid (Arshakuni) dynasty gaining political supremacy over several countries, including Caucasian Albania, Armenia and Iberia, and with the coming to power of the minor branch of the Arsacid dynasty in these countries.<sup>29</sup>

### About the genealogy of Syunik rulers

The Albanian author Moses Kalankatuy<sup>30</sup>, in a mythological account of the origin of Aran - ruler of Caucasian Albania, appointed by the Arsacids, points to his belonging to the family of Sisaka, a descendant of Yaphet (son of Prophet Noah), which is considered by many peoples (including the peoples of the Caucasus and also the Turks), and in Muslim sources, as an ancestor. M. Kalankatuy writes that he “...was a certain Aran of the Sisakan family, descended from Japheth, who received the plains and mountains of Albania from the river Araxes to the fortress of Hnarakert”.<sup>31</sup> Movses Khorenatsi, to

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24 Страбон, *География*, XI, 13, 2.

25 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 88.

26 Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 151.

27 С.Т. Еремян, *Атлас к книге «История армянского народа»* (Ереван: Айпетрат, 1952)

28 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти...*, 63 ; Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 213.

29 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 145; Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 348.

30 Movses Kaghankatvatsi, or Movses Daskhurantsi, is the reputed author (or authors) of a 10th century classical historiographical work on Caucasian Albania known as *The History of the Country of Albania*. *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxuranci*, translated by C.J.F. Dowsett (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

31 *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxuranci*, 4.



whom M. Kalankatuy referred in this information, wrote that Aran was descended from Sisak, son of Gegham, grandson of Hayk, the legendary ancestor of the Armenians.<sup>32</sup> Referring to that genealogy presented by M. Khorenatsi, Armenian historiography claims the Sisak family, including the Syunik, to be of Armenian descent. As evident, M. Kalankatuy, referring to the records of M. Khorenatsi as a primary source, at the same time the ancestor of the first Albanian Arsacid ruler Aran called not Hayk, but Noah's son Japheth, an ancient progenitor of many peoples. According to Trever, "the first kings of Albania were undoubtedly representatives of the local Albanian nobility from among the most advanced tribal chiefs. Their non-Armenian and non-Iranian names (Orois, Kozis, Zober) in the Greek transmission also indicate to this..." Therefore, she concluded that:

"this legendary genealogy was created in the first centuries AD, probably at a time when in the middle or perhaps late first century AD the Parthian Arsacids for political purposes managed to place representatives of their clan (in Armenia, Atropatena, the Maskut country and Albania) on the thrones of several countries in South Caucasus".<sup>33</sup>

K.V. Traver was skeptical about the "historical significance" of the legend that Aran belonged to the Sisak clan. In her opinion, the fact Movses Khorenatsi added to this legend which dates back to the 1st century AD, information about Sisak's descent from the Hayk family (i.e. Armenian ancestry) is evidence of the great role of the Syunik-Sisakan region in the political relations between Albania and Armenia at that time. At the same time, in her opinion, "in order to bring the interests of Armenia and Albania closer together, the Arsacids may have created the legend of the formation of Albanian statehood under the direct influence of Valarshak, the legendary settler of the Armenian land".<sup>34</sup>

Obviously, such information is of a legendary nature, while not considered to be accurate or significant facts from a historical point of view (this is exactly what K. Trever's reasonable concerns are based on), nevertheless serve to legitimize the genealogical history of the nation, which began with Prophet Noah. This can be seen, in particular, in the conclusions drawn by the founder of Azerbaijani historiography, A. Bakikhanov, who usually drew his conclusions from a variety of Eastern (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Chinese, etc.) sources. Based on these sources, he writes about Japheth as the first Turkic ruler, a contemporary of the first mythical Persian King Keyumars, and calls

32 Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 405, notes.

33 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 145.

34 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 145, 146.

his eldest son and successor of Japheth, Turk, as “a justice-loving and humane king”.<sup>35</sup> In which case, it is possible to assume a Turkic origin of Aran, coming from “the Sisakan family, descendants of Japheth”.<sup>36</sup>

However, even if based on a legend, the appointment of Aran from Sisakan, i.e. from Syunik, as the ruler of the entire Caucasian Albania, indicates that Syunik was one of the regions of that country, its population was autochthonous Albanian rather than Armenian, and that Syunik had an important position (possibly explained by its military and political significance) compared with other provinces of the region.

N. Adontz, who attributed Syunik-Sisakan to one of the regions of “Greater Armenia”, referred to the information of the 9th century Arab geographers-travelers Ibn Khordadbeh and Ibn al-Faqih to support his idea. However, a comparative analysis of these sources with other sources of this period (al-Yakubi, al-Balazuri) proves that the toponym “Sisakan” mentioned by N. Adontz in Ibn Khordadbeh refers to a completely different place, and Ibn al-Faqih’s is the result of the publisher’s mistaken conjecture.<sup>37</sup> Thus, “Sisajanshah”, whom Ibn Khordadbeh names among the rulers of the countries subordinated to the Sassanid Shahinshah Ardeshir I (224-241), is mistakenly identified by Adontz with Sisakan-Sunik.<sup>38</sup> Actually, as-Sisajan in Ibn Khordadbeh’s work referred to Khorasan in the Middle Ages, but is now called the region of Sistan. Neither this region, nor Barashan, mentioned in the same text and related to Azerbaijan, have any connection with Armenia, contrary to Adontz’s statement. The erroneous conjecture of Ibn al-Faqih’s publisher - to read the toponym *Savshin-Shakashin-Sakasena* as *Sisar* - caused another mistake by Adontz and led to his faulty statements.

It should be noted that early medieval Sisakan, along with other neighboring countries, is presented in various sources as a separate, independent province governed by a local prince. Thus, the inscription on the wall of the temple in *Naghshi-Rustam*<sup>39</sup>, commemorating the victory of the second Sassanid ruler Shapur I (241-272) also mentions “Mahelonia” among the countries he conquered (Atropatene, Armenia, Iberia, and Albania).<sup>40</sup> In the Pahlavi version of the inscription (there are also Persian and Greek inscriptions on the wall of the temple), Mahelonia is mentioned as Se(a)kan (SYKN), which has led

35 А.А. Бакиханов, *Гюлистан-и Ирам* (Баку: ЭЛМ, 1991): 27.

36 N. Vəlixanlı, *Azərbaycan VII-XII əsrlərdə: tarix, mənbələr, şərhlər* (Баку: ЭЛМ, 2016), 105.

37 N. Vəlixanlı, *Azərbaycan VII-XII əsrlərdə...*, 193, 198, notes 17.

38 Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 218.

39 Naqsh-e Rostam is an ancient archeological site and necropolis located about 12 km northwest of Persepolis, in Fars Province, Iran.

40 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 134-136.

many scholars to claim a reference to Sunik-Sisakan here (few researchers have read “Mahelonia” as Mingrelia or Maggal, referring to the Ingush).<sup>41</sup>

Adontz also writes of the “separatist tendencies” of the Sisakan-Syunik region, believing that this “must surely be attributed primarily to the ethnic features of the country”.<sup>42</sup> According to him, the “tribal exclusivity” of Syunik was “maintained and renewed by migratory currents from the adjoining mountainous countries”.<sup>43</sup> Adontz, pointing out the traces preserved from these settlers in the geographical names, in particular, noted that the connection of the ethnic origin of the name Balasakan with the Saka tribes “is beyond doubt”.<sup>44</sup> F. Mammadova, who researched the issue, suggested that the tribal exclusivity of Syunik was constituted by “Kurds called Mari”.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, it is clear that the local population of early medieval Sisakan, which differed from other areas of the region in its “separatist tendencies”, spoke a language that was not similar to that of its neighbors. The 6th century Syrian author Zakharias Ritor lists “the country of Sisakan, with its own language” among the five faithful nations of the “northern region”, by which he means the South Caucasus, and states that its people are “believers, but there are pagans among its population”.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, he separates Sisakan from Armenia, Georgia (which he calls Jurzan), and Arran-Albania, and emphasizes that they all had their own languages, but were united by the same faith - Christianity. Another author of the same period, Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea, also reports that the Syuniks, whom he refers to as “Sunnis”<sup>47</sup>, were “a people separate from the Persian-Armenians [Armenians living in Sassanid-controlled Eastern Armenia]”.<sup>48</sup>

Adontz, while recognizing Syunik as Armenia, wrote that “geographically and ethnically, Sisakan stood somewhat apart from Armenia; and this apartness could sometimes give the impression of a completely separate country”.<sup>49</sup> Once again, the author saw the reason for this “separateness” as

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41 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 135, notes 2.

42 Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 421.

43 Н. Адонц *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 423; Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 208-209.

44 Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 423.

45 Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 209.

46 Н. Адонц *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 218-221 ; З.М. Бунятов, “Азербайджан в VII-IX века”, 117 ; Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 263.

47 The 11th century Azerbaijani poet Gatran Tabrizi refers to Sunik-Sisakan as “Suni-Sini”. N. Vəlixanlı, *Azərbaycan VII-XII əsrlərdə...*, 91.

48 Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 221.

49 Н. Адонц, *Армения в эпоху Юстиниана...*, 221.

the presence of diverse and multilingual ethnic groups that had settled in Syunik.

Written sources and material culture also confirm the presence of a dominant Albanian ethnos throughout Caucasian Albania from the 1st century AD onwards, with “ethnic heterogeneity”.<sup>50</sup> In that regard, of particular interest is the opinion of the Russian historian A.P. Novoseltsev on the peoples living in Syunik during that period. Referring to Syrian, Byzantine, and Armenian sources, he also mentions the differences between these peoples and the weak ties between them, indicating that the spread of the Armenian ethnos to the north-east, towards Syunik and then Albania increased only from the last years of the 6th century (after the Byzantine-Sasanian treaty of 591).<sup>51</sup> Incidentally, he cited local multiethnicity (we would add, inherent in multi-ethnic Albania) as one of the reasons for the spread of the Armenian ethnos in this region of the South Caucasus. At the same time, Novoseltsev argued that as a result of the spread of the Armenian ethnos in the region, local tribes were gradually subjected to assimilation, but this process was not completed even in the 6-7th centuries. Only the Christianization policy pursued by the Armenian and Albanian churches accelerated assimilation.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, both Greco-Roman and other sources report that, from the first centuries AD to the Arab conquest, various ethnic groups migrated to all regions of the South Caucasus. Interestingly, Strabo, who lived at the turn of the two eras, wrote about nomadic tribes (without mentioning its names) who served as mercenaries for Albanian and Iberian forces during wartime and attacked in peacetime to commit looting.<sup>53</sup> Other sources also mention invasions by these tribes, more commonly referred to as “Huns”, into Albania and other areas of the South Caucasus.<sup>54</sup> There is also ample evidence of the settlement of large, compact masses of nomads and their subsequent involvement in the political, economic and cultural relations of local states.<sup>55</sup> Of high interest is the account by Moses Kalankatuy about the arrival of the Gor and Gazan brothers with a large army to Syunik, their settlement there and their adoption of Christianity.

“In the first year of his reign, Babik sallied forth to hunt, and he toured and inspected his deserted land. Coming to Salat, .... That day was the first day in the month of Hori, and on that day those assembled there

50 Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 380.

51 А.П. Новосельцев, В.Т. Пашуто, Л.В. Черепнин, *Пути развития феодализма (Закавказье, Средняя Азия, Прибалтика)* (Москва: Наука, 1972), 45.

52 А.П.Новосельцев et al., *Пути развития...*, 45.

53 Страбон, *География*, XI, 4, 5.

54 See: Ю. Джафаров, *Гуны и Азербайджан* (Баку: Азернешр, 1993).

55 *Azərbaycan tarixi*, V.2 (Баки: Elm, 2000): 26-34; Ю. Джафаров, *Гуны и Азербайджан*, 88-89.

performed a great service, and there was great healing among those present. Unbelievers who witnessed this were converted, and Gor and Gazan, two rich brothers who had followed Babik with many other soldiers, were baptized. Babik drew lots, and Gor received the village of Xot, while the younger Gazan was allotted the desirable Salat. All this took place twenty years before the reign of the wicked Yazkert who wished to destroy the Christian faith and make us submit to Gehenna. St. Vardan and his holy followers were martyred by this same Yazkert, 1,066 chosen men, 120 years before the Armenian era began.”<sup>56</sup>

However, despite extensive propaganda by Albanian clerics, not all the tribes settled in the region converted to Christianity. That confirms the report of Zacharias Rhetor that among the population of Sisakan as early as the 6th century there were pagans along with “believers” (i.e. Christians). Note also that the diversity of the population of Syunik-Sisakan in the pre-Arabic period in the subsequent centuries was further increased by Muslim Arabs settling in the entire South Caucasus, including Zangezur, and by Turkic-speaking tribes, referred to in sources as “Scythian Turks”, “Turkmans” (who entered the region in approximately 7-12th centuries).

Despite that, G.M. Grigoryan, following other Armenian researchers, who considered Syunik to be an “ancestral” Armenian territory, called incorrect<sup>57</sup> the opinion of academician Z. Buniatov that the Armenianization of the Caucasian Albania provinces of Syunik and a significant part of Artsakh (and let us add, the Armenianization of the Christian population of these provinces) took place in the early 7th century.<sup>58</sup> Grigoryan generally denied the very existence of the process of “Armenianization”, which other scholars (e.g. S. Yeremyan, V. Shnirelman, etc.) also confirm in their studies. V. Shnirelman, in particular, writes the following about Armenianization of some Albanians: “Meanwhile, those Albanians who remained Christians after the Arab conquest and Islamization and lived on the right bank of the Kura River were quickly Armenianized, and the Albanian Christian Church merged with the Armenian Church”.<sup>59</sup> Grigoryan accused F. Mammadov of bias and falsification of historical facts because she claimed an Albanian rather than an Armenian population in Syunik and Artsakh. At the same time, in her conclusions, F. Mammadova referred to the report of the 7th century author Stephen of Syunik that “at his time, both the Syunik and Artsakh languages were spoken in Syunik and Artsakh”.<sup>60</sup> Calling the right bank provinces of

56 *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxuranci*, 65.

57 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 22.

58 З.М. Бунятов, “Азербайджан в VII-IX века”, 117, notes 98.

59 В.А. Шнирельман, *Войны памяти...*, 103.

60 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 33.

Albania “the Eastern Armenian province of Aghvank”, Grigoryan denied the existence of factors that led to the “Islamisation and Grigorisation of the Albanian Christian population” and accused Azerbaijani authors of making groundlessness arguments.<sup>61</sup>

At the same time, the sources of that period contain many facts regarding the adoption of Islam and Muslim names not only by Albanians, but also by Armenians themselves. For example, the Armenian historian Asoghik reported that during the attack of the Muslim Abu Dulaf on the Armenian province of Vaspurakan by the Emir of Gohtan (one of the regions of Syunik), among the Armenian warriors killed on the battlefield were Muslims who had converted to Islam. Asoghik wrote of this with shame, adding that “it is not worth mentioning”.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, the staunch Christian, Asoghik saw this change of faith as the reason for the Armenians’ defeat: “For this reason, God delivered them to the Muslims, in 432 of the Era”.<sup>63</sup> Or another example, the Sajid Emir Yusif in the year 926 or 927 temporarily appointed Dabil Nasr as ruler in his place. According to Catholicos Hovhannes Draskhanakertsi, more than 40 members of the nobility, whom he describes as “infidels”, i.e. those who have renounced Christianity, turned out to meet the new emir.<sup>64</sup> As can be seen, this part of the population of Dabil was practicing Islam. Consequently, claims that there was no process of Islamization of Armenians are refuted by historical facts.

It should be noted that completely denying the existence of the Artsakh and Syunik languages, Grigoryan called them “local dialects of the national Armenian language”. Asserting that Armenians allegedly “could not re-Armenianise”, he also denied the real and objective process of “Grigorisation” and “Armenisation”.<sup>65</sup> Thus, in fact, Grigoryan forgets and rejects the ethnic peculiarity – “tribal exclusivity” of the population of Syunik-Sisakan in the ancient and early medieval times, as written about in various sources (Arabic, Armenian, etc.) and literature (N. Adontz, A. Novoseltsev and others). He explains the separate and independent position of Sunik from Armenia by its “enormous military might and political weight among all the other principalities of Armenia, the competition for power and priority by its

61 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 33.

62 Асогик, *Всеобщая история Степ’аноса Таронского Асох’ика по прозванию-писателя XI столетия*, Пер. с древнеарм. Н. Эмин (Москва: типография Лазаревского института Восточных языков, 1864), 133.

63 Tim Greenwood, *The Universal History of Step’anos Tarōnec’I: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017): 242

64 О. Драсханакертци, *История Армении*. Пер. с древнеарм. М.О. Дарбинян-Меликян (Ереван: Советакан грох, 1986): 180. А.Н. Ter-Gevondian writes that most of these people were Armenians, and explains this by the increase in the number of Armenians during Ashot’s long stay in the city of Sparapet. However, Catholicos John emphasizes that these were “infidels”, i.e. non-Christians.

65 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 33.

high clergy”.<sup>66</sup> According to Grigoryan, Adontz’s words on “tribal exclusivity” and “ethnic specificity” of Syunik should not be understood as different languages, but in the sense of a dialect of the Armenian language.<sup>67</sup> It should be noted that the academician Z. Buniatov, referring to the “History” of Kirakos Gandzaketsi, an author of the 13th century, has clarified the issue of the process of “Armenisation” and its timing. As Kirakos’ report suggests, even in his time only a part of the Albanian nobility could speak Armenian, which gradually became Armenianized as a result of Grigorianization.<sup>68</sup> It turns out that not only in the early 12th century, but much later, the process of Armenianization had not yet been completed among ordinary Christian Albanians, including the Syunik people. Therefore, the church strife in the region, which Armenian historians explain as “centrifugal aspirations of individual feudal formations”,<sup>69</sup> was apparently based not only on political and ideological reasons, but also on differences in bloodline and ancestry.

The existence of a “peculiar” language among the population of Syunik-Sisakan is confirmed by Koryun and Movses Khorenatsi<sup>70</sup>, as well as Moses Kalankatuy, regarding the creation of the Albanian alphabet. According to the above-mentioned sources, Mesrop Mashtots, who wanted to create an alphabet for Georgians, Armenians and Albanians, met with the Albanian King Asuagenes [Asualen] for this purpose, and then with the Syunik translator Benjamin, sent by the ruler of Syunik, Vasak. Benjamin, who apparently knew both Armenian and Albanian, helped Mashtots create an Albanian alphabet of 52 phonemes.

“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 Gargararik”.<sup>71</sup>

In this report, attention is drawn to the fact that Vasak, the ruler of Syunik, through Bishop Anania invited the Syunik translator Benjamin to create the

66 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 32. For more detail: Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 264, 379-391.

67 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 33.

68 З.М. Бунятов, “Азербайджан в VII-IX века”, 118 ; Ф. Мамедова, *Кавказская Албания и албаны*, 92-93. Also see: Киракоса Гандзакети, *История Армении*. Пер. с древнеарм., предисл. и коммент. Л. А. Ханларян (Москва: Наука, 1976): 133.

69 Г.М. Григорян, *Очерки истории Сюника IX-XV вв.*, 32.

70 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 308.

71 *The History of the Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxuranci*, 69.

Albanian alphabet and Benjamin was directly involved in this process. Trever, referring to somewhat different information contained in a new edition of the writings of Koryun and Movses Khorenatsi, created during the Middle Ages and called “Pseudo Koryun”, presents Benjamin as a monk of “Albanian origin” and claims that Mesrop Mashtots was introduced to “alien Albanian” through him.<sup>72</sup>

The absence of reference to the Syunik people’s own language in this information can be explained by the fact that Benjamin, a “Syuniker” of “Albanian origin”, who was an interpreter for the Syunik ruler Vasak and was sent to help Mashtots in this capacity, knew languages of numerous Albanian tribes in addition to his mother tongue. The reference to Benjamin’s “Albanian origins” and the fact that he is “Syuniker” allows us to speak of the “special” Sunik language as one of the languages of the Albanian tribes.

Of course, such different, contradictory approaches to the events and facts of the history of Zangezur in the early Middle Ages cause historians an understandable desire to find out how true these estimates and interpretations are. In this endeavour, of course, unbiased sources and objective researchers should be relied upon.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thus, historically, geographically and politically, as well as ethnically, Zangezur constituted an integral part of Caucasian Albania, hence the historical lands of Azerbaijan. As is known, Caucasian Albania itself was a poly-ethnic state, formed not by any homogeneous element, but according to Strabo was made up of 26 tribes.<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, a comprehensive study of all the diverse multilingual sources on the history of the region allows us to assert that throughout its history the Zangezur was a diverse area subject to many changes in ethnicity and political rule.

Studies by pro-Armenian scholars, based on unsubstantiated claims or direct distortion of sources, have been repeatedly exposed in our historiography by leading Azerbaijani historians. The tendentiousness and distortion of historical reality adopted in the works of the relevant Armenian scholars are no exception in the studies on the history of Syunik, which covered a large part of Zangezur. The first discussions between Azerbaijani and Armenian academics in this area began back in Soviet times. Initially the discussion was

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72 К.В. Тревер, *Очерки по истории и культуре Кавказской Албании*, 308.

73 Страбон, *География*, XI, 4.



## Some of the Historiographical Problems of Zangezur's History

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mainly about the ethno-cultural affiliation, borders, and history of Caucasian Albania. Azerbaijani scholars such as Z. Buniatov, F. Mammadova, I. Aliyev and V. Piriyeu stated that Zangezur (Syunik) and Karabakh (Artsakh) were regions of Caucasian Albania and were inhabited by Albanian tribes, based on reliable facts. Until now, the issue of ownership of the lands of Caucasian Albania has been one of the key themes of the Armenian national myth and ideological struggle against Azerbaijan. Armenian scholars who are a part of this ideological struggle have demonstrated a masterful arsenal of techniques that allow them to obscure or brighten a particular event in the history of the region, while maintaining an impression of objectivity in their narrative.

We call on scholars to study history independently and objectively. It is our duty as historians to try to prevent the assertion of false speculation in historical science. In our view, the best tool against pseudo-historians is the proper study of history. More precisely, the best tool is the truth itself.

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