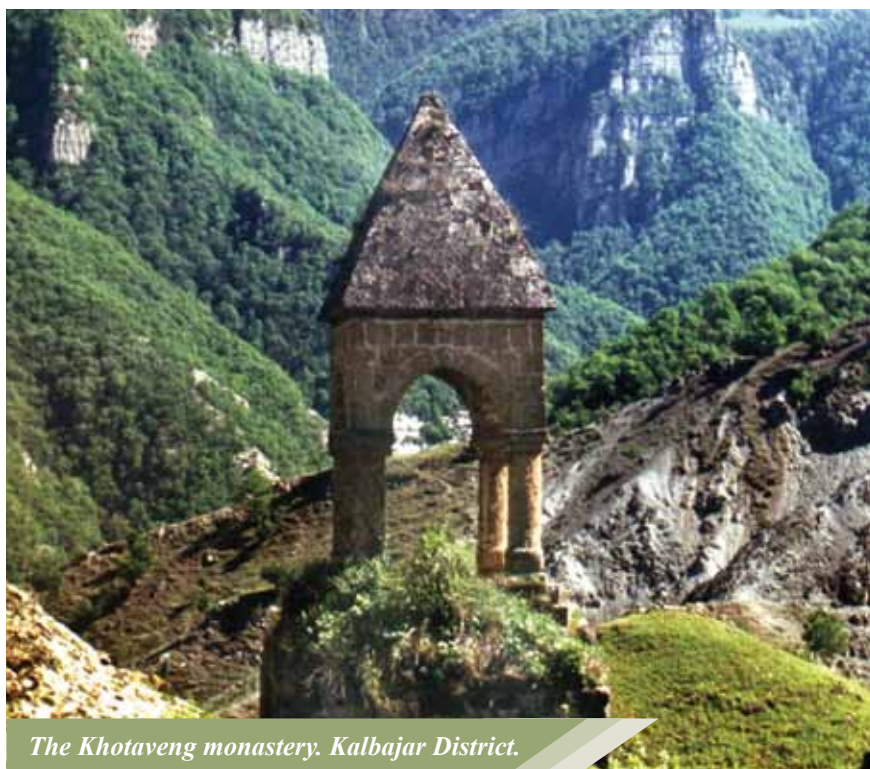


# KARABAKH



# IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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*The Khotaveng monastery. Kalbajar District.*

#### **4-7<sup>th</sup> centuries**

The territory of the Caucasian Albania in the 4-7<sup>th</sup> centuries was enormous. It covered lands from the Greater Caucasus in the north to the confluence of the Kura and Aras rivers in the south, from the Caspian Sea in the east to Iberia in the west.

There were 11 historical regions in the Albanian state: Chola (southern Dagestan with the city of Derbent as residency of the Albanian Catholicos), Lpinia (south of the Samur river), Kambisena (on the border with Iberia), Kabala (present-day Gabala District; Kabala was the first capital of the Albanian state), Edzheri (south of Kabala), Sheki (Zagatala-Sheki zone), Paytakaran, Caspiana or Balasakan (part of the Mil and Mughan steppes),



*The Khotaveng monastery. Kalbajar District.*

Uti (with the city of Partav, present-day Barda, which was the capital of Albania and residency of the Albanian Catholicos), Gardman (on the border with Iberia), Artsakh (present-day Nagorno-Karabakh and part of the Mil steppe), Sunik, Sisakan or Zangezur (south of Artsakh)<sup>1</sup>.

Karabakh, i.e. the area between the Kura and Aras rivers, included the regions of Uti, Gardman, Saksena, Artsakh, Sunik and Paytakaran with the capital city of Partav and the summer residency, the city of Khalkhal.

According to Greek, Byzantine, Georgian, Albanian, Syrian and Arab sources, the autochthons of Albania were Albans, Utis, Lpins, Caspiys, Chilbs, Gargars, Legs, Gardmans and Tsavdeys<sup>2</sup>. The Utis,

Gargars and Tsavdeys lived in Uti, Paytakaran and Artsakh. Written sources also suggest that there were also nomadic tribes on the territory of Karabakh and in Caucasian Albania as a whole. The same sources point to the presence of the Maskuts, Saks and Gels here.

**Turkic-speaking tribes were one of the ethnic components of Karabakh in the 4-7<sup>th</sup> centuries.**

This period went down in history as one of assimilation: 1) among local tribes; 2) among alien tribes; and 3) between local and alien tribes. Eventually, Turkic-speaking tribes became dominant<sup>3</sup>.

The main occupation of the Karabakh population in the early middle ages was land cultivation. Fields were watered by rivers and irrigation ditches and people grew

wheat, barley and millet. Grain was stored in pits and jugs<sup>4</sup>.

Eighth century historian Moses of Kalankatuik writes in his book "History of the Albanians" that in addition to agriculture, the Karabakh population was engaged in gardening. People grew grapes, peaches, cherries, plums, pomegranates, cornelian cherries, walnuts, chestnuts, figs, water-melons, pumpkins and other crops, as well as olives, saffron, madder and cotton.

Also quite developed in Karabakh in the early middle ages were livestock breeding and fishing. There were other popular crafts as well: pottery, jewelry, weaving, glassmaking, metalworking, manufacturing of various tools and instruments, stone-sawing, wood



*The Agoglan monastery. Zeyva settlement, 6th century*



*Inside of the Agoglan monastery. 6th century*

and bone carving. For the level of its economic development, Karabakh was not behind any other region of Asia. As was the case in other parts of Albania, various cities of Karabakh thrived as handicraft and transit trade centers. The cities were also noted for being the concentration of public and political life<sup>5</sup>.

Cities were surrounded by walls with towers and had various structures inside, including administrative buildings and palaces. The most significant were Kabala, Chola, Barda, Paytakaran, Amaras, Tsri<sup>6</sup>.

Particularly developed in Karabakh was trade, which was largely due to the passage of well-known trade routes through the Caucasus. Caucasian cities were linked to the Great Silk Way which originated in the far east and stretched as far as

Europe. Therefore, Karabakh cities used the Caspian Sea and the Kura river to engage in trade with various handicraft and trade centers of the East and West. Taken out of Karabakh were mainly livestock, fish, silk, saffron, madder, carpets and dried fruits, while different silk fabrics, gems, glassware, silverware and various decorations for women were imported. Karabakh's extensive bilateral relations with the outside world are confirmed by the Sassanid, Byzantine and other coins discovered in Azerbaijan<sup>7</sup>.

Albania had its own script in which various compositions were written. The script was developed by Benjamin and Jeremiah on the basis of the Gargar language which was rich in guttural sounds<sup>8</sup>. The Albanian alphabet consisted of 52 graphemes. Many books, primar-

ily religious, were translated from ancient Syrian and Greek languages into the Albanian. It is known that there was correspondence between Albanian kings and the clergy. The existence of the Albanian-language literature is confirmed by the "Canons" of Albanian King Vachagan III and a unique research called "The History of the Albanians" by Moses of Kalankatuyk.

There were schools in the Uti (Karabakh) region of Albania in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. On orders from King Vachagan III, a special school was established to teach writing and Christianity to pagan children<sup>9</sup>. Before the introduction of Christianity to Albania, astral cults were widespread throughout Albania, including Karabakh. Christianity became state religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>10</sup>. Albanian Catholicoses were ordained at church congregations attended by the king, heads of eparchies, princes and noblemen. The most outstanding Catholicos was Viro who played an important part in the political life and foreign relations of the Albanian state in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

The 7<sup>th</sup> century political history of Karabakh was rich in complex developments. Starting from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Karabakh was the main region of the kingdom and soon developed into a political, economic, cultural and religious center of the state. In 446, the capital of the Albanian kingdom was moved from Kabala to the Karabakh city of Barda. This is where the Albanian Catholicos established his residency as well. Despite the foreign political turmoil, Albanian kings managed to preserve the independence of the Albanian state. For instance, one of the most prominent Albanian leaders Vachagan III (487-510) pursued independent domestic

and foreign policies. To reinforce his own power, he strengthened the positions of Christianity in the kingdom, which was why the capital was moved to Barda. It was under his rule that Albanian laws were codified: the Aguen canons regulating the state, socioeconomic and religious life of the Albanian kingdom were approved in 448.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century Albania was at the center of war among the Sassanid, Byzantium and Khazars. According to a 591 agreement between the Sassanid and Byzantium, Albania found itself under the rule of Shahanshahs who eliminated the local dynasty. As was the case elsewhere in the Caucasus, Alba-



*Capital. Early middle ages. Barda.*

nia, including Karabakh (Uti, Paytakaran and Artsakh), became part of the northern vicariate of the Sassanid empire.

In the early 7<sup>th</sup> century (603-629), there was war between the Sassanid and Byzantine empires, and Albania was caught in it. As a result, Karabakh was plundered and serious damage was caused to its cities and villages.

One of the prominent Albanian rulers, Prince Javanshir, signed a peace treaty with Byzantine Emperor Constantine Augustus<sup>11</sup> in an effort to preserve the economic and political stability of the state and rid the people of wearisome

wars. However, on seeing the impotence of Byzantium, he announced in 667 that Albania was moving into the patronage of the Arab caliphate. The move helped preserve Albania's independence and protect the country from plundering raids. Conditions were created for the development of crafts, trade and culture in Albania. It was on the instruction of Prince Javanshir that Moses of Kalankatuyk wrote the History of the Albanians. Prince Javanshir also provided support to a multitude of poets, architects and musicians. This is how he contributed to Albania's cultural renaissance and turned Karabakh into an important cultural center of Albania.

### **8-10<sup>th</sup> centuries**

By the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, the southern part of Azerbaijan was passed into the control of the Arab caliphate, while the north, Albania, became its vassal<sup>12</sup>. **Soon afterwards, a new religion, Islam, was spread throughout the country, including Karabakh.** Most of the population became Muslims, while a minority remained Christians. Taking advantage of the situation, Armenian Catholicos Iliia told Caliph Abd al-Maliq that Christian Albanians were staging an uprising against him. Without bothering to look into the situation, the caliph ordered that Christian Albanians become part of the Armenian church. **This is how the transformation of Karabakh Albanians into confessional "Armenians" began<sup>13</sup>.**

The development of commerce in the 8-9<sup>th</sup> centuries fetched significant revenue to the caliphate. In its heyday (9-early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries), Karabakh maintained broad contacts with its northern neighbors across the Caspian and the Volga,



Bridge. Early middle ages. Barda.

the Dnepr and Don<sup>14</sup>. Karabakh was a destination for trade caravans from many countries, mainly Europe and the East. Karabakh markets were a popular transfer point and played an important part in the development of this part of Azerbaijan. This is why a large number of copper, silver and golden coins and five major hoards have been discovered here. A research of the coins has revealed that a local caulking iron appeared here in ancient times and existed until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Coins of many other countries were discovered in Karabakh as well, which is evidence of its participation in international commerce<sup>15</sup>.

The wealth of Karabakh's main city, Barda, attracted the Russians who raided the city using the Volga-Caspian waterway in 943-944 and plundered it<sup>16</sup>.

In the caliphate era, scientific researches and works of art were

created in Arabic, while Christian schools were superseded by the Muslim Mekteb and Medrese<sup>17</sup>. Mosques and schools were built in Karabakh. As was the case elsewhere in the Muslim world, local cities were rebuilt in a new architectural style<sup>18</sup>.

The works of medieval Arab authors (Yaqubi, al-Kufi, al-Masudi, al-Istahri, Muqaddasi, Yaqut Hamawi) indicated that **the population of Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, spoke the "Aran language", which was probably one of the Albanian languages (Gargar)**. It is worth indicating that the Albanian name of the area between the Kura and Aras, Aran, which according to Moses of Kalankatuyk was the name of the "founding father of the Albans and their first king", was replaced in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with Turkic Karabakh<sup>19</sup>. In Turkic languages, Karabakh means "**a large garden and a vast country**"<sup>20</sup>.

In the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, independent feudal structures started emerging on the outskirts of the caliphate. At the end of the process, Karabakh became part of the Sadjid state. The silver coins discovered here were struck in 898 in the name of Muhammed Afshin, in 906 and 915 in the name of Yusuf ibn-Divdad, in 931 in the name of Muflih al-Yusifi and in 952 in the name of Daysam ibn-Ibrahim. They are highly important from the standpoint of establishing the status of Karabakh in the time of the Sadjid dynasty<sup>21</sup>.

In 942, the Sadjid state was replaced by the Salarids. In the first years of its existence, Karabakh, one of the central regions of the state, reached a high level of economic, social and cultural development.

The Shaddadid state appeared in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and Karabakh became part of it. After the founder of the Shaddadids, Muhammad bin Shaddad, defeated the Salarids,



*Khudaferin Bridge. Jabrayil District.*

his son Ali Lashkari ascended to power in 971 and the Shaddadids established control over the whole of Aran. Soon afterwards, taking advantage of the weakening of the Shaddadids, Shirvanshahs captured part of Karabakh in 982, but in 993 ruler Al-Fadl I bin Muhammad Shaddadid re-gained control over Karabakh<sup>22</sup>. 🌱

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