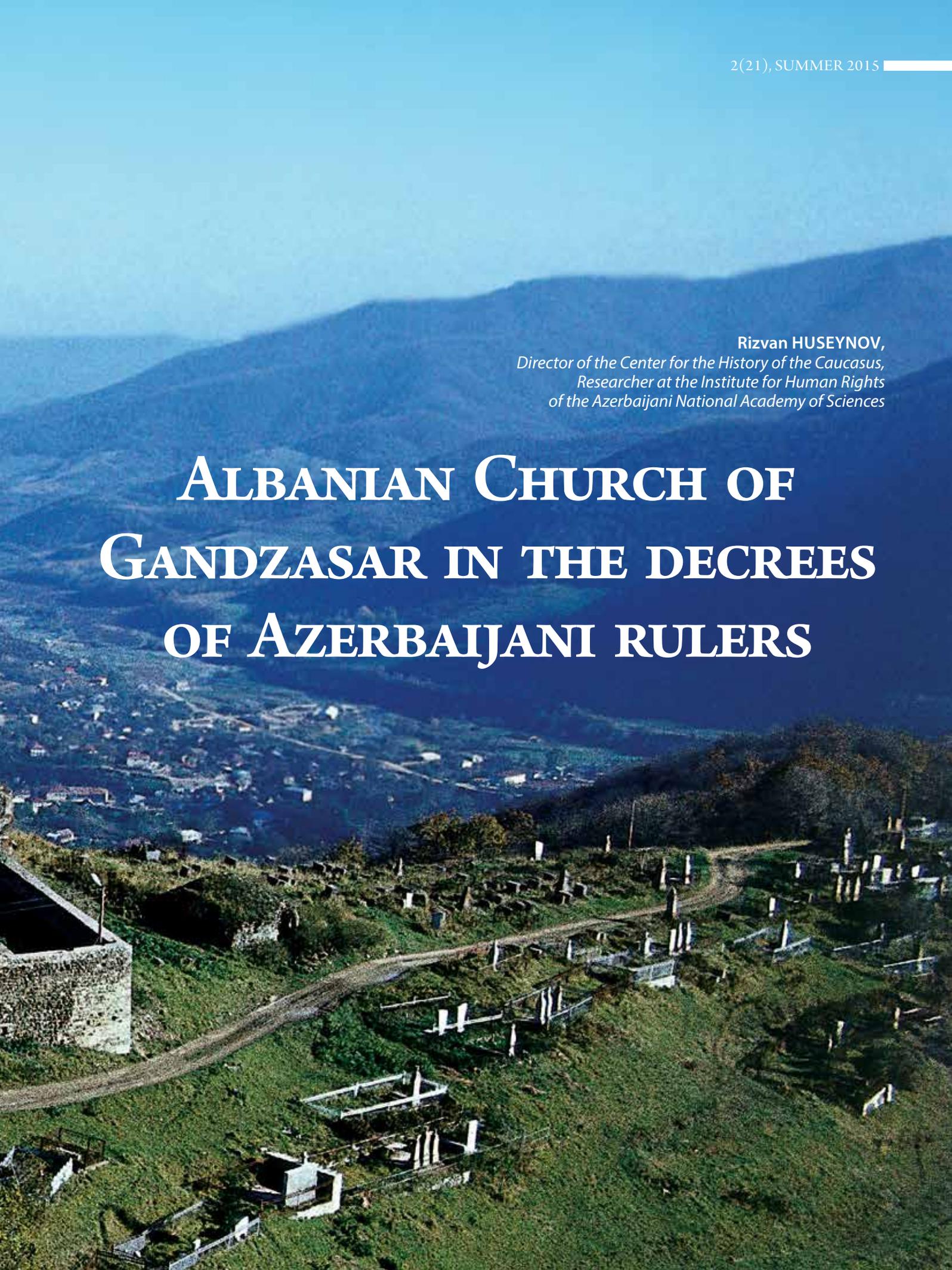




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# ALBANIAN CHURCH OF GANDZASAR IN THE DECREES OF AZERBAIJANI RULERS



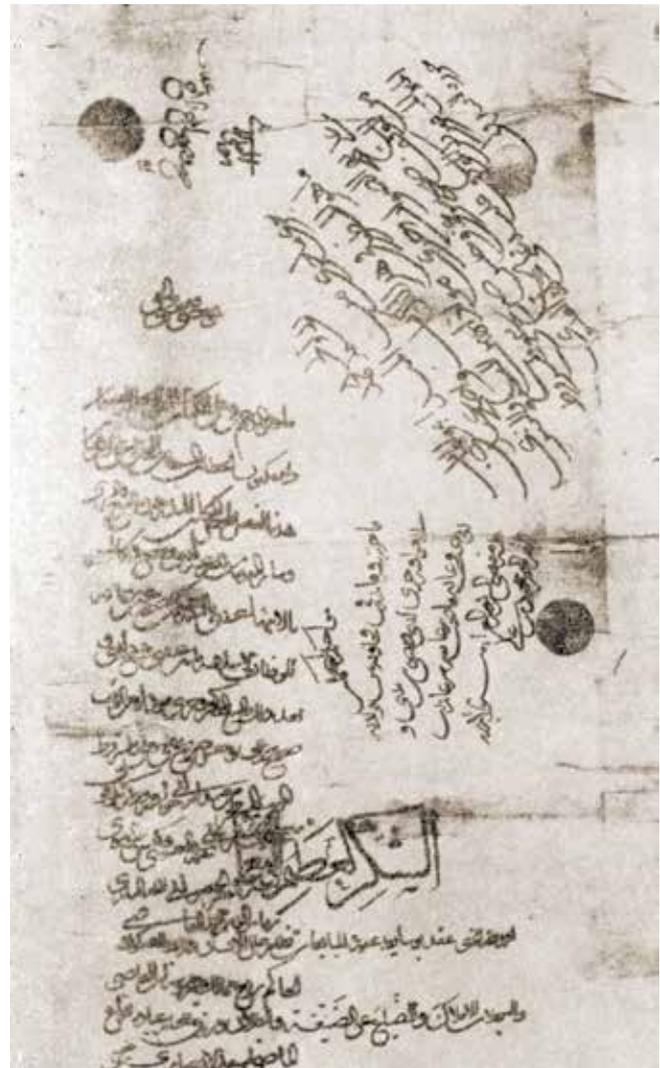
*A deed of 1430 on the sale of the village of Vagarshapat (Uchkilisa) to an Armenian bishop*

This article is devoted to Armenian falsifications aimed at misappropriating Albanian manuscript heritage and churches on the territory of present-day Armenia and in the occupied Azerbaijani lands of Karabakh. According to sources, **Armenian Church superiors settled with the permission of Jahanshah, the ruler of the Azerbaijani state of Qara Qoyunlu in the village of Uchkilisa - now Echmiadzin - in 1441.** This information is confirmed by Encyclopaedia Britannica (1910), where the article "Armenian Church" states that Armenian catholicoses first moved to Echmiadzin in 1441 (1). The article "Armenia" in the same place notes that Armenia is geographically located in Asia Minor, not in the Caucasus (2).

It should be noted that even before 1441 the Armenian clergy gradually flocked to the vicinity of Uchkilisa in several decades and bought land for their church here with the permission of Azerbaijani rulers. Numerous medieval decrees and bills of sale signed by Azerbaijani rulers and feudal lords from the archives of Armenian catholicoses were collected and analyzed by the Soviet Armenian scientist A. D. Papazyan and then published by the Academy of Sciences of the Armenian SSR as a series of books called "Persian Documents of Matenadaran" in 1956, 1959 and 1968 respectively (3).

In Armenia, the Matenadaran archive keeps **the 1430 bill of sale for the village of Uchkilisa** compiled on the basis of three separate bills of sale from 1428-1430, which show **how the Armenian clergymen began to buy land from Azerbaijani feudal lords for their future residence.** The original bill of sale shows that 4/6 of land in the village of Vagarshapat (Uchkilisa) were acquired in three steps from specific Azerbaijani landowners mentioned by name in the bill of sale (4). It is important to note that this and four other bills of sale kept in Matenadaran (Doc. 5, 8, 9 and 23) **indicate these lands as part of Azerbaijan.** Therefore, Papazyan was forced to point out that the Chukhur-Sa'd vilayet is referred to as one "of the regions of Georgia subordinate to the country of Azerbaijan".

Papazyan tried to explain in his own manner why Echmiadzin (Uchkilisa), as well as the entire territory of modern Armenia were located within Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages. According to him, this is the result of the "administrative" or "financial" division of the medieval Safavid Empire: "Under the Safavids, the country was divided into four major financial departments (departemens) - Iraq, Fars, Azerbaijan and Khorasan." He cites V. Minorskiy, who indicates that Azerbaijan had four baylarbaydoms: Tabriz,



Chukhur-S'ad, Karabakh and Shirvan (5). But the references above confirm that **the Azerbaijani possessions included vast territories in the Caucasus, including present-day Armenia (Chukhur-S'ad), Karabakh and Shirvan.** It is clear that Papazyan had to stretch the truth and play with formulations so as not to hurt the feelings of Armenian nationalists, who sensitively reacted to any mention of the fact that Armenia was created on medieval Azerbaijani lands. After all, any more or less literate Orientalist understands that the abovementioned medieval administrative and financial subordination is directly indicative of the political sovereignty of Azerbaijan over these lands of the Caucasus.

After the Armenian Church gained a foothold in Echmiadzin, where the residence of the Patriarchs of the Albanian Church had been located for centuries, **the deliberate Armenification of the rich heritage of the Christian peoples of the region began. The Armeni-**

*A decree by Begum Khatun, the wife of Sultan Jahan Qara Qoyunlu dated 1462, issued to Gandzasar Catholicos Ioannes, confirming his patriarchal rights*

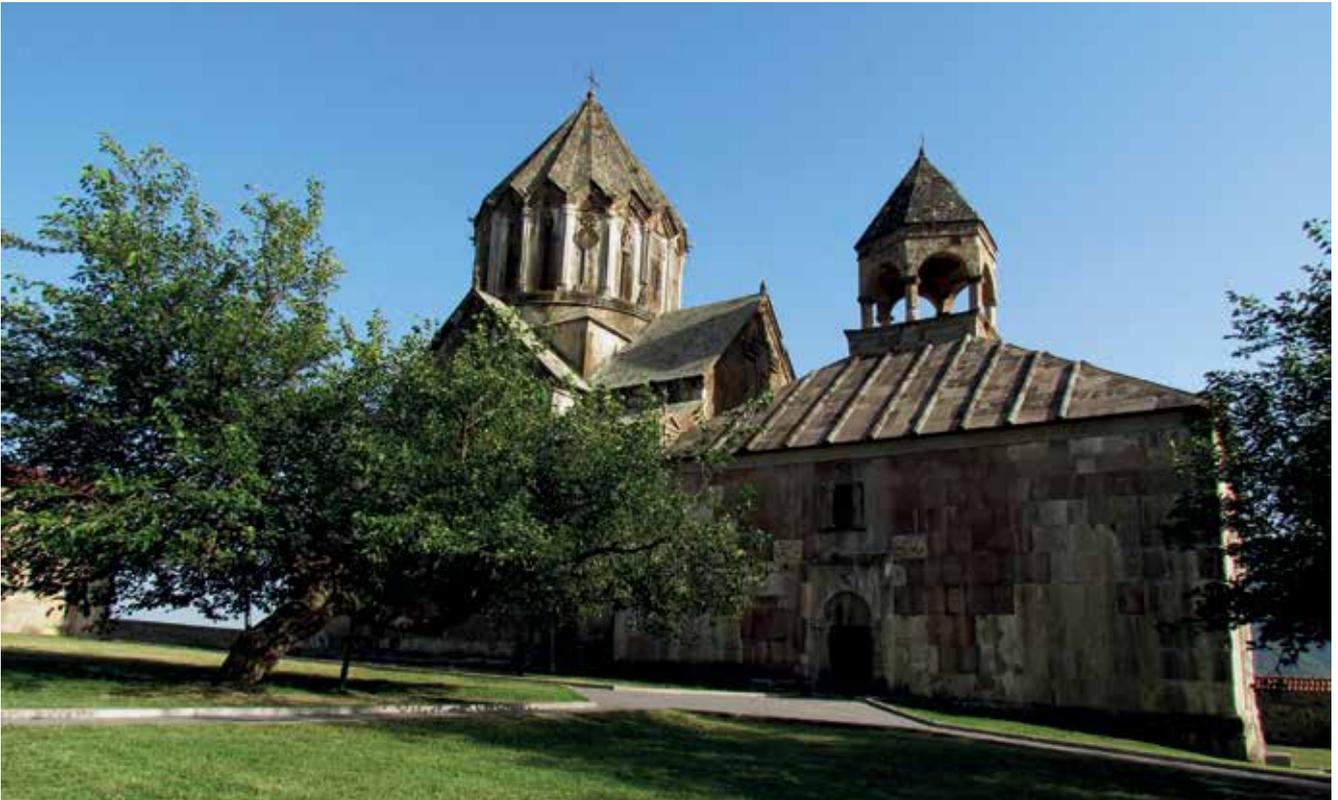


fiction of Albanian heritage took on a total nature in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the mass settlement of Armenians in the region began after Azerbaijani territories in the Caucasus were incorporated into Russia. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, more than one million Armenians from Persia, Turkey and the Middle East were resettled to the South Caucasus. After that, the Russian monarchy abolished the Albanian Autocephalous Church, which had served as one of the most important spiritual centers of the region since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and handed over its temples, archives and flock to the Armenian Church of Echmiadzin. **Numerous Albanian manuscripts were copied in the Armenian language and their content was faked, and as a result, there appeared a whole layer of fabricated sources that**

claimed the belonging of the Albanian church and its flock to Armenian ethnicity. Besides purely Albanian manuscripts and texts, **numerous decrees by medieval Azerbaijani rulers of Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu and Safavids**, the originals of which in Azeri and Persian then disappeared or were destroyed, were rewritten in Armenian. These rewritten copies, together with numerous other documents, were transferred to Echmiadzin and Matenadaran, where they are now used as the original medieval sources on Armenian history. Some of these decrees of Azerbaijani rulers issued to Albanian and Armenian monasteries were included in the abovementioned "Persian Documents of Matenadaran".

Papazyan, distorting the meaning of the documents in his study and adding the "necessary" words to them, is





**Qoyunlu**, issued to Gandzasar Catholicos Ioannes, he is referred to as *"the pride of the Christians and the catholicos of the vilayet of Agvank (Albania)"* (the Gandzasar monastery complex is located on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh currently occupied by Armenia - R. G.). However, Papazyan tries to present the Gandzasar catholicos as being subordinate to Armenia and Armenian catholicoses, although this decree of Begum Khatun clearly states that *"Armenians of this vilayet are subordinate to the Albanian catholicos"*. Here, **Armenians means not ethnicity, but the Albanian population of the Armenian-Gregorian faith**. This decree confirms the patriarchal rights of the Albanian catholicos of Gandzasar, which were previously granted to them by Jahanshah Qara Qoyunlu (1397-1467) and even earlier Sheikh Uveys Jelairid (1356-1374) (8).

The decree of Begum Khatun makes it clear that the Gandzasar patriarch had direct links with the Albanian rulers of Cilicia (Asia Minor), who settled here in the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today **Armenian science is trying to take credit for all the Albanian heritage of the Cilician Hethumids** who moved to the Cilician city of Sis headed by Albanian Prince Hethum. One of the most important primary sources of the 14<sup>th</sup> century - the book of Muhammad Nakhchivani "Dastur ul-Katib" cited the full title of the kings of Cilicia, with which the Turkic rulers turned to

them: *"To the venerable friend, great Basileus, glory of Alexander's family, shelter of Christians and the king of Sis..."* (9).

Besides Albanian patriarchs, Azerbaijani rulers supported Armenian-Haykan church dignitaries as well. It is thanks to this support that Armenian catholicoses, who also settled in Cilicia, relocated to Echmiadzin later and established themselves here. In particular, Papazyan rightly notes that Begum Khatun had special respect and provided support for Catholicos Akhtamartsi Zakaria, to whom she handed over the Catholicosate of Echmiadzin (10).

The 1487 decree of Yaqub, the shah of the Azerbaijani state of Aq Qoyunlu, to the Albanian Catholicos of Gandzasar Shmavon, exempts his congregation from different taxes and reports that **Agvank (Albania) is one of the vilayets of Azerbaijan**: *"Let amirs, hakims, darugas, well-born, noble and prominent people, meliks, kandkhudas and arbabs of all Azerbaijan, all mutasadds for divan affairs and mubashirs for royal affairs of the vilayet of Agvank know..."* (11). This decree mentions Armenian priests who came to confirm their rights in Gandzasar, but even here their Armenian Gregorian religion, not ethnicity, is meant. The fact is that **in the Middle Ages and later, all persons of the Armenian-Gregorian religion were called "Armenians", which is cleverly used today by modern Armenian falsifiers**, attributing all the Armenian Gregorian



heritage of very different peoples to the Haykan people: Armenian Kipchaks, Assyrians, Udis, Tats, Kurds and others.

The Azerbaijani Safavid state also confirmed the previous decrees on the patriarchal rights of Gandzasar catholicoses. In particular, this is stated in the decree of Shah Tahmasib I of 1570 (12).

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Azerbaijan frequently became a scene of battles in the Ottoman-Safavid wars. At a time when **Ottoman troops captured a significant part of Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, Ottoman henchmen - Armenian-Haykan churchmen from Asia Minor - were appointed catholicoses here.** This caused a bitter struggle between them and the legal heirs of the Gandzasar Patriarchate from the Albanian family of Prince Hasan Jalal, who built the Albanian temples of Gandzasar and other territories that were part of his Khachen principality in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Only after the retreat of the Ottoman army from Azerbaijan, was the Catholicosate in Gandzasar returned to the descendants of Hasan Jalal. This is referred to in the decree of Safavid Shah Abbas I and Papazyan's commentary accompanying this document (13). Another decree by Shah Abbas I speaks about the restoration of Gandzasar temples and its taxation (14).

Here it would be appropriate to touch on a story

from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century connected with the Armenian Catholicos Melkiset and the ruler of the Azerbaijani Erivan Khanate, Amirgune. In this period, Armenians of different faiths were engaged in a struggle in which an important role was played by European rulers who sought to use the Armenians for their own purposes. With the efforts of European monarchies and the Roman Catholic Church, the overwhelming majority of Armenians in the Middle East, Asia Minor and Europe embraced Catholicism and were engaged in an ideological war with Monophysite Armenians in the Caucasus. A clear idea about the nature of this confrontation is given by **the theft by "Frankish Paters" (Armenian Catholics) from Uchkilisa (Echmiadzin) of the relics of St. Hripsime and Gayane,** which occurred in 1610. By the decree of Safavid Shah Abbas I, Khan Amirgune sent a detachment that caught the thieves and took the relics away from them. All the perpetrators of this crime, including the Catholicos of Echmiadzin Melkiset were punished (15). This event is narrated in the work of Armenian chronicler Arakel Davrizhetsi (of Tabriz), who points to the involvement in the theft of Catholicos Melkiset, who allowed the Catholics to take away the relics of saints from Uchkilisa for a bribe (16). 🌟

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