

Caucasian Albania

Caucasian Albania is an ancient state that existed from the 1st century BC to the 8th century AD in the Eastern Caucasus, occupying part of the territories of present-day Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Dagestan.

Caucasian Albania was first mentioned by the ancient historian and geographer Strabo (64/63 BC – 23/24 AD). Strabo lived during the Roman campaigns against the country of the Albanians and, as a contemporary of those historical events, gave a detailed description of Caucasian Albania. Strabo's 'Geography,' which has survived to our time, has been published repeatedly in French, Russian, Greek, English, and German. It is no coincidence that many scholars have taken this work of the ancient historian as a basis for their studies. He described Caucasian Albania in Parts 4 and 5 of the 'Geography.'

The 'Albania' toponym occurs in Greek and Latin sources; in Armenian ones, it is recorded as 'Alvank', and in Persian – 'Arran.' From the 9th to the 13th centuries, Caucasian Albania was known by the Persian toponym 'Arran.' According to another version, the 'Albania' term originates from ancient Turkic and Sanskrit languages and derives from the word 'alp,' 'alb,' which means 'high,' 'peak,' 'mountain,' 'Mountain Country.' In the ancient Celtic (Indo-European) language, Scotland was called Albania with the meaning of 'Mountain Country.' Today's Republic of Albania on the Balkan Peninsula also has a similar semantic meaning. This version was also supported by Russian orientalist and Caucasologist Nikolay Marr, who cited 'Dagestan' ('Country of Mountains') as an example. However, in the early 19th century, Azerbaijani scholar Abbasgulu Agha Bakikhanov (1794–1847) suggested that the 'Albans' term comes from the Latin 'albi,' which means 'white' in the sense of 'free.'

Some scholars suggest that the 'Albania' term is of Iranian linguistic origin and was used by ancient Greeks and later by the Western world, whereas the Parthians, Sasanians, and later the Arabs referred to the same territory as 'Arran.'

Tribes of Caucasian Albania

Researchers claim that in the ancient period, the Albanian kingdom, which was located on the left bank of the Kura River, represented a union of 26 tribes speaking various languages. The ethnonyms of some of them are known. These are the Albans, Gargars, Utians, Maskuts, Gels, Silvs (Chilbs), Legs, Lupentsis (Lbins), and Didurs. Nevertheless, new scientific and historical studies convincingly prove that some tribes were not part of Albania at all, and some had Scythian roots. This indicates that the writings by ancient and later authors, who referred to their ancient predecessors as primary sources, are, to put it mildly, distortions of the history of Caucasian Albania. Undoubtedly, Armenian and Russian researchers played a major role in this. Thus, e.g., the Silvs, Legis, Lupentsis, and Didurs were not originally and permanently part of Caucasian Albania. These tribes were northern neighbors of the Albans, lived in the south of present-day Dagestan, and only occasionally, during periods of expansion of Caucasian Albania, did they end up within its borders. Gargars, Utians, Maskuts, and Gels are Scythian tribes (Sakas, Massagetae, Sarmatians), which always lived here. In Caucasian Albania, tribes of the Nakh-Dagestani family, Persian-speaking and Scythian tribes, and starting from the 2nd century – Turkic tribes also lived. The Greeks referred to the territories of present-day Azerbaijan from historical Armenia to the place where the nomadic Sarmatians lived, the Caspian Sea and Derbent, as Albania, and there is no doubt that the Albans directly contributed to the ethnogenesis of present-day Azerbaijanis and the peoples of southern Dagestan. However, the Albans were not a separate ethnic group. Albania is a historical-geographical toponym. Albans is a collective name for the inhabitants of this territory. E.g., ‘Dagestan’ is a geographical toponym, but on this territory, from 40 to 80 tribes, peoples, and ethnic groups have lived and continue to live. According to the Russian encyclopedia ‘Peoples and Religions’ (1999), the Gargars, along with the Albans, Utians, Caspians, and Legs, contributed to the ethnogenesis of Azerbaijanis. According to the assumption of Soviet historian Kamilla Trever (1892–1974), the Gargars were one of the leading tribes of Caucasian Albania. Some researchers equate the Gargars with the Ingush, Rutuls, or Tsakhurs. However,

Azerbaijani researchers believe that the ‘Gargar’ ethnonym echoes the names of Turkic-speaking tribes such as ‘Bulgar,’ ‘Kongar,’ ‘Uturgar,’ etc. Azerbaijani historians consider that the ‘Gargar’ term consists of two parts. The first part – ‘gar’ – should be read as ‘garg,’ which means ‘garga’ (‘crow’), and the ‘ar’ suffix means plural form. ‘Gargar,’ thus, means ‘tribe of crows.’

Unlike the Armenians and Georgians, the Albanians failed to create a common language and culture. Some of the tribes became Christians while others still traditionally practiced Zoroastrianism; later, Turkic-speaking and Persian-speaking tribes adopted Islam, and the supremacy subsequently shifted to the Turkic element.

Throughout the early Middle Ages (a period of European history that started after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 and continued until 1030), Albania remained a multi-ethnic country. Christians of Albania were partially Armenized (the provinces of Artsakh and Utik), and partially (in the border Albanian-Iberian zone (Kakheti)) Kartvelized. The main part of the population adopted Islam. The descendants of the population of the northern and Caspian regions are the present-day Azerbaijanis, Udis, Tats, Rutuls, Tsakhurs, and Lezgins. The descendants of the population of the southern and Caspian regions are the present-day Azerbaijanis, Talysh, and Tats.

Rulers of Caucasian Albania

In the Albanian state, from the 1st to the 4th century, the Arranshahs or Arsacids ruled – a branch of the Parthian Arsacid dynasty. In Armenia, the dynasty was headed by the brother of the Parthian king while in Georgia and Caucasian Albania, his other relatives ruled.

Under the Sasanians, the territory of Caucasian Albania was expanded. In 461, the Albanian kingdom became a marzpanate within the Sasanian state. In 630, power in Caucasian Albania was seized by the Mihranid dynasty, who had Parthian (ancient Persian) roots. Back in the early 7th century, they received the feudal possession of Gardman in Caucasian Albania from the Sasanians. In 727, Caucasian Albania was captured by the Arabs. Unlike the Armenians and Georgians, who preserved their

language and faith, the tribes of Caucasian Albania failed to consolidate into a single people, and as a consequence, Caucasian Albania left the historical stage.

Cities of Caucasian Albania

At different times, the capitals of Caucasian Albania were the cities of Kabala (until the 6th century) and Partav. Other major cities were Paitakaran (Beylagan, *Azerbaijan*), Derbent (Derbent, *Dagestan*), and Shamakhy (Shamakhi, *Azerbaijan*).

The city of Kabala (now the city of Gabala, *Azerbaijan*) was inhabited by Albanian and Turkic tribes (Huns-Savirs and Khazars). In the 7th century, the Khazars ruled Kabala. The Arabs, who captured the city in 727, called it al-Khazar or Khazaran.

Under the Arabs, the capital of Caucasian Albania became the city of Partav, Perozabad, or Bardavi (now the city of Barda, *Azerbaijan*).

Language of Caucasian Albania

The Albanian language had its script and was the ancestor of the modern Udi language. It belongs to the Northeast Caucasian language family. The German linguist Jost Gippert asserts that the Udi language is close to Albanian. Almost half of Albanian words are understandable to the Udis.

The Udis – the most ancient tribe of the Eastern Caucasus – were among the founders of Caucasian Albania on the territory of present-day Azerbaijan, ethnically close to the peoples of Dagestan. Linguists classify the Udi language as part of the Lezgian branch of the Nakh-Dagestani language family, although it does not resemble Lezgian. Their religion is Orthodox Christianity.

The ancient Greek historian Herodotus (484 BC – 425 BC), describing the Battle of Marathon (32 km from Athens) in 490 BC between the Roman and Achaemenid empires in his book ‘The Histories,’ wrote that the Utian soldiers also fought as part of the XIV satrapy of the Achaemenid army. The ancient Roman writer Gaius Plinius Secundus

(Pliny the Elder, 22–79 AD) called the Udis Scythians and reported on the Utidors (Aorsi-Sarmatians). Moreover, it is reliably known that yet in the 1st millennium BC, the North Caucasus was part of Scythia, then Sarmatia, and Great Bulgaria. The core of the Bulgars consisted of ancient Turkic tribes. Furthermore, the entire territory of the North Caucasus was inhabited by ancient Persian-speaking and Turkic-speaking tribes. New tribes emerged under new names while the old ones disappeared. Dagestan was multilingual; in the mountainous terrain, tribes lived in small groups in isolation. All this contributed to the division of Dagestani tribes into separate language groups and created a need for the preservation and use of native languages in everyday life. Thus, based on a mix of languages, the Nakh-Dagestani language family emerged. A similar situation occurred in Caucasian Albania. The self-designations of tribes continuously changed. Some tribes united into confederations under different names while maintaining their identity and ethnonyms.

Armenian sources claim that the script for the Albanian language was created by Mesrop Mashtots in the early 5th century. The alphabet consists of 52 letters. Christian literature was translated into the Albanian language, and the church service was celebrated in it. Later, due to historical reasons, the Albanian script ceased to be used and gradually disappeared. In Caucasian Albania, Aramaic and later Middle Persian were the official and spoken languages until the 5th century. The existence of many different tribes and languages led to Middle Persian becoming the lingua franca. According to some researchers, among the tribes of Caucasian Albania, the Gargars were significant in number. Based on the Gargarian language, the Albanian alphabet was created, similar to Armenian. The church played a key role in the creation of the alphabet. The Armenian, Georgian, and Albanian churches were spiritually very close. After the Georgian church withdrew from the trinity and joined Byzantine Orthodoxy in the early 8th century (under the Arabs), the Albanian church fell under the complete influence of the Armenian Apostolic Church. As a result, the Albanian language gradually ceased to be an element of religious identity and gave way to Armenian. Consequently, over the following centuries, the Christians of Caucasian Albania gradually Armenized. As for the part of the

population that adopted Islam, over several centuries, the Nakh-Dagestani, Iranian-speaking, and Turkic tribes interacted, intermingled, and assimilated, which led to a unified culture, language, and self-awareness, resulting in the formation of the Azerbaijani Turkic people. And it is quite natural that the ethnogenesis of the Dagestani peoples involved Nakh-Dagestani tribes, Persian-speaking tribes, proto-Turks (Scythians, Massagetae), Turkic-speaking tribes (Huns, Khazars, Pechenegs, Kipchaks), Arabs (7th–11th centuries), as well as the Turkic Safavids, Afshars, and Qajars (mid-16th century – early 19th century).

Today, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and the peoples of the North Caucasus are representatives of the Caucasian peoples and bearers of Caucasian culture. Although Armenia is considered one of the three South Caucasian republics, for some reason, it is not a bearer of Caucasian culture.

Religion of Caucasian Albania

In the ancient period, the tribes of Albania were pagans. In the 3rd century, Zoroastrianism became the main religion. At the end of the 3rd century, Christianity began to spread in the region. Apostle Eliseus is considered the first Christian preacher in Albania. He lived and died in the 1st century. He built the first Christian church in Transcaucasia in the village of Kish (now the village of Kish in the Shaki region, Azerbaijan).

At the beginning of the 4th century, Christianity received official status in the marzpanates of Armenia, Georgia, and Albania. These three churches became independent, forming a separate group in the global Christian system. In 607, the Georgian church joined Byzantine Orthodoxy. Since then, the absorption of the Albanian church by the stronger Armenian one has begun. In 704, the Albanian catholicos was deposed, and the Albanian church became part of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and later fully merged with the latter. Formally, the Aghvan Catholicosate existed until the mid-19th century. The throne of the Catholicos was abolished in 1830. The corresponding parishes of the Albanian church became directly subordinate to Etchmiadzin, as the Azerbaijani and Artsakh dioceses. Catholicos Isaac Partev and his associate Mesrop Mashtots created the Armenian language and script in

407. Isaac Partev was the grandson of the spreader of Christianity in the province of Armenia – the first catholicos Gregory the Illuminator. As is known, Gregory was of Parthian origin. He was the cousin of a governor from the Parthian Arsacid (Arshakuni) dynasty, and after the establishment of Sasanid power, all Parthian princes were entitled to move to the province of Armenia to their close relatives. Christianity turned out to be the only force that contributed to the self-assertion of Parthian culture. With the help of Christianity, the Parthians could fight against the Sasanids. To do this, the fragments of the Parthians had to create a new people and a new language. Since the province was called Armenia, and the church was called Armenian, the language was also called Armenian. To strengthen the faith, they needed to have the Holy Scripture in the same language. Thus, the Bible and all church literature were translated into the new language.

The spread of Christianity and the fight against paganism continued for several centuries. Sometimes governors quarreled with the church, there were cases when they even killed catholicos, but they had never claimed the church property. There were bloody clashes between different clans and tribes. The confrontation was also between governors on the one side, and the Catholicos and major feudal lords on the other side. The church, sometimes with the help of the governor or together with major Christian feudal lords, destroyed pagans, and their property was confiscated in favor of the church, the governor, and the Christian feudal lord. Even those who had accepted Christianity but did not want to submit to the church were destroyed. The church waged a struggle for the centralization of power with the aim of absolute supremacy over the governors of the province and all tribal communities.

There were constant wars between the Roman and Byzantine empires on the one side, and the Zoroastrians of the Sasanid Empire, the Arab Caliphate, the Seljuk state, and the Ottoman Empire on the other side. As a result of wars, the western part of Armenia and Georgia remained part of the Christian empires. Christianization and Armenization of the tribes occurred faster in the western part of the province than in the eastern one, where the majority did not want to abandon Zoroastrianism. The same was observed in Georgia, where dynasties with Parthian Persian roots

ruled.

Many ask the question: Why were Georgians and Armenians, having lived for one and a half thousand years surrounded by Muslims, not Islamized?

After the emergence of the Arab Caliphate (640–1055) in eastern Anatolia, Iran, and the South Caucasus, paganism gradually faded. Christianity spread throughout the territory of Armenia and Georgia, and the highland part of Azerbaijan. Christian states supported Armenians and Georgians, but Arabs and Turks did not force Georgians and Armenians to adopt Islam. Georgians and Armenians preserved their faith, and their churches and feudal lords retained their lands. Azerbaijanis and Caucasian peoples voluntarily adopted Islam. In 642, the Arabs came to Nakhchivan, virtually without resistance, through the entire territory of present-day Azerbaijan, and reached Derbent. The local Persian governors adopted Islam and passed under the protection of the new authorities. The governor of Derbent did the same. Islam started penetrating Albania at the end of the 7th century, after the Arabs came. The ruler of Albania, Javanshir, was the first to begin the Islamization of the region. In the 9th century, the Islamic dynasty of the Shirvanshahs (861–1538) emerged, with capitals in Shamakhi and Baku. In various periods of history, the power of the Shirvanshahs extended to neighboring regions: Arran and Derbent. In the 10th century, the Islamic dynasty of the Shaddadids (951–1136) emerged, with its capital in Ganja. The Shirvanshahs and Shaddadids had Arab roots, but considered themselves descendants of the Sasanids. They ruled these lands until the 11th century when the Seljuk Turks came. In the south of Azerbaijan, the Shaddadids ceded the throne to the Turkic state of the Eldiguzids (1136–1225).

Thus, Christian Albanians were Armenized, and Persian- and Turkic-speaking tribes adopted Islam. But along with fire-worshippers, Christians, and Muslims, there were also Tengrists. Southern Dagestan was Islamized, but the rest of Dagestan remained under the rule of the Khazar-Tengrists until the end of the 10th century. Turkic Khazars and the Arab Muslims waged continuous wars.

In 740, the Khazars converted to Buddhism and found themselves

surrounded by Turks (Tengrism), local pagans, and from the south, Arabs. In 921, the Turkic Bulgars converted to Islam. From this time onward, Turks began to massively convert to Islam. As a result, by the end of the 10th century, the Khazars left the historical stage.

Nearby, there were strong Armenian and Georgian princely families who managed to unite various tribes around Christianity, creating their languages and people. From the beginning of the 5th century to the middle of the 7th century, the Albanians acted jointly with the Armenians. They had the same ancient Persian Parthian roots and religion – Zoroastrianism. They almost simultaneously adopted Christianity and created their alphabets. But in the middle of the 7th century, under the ruler Javanshir, Turkic tribes dominated in Caucasian Albania, and the Islamization of the population began. In 705, the Albanian church became part of the Armenian one, and part of the Albanians were Armenized. Only the Udi preserved their presence in Azerbaijan to this day. The rest of the tribes of Caucasian Albania also adopted Islam. Why? Zoroastrianism, as one of the most ancient monotheistic (belief in a single God) religions, is the closest to Islam in its ideology and worldview. E.g., the sequence of prayers is identical – five times a day. In the ‘Fatiha’ surah we encounter the concept of ‘Sirat al-Mustaqim’ (‘The Straight Path’). Zoroastrians have the same sacred bridge, and they also believe that at the end of their earthly journey, all mortals will stand before the Last Judgment. They will pass across the bridge and get to hell or paradise. Zoroastrians believe that there is both an external and an internal devil. In Islam, this is Shaytan. The explicit example of the influence of Zoroastrianism is the holiday of Novruz or Nowruz celebrated by all Turkic peoples and Persians. The holiday of the spring equinox was considered one of the main holidays of Zoroastrians. On this day, people celebrated and lit bonfires. This custom, in essence unchanged, continues today in Azerbaijan.

With the spread of Islam in Caucasian Albania, the connection with the ancient world was broken, and a civilizational reboot took place. Farsi became the language of culture, and Arabic – the official and religious language. The population of Caucasian Albania continued to live as before, bowing to feudal lords and governors. They spoke multiple languages. Later, the Turkic language became the lingua franca. This

would take several more centuries.

Turkic Element in Caucasian Albania. Scythians and Huns.

Ancient Greek sources mentioned a people consisting of several tribes and dominating the western and central steppes of Eurasia from the 9th century BC to the 4th century as Scythians. Achaemenid chronicles referred to them as 'sak' or 'saka,' and Chinese sources used the 'sai' ethnonym. Some researchers believe that the customs and way of life of the Scythian tribes are identical to those of the Turkic peoples. Medieval historians and chroniclers call them Turks or classify them as Turkic peoples.

It is reliably known that from the 7th–6th centuries BC, on the territory of present-day Azerbaijan, a historical region called Sakasena existed, which was part of the Scythian kingdom of Ishkuza (670–550 BC). It was then replaced by the Scythian tribe of the Massagetae led by the famous Queen Tomyris (570–520 BC). *There is a well-known legend about Queen Tomyris who took revenge on King Cyrus. According to the myth, the Achaemenid King Cyrus II the Great, after crossing the Araxes River with a large army, set up camp on the Massagetae territory and sent envoys to propose to the queen. After Tomyris refused him, Cyrus' troops withdrew. Only a small detachment remained in the Persian camp. Taking advantage of the enemy's small number, the Massagetae led by Prince Spargapises attacked the camp, defeated the Persians, and began celebrating victory. Angered by the Prince's audacity, Cyrus defeated the Massagetae detachment and captured Tomyris's son. In captivity, Spargapises committed suicide. Upon learning of this, Tomyris attacked the Persians with her army and defeated them. Cyrus II the Great also perished. Tomyris ordered to fill a wine bag with blood and dip Cyrus's head into it.*

Later, the Massagetae were called Maskuts and had their cognominal historical region, which was part of Caucasian Albania.

On the territory of present-day Azerbaijan, there was also the historical region of Caspiana or Paytakaran, which at different times belonged to the Achaemenids, Romans, Parthians, and Sasanians. Some ancient

researchers believed that Parsis lived in Caspiana. The ‘Paytakaran’ term and the population of the region had Persian roots. The king of the Maskuts, Sanesan or Sanatruk (? – between 330 and 338), seized the city of Paytarakan and ruled in Caucasian Albania with the help of Huns subordinate to him. Many researchers confirm that Caucasian Albania was a confederation of feudal domains of Chola, Maskut, Lpinia, Balasakan, Paytarakan, Artsakh, Utik, Gardman, and Albania.

Habitat of the Massagetae:

*Chola region (Derbent area, *Dagestan*).

*Maskut region (northwest *Azerbaijan* and southern *Dagestan*).

*Balasakan region (western and southwestern parts of the Caspian Sea, *Azerbaijan*).

Strabo wrote that in the region of Paytarakan (the ancient Caspiana, now divided between Azerbaijan and Iran), pariahs, who were also a tribe of Scythian origin, and later in this area, the Massagetae and Persian-speaking tribes lived.

In the region of Artsakh (a mountainous part of Karabakh, Azerbaijan), Persian-speaking tribes also lived.

According to some researchers, in the region of Utik (in the ancient period), Persian-speaking Uti lived. Strabo, in turn, believed that in the region of Utik, the Anariakai lived, who were a tribe of Scythian origin. In the region of Gardman (a historical area between the eastern part of Armenia and the Shamkir region of Azerbaijan), Persian-speaking tribes lived.

The population of the Albania region (left bank of the Kura River in the territory of Azerbaijan, partly Georgia, and partly Dagestan) was ethnically diverse. In ancient times, Scythians (Saka, Massagetae, Sarmatians) and ancient Persian-speaking tribes lived here. Later in Albania, tribes of the Nakh-Dagestani language family, as well as Turkic and Persian-speaking tribes, lived.

Historical literature holds that the first Turkic tribes appeared in the South Caucasus only in the 11th century – these were Seljuk Turks who assimilated the local population of Caucasian Albania. However, it is

scientifically proven that Scythians (Saka, Massagetae, and Sarmatians) lived in the South Caucasus as early as the 1st century BC. Moreover, the first Huns appeared in the Caucasus in the 2nd century. In the 3rd century, Huns served in the Persian army. The mass penetration of the Huns into the Caucasus dates to the late 4th century. The pastures of the Huns were located in the steppe regions of the Western Caspian up to the Derbent Pass. Ethnonyms changed even after the Huns: Khazars, Bulgars, Pechenegs, Kipchaks, Oghuz, Turkmens, Seljuks, Chinggisids, Ottomans, etc.

In 378, the Romans first encountered the Huns, who had captured the North Caucasus, the lower reaches of the Dnieper and Dniester, and Thrace on the Balkan Peninsula, and settled in Hungary and Austria. At the end of the 4th century, the Hun-Savirs came to Caucasian Albania.

From the 5th to 10th centuries, a kingdom of Huns (Savirs) existed on the territory of Dagestan. Its capital was the city of Varachan – according to one version, Buynaksk, and according to another version, the vicinity of the Bashlykent village. This kingdom was a vassal of the Khazars.

In the 5th century, the Sarmatians, who had long lived in the Trans-Volga region and the Southern Urals, settled in the North Caucasus. Researchers have proven that Huns and Sarmatians, who relocated to Albania, served in the Sasanian and Albanian armies. Some historians consider them ancestors of the Slavic people. The issue of the ethnic affiliation of the Sarmatians is unresolved in science. Recent studies show that the concept of their Turkic origin is more convincing. The language of the Sarmatians confirms this. Caucasian Albania and the Khazar Khaganate were almost always on good terms, especially under Javanshir (642–681), who was married to the daughter of the Khazar Khagan. In 681, the ruler of the Hunnic kingdom in Dagestan, Alp-Ilitver, angered by the conspirators' murder of Prince Javanshir, launched a campaign against Caucasian Albania and turned it into a vassal of the Hunnic kingdom.

Thus, in the ancient period, starting from the 1st millennium BC, Scythian tribes Sarmatians and Saka (Massagetae, Muskuts) lived in the Caucasus, on the territory of present-day Dagestan and Azerbaijan. On the territory of present-day Azerbaijan and Iran, there was the Scythian

kingdom of Ishkuza (670–550 BC). The center of the kingdom was the territory inhabited by the Saka, Sakasena (area of the city of Ganja, Azerbaijan). After the Saka, the Massagetae emerged on the historical stage. On the territory of present-day Azerbaijan and Dagestan, the kingdom of the Maskuts existed (6th century BC – 1st century AD) with its capital in the city of Chola (now Derbent). From the 1st century AD, the Maskut region was in vassal dependence on the kings of Caucasian Albania.

Azerbaijani scholars A. Bakikhanov and S. Ashurbayli leaned toward the idea that Maskuts (Massagetae) who lived on the shores of the Caspian Sea named the village of Mashtaga (a suburb of Baku, *Azerbaijan*).

As for the territory of present-day Dagestan, numerous Turkic tribes of Huns, Khazars, Kipchaks, Nogais, and Kумыks with their khanates also lived here from the beginning of our era until 1867. Kумыks and Nogais were descendants of ancient and medieval Turkic-speaking tribes, which were in close contact with the Nakh-Vainakh language family. Nevertheless, it is known that the Turkic Kумыk language was the lingua franca in the North Caucasus, and the Turkic Azerbaijani language in Transcaucasia from the 11th century until the beginning of the 20th century.

On the territory of the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan, Huns, Khazars, Oghuz, Kipchaks, and Turkmens lived with their states and khanates until 1828.

After the Russo-Qajar wars of 1804–1813 (Gulistan Treaty) and 1826–1828 (Turkmenchay Treaty), the Qajar state lost Eastern Georgia, Dagestan, Armenia, and Northern Azerbaijan. Territories north of the Araz River were ceded to Russia, and territories south of the Araz River remained part of the Qajar state, which is today's Iran.

The fact that the Turkmen-Oghuz came to Iran and Azerbaijan in the mid-11th century and encountered no resistance indicates that by that time, the majority of the population of northern Iran and Azerbaijan were already Turks and Muslims. From that time, powerful states of the Seljuks (1038–1157), Eldiguzids (1137–1225), Ilkhanids (1256–1335), and Timurids (1370–1507) existed in these lands.

By the middle of the 14th century, due to the weakening of the Ilkhanids, the states of the Chobanids (1338–1357) and the Jalayirids (1340–1410) emerged on the territory of Iran and Azerbaijan. Their state covered the territories of present-day central and southern Iran, and Iraq (except the north). The capitals were the cities of Baghdad (Iraq), Tabriz (South Azerbaijan, Iran), and Basra (Iraq).

After the weakening of the Timurids, other states came forward: Qara Qoyunlu (1375–1468) and Aq Qoyunlu (1467–1501), representing a confederation of Oghuz tribes.

The state of Qara Qoyunlu existed in Southwest Asia, on the territory of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, northwestern Iran, and eastern Turkey. The capital of the state was the city of Tabriz (East Azerbaijan region, Iran).

The state of Aq Qoyunlu ruled in the eastern part of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The capital of the state was the city of Tabriz.

The Oghuz Turkic tribes that were part of the Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu states were related. The only difference was that the former were Shiites, and the latter – Sunnis.

There also existed the states of the Safavids (1501–1736), Afsharids (1729–1750), and Qajars (1785–1925). The last Qajar ruler Sultan Ahmad Shah was deposed on October 31, 1925, and Reza Khan was proclaimed Shah.

It should be noted here that the ‘Iran’ and ‘Azerbaijan’ terms should be understood as toponyms. The states of the Jalayirids, Qara Qoyunlu, Aq Qoyunlu, Safavids, Afsharids, and Qajars are directly related to present-day Azerbaijanis. It is fundamentally incorrect to call them Iranian or Persian states.

The basis of autochthony lay in the belief that ancient habitation justifies a people’s right to a given territory. Today this concept has lost its relevance. To recognize the rights of a people to a particular territory, it is sufficient for several generations to have lived there and for international legal documents to exist, in which this right is recognized and recorded.

Russian Factor

Why did the Russians wage war against the highlanders of the Caucasus for nearly 50 years? How did numerous multilingual tribes unite to resist the Russian intervention?

Firstly, the region's landscape created problems for the Russians; the mountains and forests allowed the highlanders to resist successfully.

Secondly, Russian troops destroyed forests, crops, and grain reserves, and confiscated livestock. Then they destroyed defiant villages. Therefore, the resistance became widespread.

Thirdly, Muslims declared a ghazavat – a holy war against infidels. The Muslim uprising was led by the imams of Dagestan: Ghazi Muhammad (1795–1832), Gamzat-Bek (1789–1834), and Sheikh Shamil (1797–1871). There are different versions regarding Shamil's ethnicity. Researchers write that Shamil was an Avar, like Muhammad-Ghazi and Gamzat-Bek. But his paternal ancestor was a Kumyk named Amirkhan. At home, with his family members, Shamil spoke the Kumyk language. He was a murid of Imam Ghazi Muhammad, who was ethnical Kumyk. Both were born in the village of Gimry. The Avar toponym of the village is Genub, from 'geni,' which means 'pear.' Other versions are related to the Kumyk 'q'ymra,' meaning a plant name, and the Turkic 'gemry,' meaning 'pasture.' Shamil said he knew Arabic, Avar, Turkish, and Kumyk. Once he called himself a 'simple Tatar.' At that time, Kумыks and Azerbaijanis were called Tatars in Russia.

Shamil was exiled to Kaluga (1860-1869), where he lived for 9 years in a three-story house, like a nobleman. He had two translators – one from Russian, and another from Kumyk. In Kaluga, Colonel Dmitry Boguslavsky, who knew Arabic and Kumyk well, conducted secret surveillance over Shamil. Correspondence with the Tsarist government was conducted in the Kumyk Turkic language.

In the northern part of Dagestan, the interethnic language was Avar while in the southern part – Kumyk Turkic. Imam Shamil was a scholar of Islamic religion, an organizer, and a military leader. Thanks to these qualities and his knowledge of the two aforementioned languages, the imam successfully led the resistance of the highlanders for 25 years.

Справка.

Reference.

Lezgins. According to some historians, the Lezgins are descendants of the Albanians. The Russian 'Lezgin' corresponds to the self-name of Lezgins *lezgi* or *lek*. *Lezgi* is an Iranized form of Lezgin's historical name – *lek/leg*. Medieval Arab authors called the Leks 'al-Lakz.' Strabo noted that 'the Gels and Legs – Scythians live between the Amazons and Albanians.' Legs or Leks – one of the 26 tribes of Caucasian Albania, who are considered ancestors of today's Lezgins and Laks.

Strabo believed that the Amazons lived near the Mermoda River. Scholars suggest that Mermoda is the present-day Terek or Kuban River. The ancient Greek writer and philosopher Plutarch (between 45 and 50 – between 119 and 125) reported that the Amazons lived in the Caucasus range along the Caspian coast from the mouth of the Kura to the Samur River. There is a version that the Amazons is a distorted ethnic term 'Alazons,' from the toponym of the area along the Alazani River.

Alazani is a river in eastern Georgia and western Azerbaijan, flowing into the Mingachevir Reservoir. In Azerbaijan, it is called Ganikh. The Avars call it Alazan, Chechens – Alaz, and Tsakhurs – Dur.

The 'Lezgi' term has been known in written sources since the 12th century. This was not a self-designation for a separate Dagestani ethnicity. In the Russian Empire and among the Turks, 'Lezgin' was used to refer to numerous mountain tribes of Southern Dagestan. In the 1920s, the 'Lezgin' ethnonym was officially assigned to one of the mountain peoples of Dagestan, known since the second half of the 19th century as the Kyurins, a term introduced by ethnographer General Pyotr Uslarov (1816–1875).

Kyura is a historical and geographical area in Southern Dagestan. The region's toponym originates from the Arabic 'kyura,' which means 'area, district.' It is located between the Samur River and the Tabasaran region to the north.

From the late 14th century to 1867, a Kumyk state existed in Dagestan, called the Shamkhalate, Tarki Shamkhalate, Kazikumukh Khanate, and

Kyura-Kazikumukh Khanate. From 1812 to 1820, a separate Kyurin Khanate existed. Its capital was the city of Targu or Tarki (now a district of Makhachkala). The Khans belonged to the Kumyk Shamkhal dynasty.

Until the 1920s, the Nakh-Dagestani peoples of Dagestan were considered Lezgin tribes. In some sources, the 'Lezgin' term was used to refer to all non-Turkic peoples of Dagestan. However, in 2020, 14 peoples: Avars, Aguls, Azerbaijanis, Dargins, Kumyks, Laks, Lezgins, Tats, Tabasarans, Nogais, Rutuls, Russians, Tsakhurs, and Akkin Chechens were officially recognized as the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the Republic of Dagestan.

As of 2024, the population of Dagestan was 3.3 million people. The Turkic-speaking population (Kumyks, Nogais, and Azerbaijanis) makes up 21.3% of Dagestan's population – about 660,000. Lezgins make up 13.3%, about 417,000. Azerbaijanis make up 3.7%, about 117,000.

As of 2024, the population of Azerbaijan is 10.2 million people. Azerbaijanis make up more than 90% of the population. Lezgins make up 2% of Azerbaijan's population – more than 200,000.

Derbent Fortress Wall.

The Derbent Wall is the eastern part of the Caucasian Wall, which protected the peoples of Transcaucasia and Southwest Asia from invasions from the north bypassing the Caucasus Mountains, along the Caspian coast. It was built after the year 562 by order of the Sasanian Shah Khosrow I Anushirvan. The Derbent Fortress blocked a narrow (3 km) passage between the sea and the mountains.

Along the entire length of the Main Caucasus Range from the Caspian to the Black Sea (about 1,000 km), there are officially two motor roads from the North Caucasus to Transcaucasia. The first is to Azerbaijan through Derbent along the Caspian. The second is the Georgian Military Road from Vladikavkaz to Tbilisi through the Darial Gorge.

'Derbent' originates from 'Dar-i Band,' which translates from Persian as 'Narrow Gate.' It was also known as the Albanian Gates.

'Darial' originates from Dar-i Alan, which translates from Persian as

'Alan Gate.' It was also known as the Caucasian Gate.

Lezginka is a lively Caucasian folk dance, long popular among the peoples of the Caucasus, known since at least 1839. Debates about where this dance originated continue to this day. It can be stated with certainty that the homeland of the dance is the Caucasus Mountains. The version that the 'Lezginka' dance name was invented in 1958 by Lezgin cultural figures – the founders of the 'Lezginka' dance ensemble is incorrect. Until the early 20th century, all the Dagestani peoples were called Lezgins. Most likely, hence the name of the dance. The dance was probably created during the Caucasian War (1817–1864) – the military campaign of the Russian army to capture the North Caucasus.

The dance gained fame in 1935 in London at the World Folk Dance Festival, performed by dancers Iliko Sukhishvili and his wife, dancer Nino Ramishvili, from the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater named after Z. Paliashvili. The Georgian version of the Lezginka dance – Lekuri – was performed in the famous film by Georgian director Rezo Chkheidze, 'Father of a Soldier' (1964). In Azerbaijan, both the classical Lezginka and the Azerbaijani version – Gaytagi – are widespread. Armenians are the only people in the Caucasus who neither wear cherkesska (chokha) nor dance Lezginka.

Cherkesska is a type of outerwear among the peoples of the Caucasus. 'Cherkesska' is the Russian name for this traditional men's garment since the Circassians were the first Caucasian people to come into contact with Russians. Each people has its name for the cherkesska. The Turkic name is 'Chokha'. Georgians call this garment 'chokha,' and Azerbaijanis – 'chukha.'

Javanshir was the Prince of Caucasian Albania (642–681) from the Persian Mihranid dynasty, ruler of the feudal house of Gardman. He led the Albanian army in the Sassanid war against the Arabs. In 660, he formed an alliance with Byzantium against the Arab Caliphate. In 667, he recognized himself as a vassal of the Arabs. In 681, he was killed by his feudal lords, who opposed the centralization of princely power. According to one version, the conspiracy against Javanshir was arranged by major feudal lords – supporters of the Byzantines led by his nephew Varaz-Trdat I. According to another version, the conspirators

were opponents of Islamization. In 705, the Mihranid power was abolished by the Arabs. The Mihranids remained princes of Gardman.

Babek (789–838) was the leader of the Khurramite uprising against the Arab Caliphate. He was born in the village of Bilalabad (now in Ardabil Province, Iran). At the time of his birth, the Khurramite ('followers of the happy religion') movement was widespread in the territory of present-day Iranian Azerbaijan and the southeastern part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. They fought for the people's freedom and were united under a red flag symbolizing freedom. They opposed human exploitation and promoted the idea of social equality. Prominent leaders of the movement were minor feudal lords Javidan and Abu Imran, who conflicted with each other. The Khurramite movement was a popular uprising, directed against Islamic religious rites, feudal oppression, and slavery. According to legend, Javidan came to the village, the house of Babek's mother, was impressed by the young man's extraordinary abilities, and took him to the fortress of Bazz. After Javidan died in 816, Babek married his widow and became the head of the sect.

In 833, al-Mu'tasim – the younger son of Harun al-Rashid, with whom the golden age of Islam is associated – became Caliph. He is well known as one of the main characters in 'One Thousand and One Nights.' In 835, Caliph al-Mu'tasim concluded peace with Byzantium, moved the capital from Baghdad to Samarra (125 km north of Baghdad), formed a new army of Turkic warriors, and began to suppress the uprising with all his might. Turks were in his inner circle, and his mother was a Turkic woman. His army was led by the Turkic commander Haydar ibn Kawus al-Afshin. In battle, Babek was defeated. His supporters scattered, losing faith in him. Babek went to his ally Sahl ibn Sunbat, ruler of the Artsakh region of Caucasian Albania, but the latter handed him over to Afshin. Babek's body was nailed to a cross and displayed on the outskirts of Samarra. This place was known as 'Babek's Cross.' In 840, Afshin was arrested, and in 841, executed. His rise (victories over Babek and Byzantium) alerted the Caliph, who eliminated Afshin. After Babek was surrendered, Sahl ibn Sunbat became governor of Arran (Caucasian Albania). In 854, he was accused of treason along with two other Albanian princes. One of Afshin's Turkic commanders – Buga al-Kabir – led a punitive detachment, defeated the Albanian princes, and exiled

them to Syria. Nothing further is known about his fate. He was likely executed.