

VAHRAM BALAYAN

ARTSAKH HISTORY
FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL
UP TO OUR DAYS



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Translator: **Gayane Halrapetyan**

English editor (Foreword, Introduction, Parts I & II): **Zovig Ballar**

Vahram Balayan
Artsakh History
from Time Immemorial up to Our Days

The book treats Artsakh history from ancient times up to our days. It dwells upon the political, socio-economic and cultural life of Armenia's eastern provinces, i.e. Utik and Artsakh, the material included being based on a huge number of sources.

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LIBERATORS OF ARTSAKH.**

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FOREWORD

This work draws on a vast body of Armenian historical material, and presents a succinct overview of the 5000-year-history of Armenian Artsakh, taking into account its geography and its political and cultural history.

Artsakh had its active participation in the struggle of the Armenians against foreign invaders. The torch of the Armenian struggle, which illuminated the fights in Avarayr, Zeytoun, Sasoun, Van, and Sardarapat, re-emerged in Artsakh, during the last decade of the 20th century, where it was ignited again at the doorstep of Gandzasar Monastery. Many heroes have given their lives for the freedom of Artsakh. Their memory is revered by all Armenians as Artsakh proceeds towards the future.

One of the main aims of this work is the depiction of the struggle for freedom and the "rehabilitation" process of Artsakh. The author himself has been a witness to all the recent historical events, which are now part of the history of the people of Arstakh. He, the Artsakhian intellectual, considered it his duty to gather source material and facts and then introduce it to the reader in accordance with the best traditions of historical scholarship. Although this book may be used for academic purposes, it is also likely to appeal to a wider circle of readers. I sincerely hope that this book will contribute in some way to the unification of Artsakh with free Armenia - the dream of every Artsakhian.

E. Danielyan
Doctor of Historical Sciences

INTRODUCTION

Artsakh is an inseparable part of the Armenian mountainous lands. According to archaeological data, it was one of the birthplaces of humanity, going back to Paleolithic times; life has unceasingly been present here.

The Armenian of Artsakh, blessed with talents, is the author of not only the pre-historic stone tools, but also those of the monasteries of Amaras and Gandzasar, considered architectural marvels of world civilization.

From ancient times up to the present, treasures created by the Armenian have been thorns on the side of certain foreigners. Thus, it is no coincidence that our temples, churches, cross-stones, and illuminated manuscripts were robbed, ruined, and spoilt by invading tyrants.

Moreover, in the years of Soviet power, the Azeri "chroniclers" distorted the truth. Using all means available to them, they tried to rob or "denationalize" the historical heritage of the eastern provinces of Armenia (Artsakh, Utik), and continue their revisionist stance, with no spared efforts, until today.

Throughout the centuries, grateful generations of Armenians have kept and cherished everything created by the endeavours and sweat of their forefathers. They have conserved the memories and history connected with this homeland.

It has been a continuous chain, and this book is one part of it. It has the mission of presenting the five-thousand-year history of Artsakh. Together with the general fate of Metz Haik (Greater Armenia), the eastern provinces (Artsakh and Utik) have a unique history but also peculiarities in their own historical development. It is no wonder that the struggle for the Utik Armenians' self-sufficiency and independence were recorded together with the history of Artsakh.

"It is the power that begets the right" - this perhaps unfair but prudent definition of a general "truth" has been known to peoples

of the world since the beginning of time. And the earlier nations understood this truth, the more favorable fate was towards them. The Armenians of Artsakh have understood this truth, and basing it on their long historical experience, have fought for life until death - against all odds - for the sake of their own homeland, statehood, freedom, and independence. The birth of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh (NKR) was the peak of that fight. But this is not the last dream of the Armenians of Artsakh. They wish to see NKR as part of a united and independent Armenia. The words of the famous Artsakhian, David Ananoun, are indeed fitting: "Karabakh, outside the whole of Armenia, is a sore... If there were wise politicians in Azerbaijan, they would have first of all given up their claims to Karabakh. If there are political leaders in Armenia who want to unite their homeland, they should not stop thinking of and caring for Karabakh. Karabakh and Armenia should and must be united"¹.

The study of the history of the eastern provinces of Armenia is crucial in understanding and elucidating the issues surrounding its existence.

In this book, I do not attempt to present the centuries-long history in detail. I aim to outline the most vital extracts of the old and new history of this heavenly land, using the most reliable sources.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF ARTSAKH

The fate of each nation has in some way been influenced by the historical and geographical environment of its homeland. For the Armenian nation, that historical and geographical area has been the Armenian land where, from times immemorial up to our days, cultural treasures have been created of a level equal to those of any other civilization. On Armenian soil, the provinces and almost all settlements are divided from their neighbours by natural borders and thus make not only separate administrative units, but also unique and independent natural-climactic entities. It seems that from the birth of humanity, as if foreboding the tragic and dramatic history of the Armenians, Metz Haik (especially Artsakh) had at least the gift of a heavenly geographical place where all the conditions for a well-to-do and healthy life could be created.

The Armenians were always surrounded by hostile neighbours, who had their eye on the land. The one sure defense the Armenians possessed against them was the mountainous rugged terrain of their homeland.

One of the provinces of ancient Armenia, Artsakh, is located in such a rich geographical area that Armenians there were allowed to work and prosper and then bequeath their wealth to the next generations. Artsakh (as a geographical area) has a landscape which includes small and large tablelands (resulting from frozen lava), mountainous concave valleys, and cliffs divided by inner mountain ranges. Sky-scraping mountains exist here together with the lowlands of fertile orchards and fields.

Artsakh occupies the south-eastern mountainous areas of Minor Caucasus, one part of the extreme eastern sector of Metz Haik or Greater Armenia. In the west, its borders reach the eastern coasts of Lake Sevan, in the south-west, the Aghavno (Hagari) river, in the south, the Yeraskh (Araks) river, in the east, the field mouth of Mukhank, and in the north, it is lined by the Karabakh mountain range.

Artsakh has an extremely rugged mountainous surface. On average, its territory is 1100 m above sea level. Like other provinces of Armenian territory, Artsakh is also characterized by seismic activity. The volcanic rocks, as well as the sedimentary rocks in river-valleys, occupy a great part. As a result of volcanic activity, the surface of the land has mostly turned into uplands.

THE MOUNTAIN RANGES AND MOUNTAINS. The Karabakhian mountain range stretches from the upper stream of Tartar River, in the north, up to the valley of Araks - the southern borderline of Artsakh. In the northern section, it joins the mountains of Minor Caucasus. The highest peaks of this mountain chain are Metz Kirs (2725m), Karasun Aghgic (2828m) and Dizapayt or Shaghakh (2780m). In the northern part of Artsakh, the Mrav mountain range stretches from the west to the east and is separated from the Karabakhian mountain chain by the valley of Tartar River. Gyamish (3724m) and Mrav (3419m) are the highest peaks of this mountain range; the mountain chain of Yeznasar, which stretches to the north-east, branches from it.

Mountain Rmbasar (3373m) is located where the Kashatagh and Sodk mountain ranges meet; this borders Lake Sevan, in the north-east. The peaks of Spitak (3300m) and Itsakar (3125m) are also in the same area.

Mountain ranges make the land look like a fortress. Leo, the chronicler born in Artsakh, wrote: "History has shown many examples of horrible invading hordes who 'clashed' with the mountains of Artsakh, and had to retreat...One can not imagine protecting the heart of Armenia, that is the land of Ararat, from the northern and eastern steppes, without Artsakh...We know for a fact that when the Araratian land was attacked from the east and south (e.g. by the Ottomans), its residents survived by leaving their villages and moving to the mountain strongholds of Karabakh. Thus, Karabakh was a protective citadel not only for the neighbouring Armenian lands, but also for the remoter parts of

Armenia. The Armenians, condemned to misfortune, knew that they could find their ultimate shelter in the thick forests of Karabakh².

It is no wonder that the early medieval Armenian chroniclers called Artsakh "Firmartsakh land"³. The mountains of Artsakh are picturesque and covered with forests; their highest areas are covered with flowers and grass.

THE SMALL AND LARGE RIVERS. The mountain ranges and mountains of Artsakh are separated from each other by precipitous gorges and valleys which embrace numerous small and large rivers, giving a unique charm to the Artsakhian land. The rivers of Artsakh are fast-flowing. They are fed by rain, water from melting snow, and therefore, mainly by mountain springs.

The general surface of Artsakh from the west to the east is arch-shaped. That is why all its rivers flow in the direction of west to east, becoming the nourishing springs of the Kur and Araks rivers.

The water of Artsakh rivers is used for irrigation purposes. Due to the discriminatory policy of Baku, the lion's share of the water used to go to the villages settled by the Azeris. The rivers of the land also have energy-producing potential. Additionally, there is a wealth of animal life, such as various types of fish in the rivers of Artsakh.

The largest river is Tartar (Trtu). It starts from the water formations of the mountain chains of the Sevan eastern coasts and the Karabakh mountain chain. It flows through the regions of Martakert, Tartar and Barda and falls into the Kur river. The river is 200km long. The hydroelectric power stations of Sarsang and Madaghis were built on this river. The largest tributary of Tartar is the Trghi river. Khachen is the second largest river. Starting from the massif of Karmrasar, it flows through the territory of Martakert. It is 119km long.

The River Inja, which belongs to the basin of the Kur, flows

through the borderline of Martakert and Shahoumyan regions. Karkar is a comparatively large river, which starts from the Mountain chain of Karabakh and flows past the town of Shoushi through a precipitous gorge. Near the town of Stepanakert river Karin Tak unites with the Karkar, and not far from Askeran town, such tributaries as the Balluja and the Badara unite with it. The length of the Karkar is 115km. The rivers Khonashen, Varanda, Amaras, Meghraget, Ishkhanaget, and Igak flow in the southern part of the province and they are comparatively shallow. River Kurak flows through the extreme northern borderline.

THE RIVER VALLEYS AND FIELDS. The rugged surface of Artsakh includes picturesque river valleys with rich strips of land and vast fertile fields. The valleys of the Araks, Ishkhanaget, Varanda, Khonashen, Karkar, Khachen, Kavart, Tartar, Inja, and Kurak rivers are especially important.

The most famous agricultural territory of Artsakh and Utik (Armenian eastern provinces) is that of Mukhank. Its climate is ideal for growing produce of dry subtropical zones. The plain of Mukhank is the most fertile part of Arstakh, and in older times it was known for the abundance of its grain production. Medieval Armenian historians noted the exclusive fertility of this land, "It is fertile and fruitful... full of every kind of produce, as well as water, animals and wood". And there is even a saying concerning the fertility of Mukhank. It is the following: "Here one need not sow in order to reap because here you can always reap"⁴. The low-lying parts of the Martuni and Mardakert regions are no less fecund.

THE CLIMATE AND TOPSOIL. The climate of Artsakh is conditioned by its location. The climactic conditions are mild and moderate. The annual average temperature is +10°C. The coldest month is January with an average temperature of -1°C; the warmest months are July and August with an average of +21°C.

The agricultural sectors of Artsakh are not covered by snow

every year. Spring is short and mild, summer is long, hot, dry, with the dominance of sunny weather. Autumn is mild and long-lasting. Strong thunderstorms are frequent in the spring and summer months. The amount of annual atmospheric precipitation ranges between 220-900mm.

Sometimes in cold weather, fine-grained hail falls instead of rain. In spring and especially in autumn, in plains and valleys, the cloudless evenings are followed by foggy nights. Influenced by wind and the warmth of the sun, this fog streams to the mountains but generally does not reach the high points; it takes its course and then disappears. In different weathers, in the presence of warm or cold currents of air, there can be winds of varied strength in Artsakh. Very often in the spring months, mild winds are followed by strong ones, resulting in damages to housing and other constructions.

The types of soil in Artsakh are conditioned by zone peculiarities of the land and correspond to the characteristics of the zone. The different conditions of orogenesis favour the evident display of complex structures and roughness of topsoil. In low-lying places, the types of soil are semi-steppe, steppe, gray, light and dark brown. In the foothills and mountainous places, mountainous black soil abounds, and in the forests, dark-brown types of soil occupy significant sections. The alluvial types of soil, which are characterized as exclusively fecund, make up substantial layers and occupy a large part in the low-lying places of river valleys. There is also a dry type, which covers the sunny slopes of mountain ridges.

THE FLORA. One can not imagine Artsakh without its virgin forests. The forests are primarily the result of the mountainous nature of the land. They are the irreplaceable regulator of the climate and remarkably raise the relative dampness of the air. They also regulate the amount of climactic precipitation, milder the summer heat and winter cold. They also prevent the

destructive force of winds and favour the fertility of the nearby fields. The forests of Artsakh are mainly of a mixed type. Beech, oak, maple, elm, poplar, birch, and ash trees grow here, and there are also islets of apple, fig, peach, nut, and plum trees. Willow trees grow along the banks of the rivers. There are also bushes of blackberry and rosehip. It is important to note that the fruits of wild trees and bushes have been used by the Armenians since ancient times. Today, they are used fresh or dried as food, condiments, and even as medicine. Forests in Artsakh are rich in a plant called khazaz, which has the smell and taste of onion. Different kinds of mushroom, as well as violets, forest roses, poppies, lilies, carnations, and immortelles (cock's combs) abound. Forests occupy around 34-35 percent of Artsakh's territory⁵, especially in the regions of Martakert and Hadrou.

Artsakh has a striking variety of plants and vegetables. There is a great variety in the types of grain, barley, oat, green pea, onion, and beetroot in Artsakh. In addition, many kinds of garden vegetables and plants can be grown in Artsakh.

In the territory of Artsakh, steppes, forests, and grass land steppes are present. The most low-lying places are semi-steppes and steppes (300-800m) and the most high-lying ones are alpine grass lands and cliffs with vegetal cover (1300-2300m); plants common for tundra grow above 2300m. The almost dry topsoil of the lowlands in the Martuni and Martakert regions are covered with such steppe or semi-steppe plants as camel's bur, caper, dandelion, and cornflower. Balmy wormwood is the most common wild plant here. The semi-steppe is covered with wild chicory flowers and poppies in the spring. Plants, such as black salsify, sorrel, capers, nettle, dandelion, and purslane are used in the local cuisine; periwinkle, immortelle (cock's comb), red bryony, and milfoil are used as medicine.

The steppes of Artsakh are mainly covered with plants like sorrel, nettle, asparagus, and mallow, which grow in the wild. The vegetal life of these steppes has been significantly damaged

because every year tens of hectares of virgin steppe lands are claimed for agriculture. The result has been the regressive change of the topsoil.

Mountainous steppes contribute greatly to the economical importance of the land. A significant part is used as meadow lands and pastures, and a source for gathering herbal medicine. One of the typical varieties of steppe cover is the thin forest where law-trunk trees and bushes (thorn, honeysuckle, jasmine, sweet marjoram, pomegranate, and rosehip) grow in close proximity to arch-grass, feather-grass, and sprout-grass. The two types of thyme are common here. Many cereal and bean plants grow in the grasslands. At the end of spring, the grasslands are covered in the yellow and blue of gold-cups, forget-me-nots, tulips, trefoils, poppies, blackthorns, field-sorrels, and butter-cups. The banks of rivers are covered with watercress and thorny-cane, and in the rivers there are several kinds of water plants. Besides all the flowers and plants, there are about 100 types of moss in Artsakh.

The climate of Artsakh is perfectly suitable for growing mulberry and grape. This is why both fruits have been grown by Armenian farmers for centuries. One part of the Artsakh mountainous land has a subtropical climate, resulting in large harvests of fig, pomegranate, almond, and blood orange.

THE FAUNA. The types of animals found in Artsakh correspond to the climactic conditions there as well as plant life. Several kinds of locusts are found in the semi-steppe and steppe zones of the land and some of them are a real danger for farmers. Some species of lizards, scorpions, reptiles (field viper) also live in the semi-steppes and rocks. The field, sand, and rabbit mice that live in corn fields breed rapidly and become a serious threat to farming. Beetles and butterflies are also present. The steppe zone is inhabited by such mammals as the hare, fox, wild boar, deer, hedgehog, wolf, and several kinds of bats. Birds include the hazel-hen, lark, field-partridge, and quail. Among the predatory

birds in Artsakh, one should mention the lamer greyer and the eagle.

The forests are the perfect environment for such birds as the woodpecker, pigeon, tomtit, partridge, swallow, starling owl, magpie and such mammals as the hare, fox, hedgehog, Caucasian weasel, deer, forest-cat and bear.

There are several kinds of fish in the mountainous rivers and high-lying sweet lakes in Artsakh, but some types have become extinct as a result of over-fishing. Frogs, tortoises, and grass-snakes live near lakes and rivers. The fauna of rivets and basins includes water-worms, dragon-flies, and several kinds of mosquitoes.

THE NATURAL RESOURCES. During the Soviet era, under conditions of neglect and indifference, no geological study or excavation was carried out. From ancient times Artsakh has been well-known for its mines of polymetals, zinc, lead, copper, iron, gold, sulphuric pyrites, and islandic spat. In addition, Artsakh is rich in non-metallic ores, in particular stone mines. For centuries, the abundance of stone was perceived as an obstacle to development. But currently, technology and scientific progress has changed perceptions and stones are now considered as an inexhaustible source of national wealth. Today, not only churches and other structures can be built of the Armenian stone, but also, in a reprocessed state, ornamental items and domestic articles. There are ores of marble in the Askeran region (villages of Harav, Karaglukh, Khramort), Martuni region (Norashen, Chartar) and near the towns of Shoushi and Hadrout. There are ores of granite in Martuni (village of Nngi) and near the village of Kholatac (Martakert region). Artsakh also has ores of black and white basalt. There are ores of pink and dark milk-white tufa (villages of Vank and Chldran, Martakert region; village of Gishi, Martuni region) and inexhaustible ores of limestone in the Martuni and Martakert regions.

Artsakh is also rich in mineral springs. The warm waters of the Karvajar region, called "baghink arkunakan" located on the left bank of the Tartar, has been known since old times. In the early medieval era, it was the holiday resort of the kings of Artsakh and Utik.

THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION. According to the Armenian geographical work entitled "Ashkharatsoyts" (by A. Shirakatsi), Artsakh is the tenth province of Metz Haik and has 12 districts. These are: 1. Myus Haband 2. Vaykunik 3. Berdadzor 4. Metzirank 5. Metzkuank 6. Hartchlank 7. Mukhank 8. Piank 9. Parskank 10. Kusti 11. Parnes 12. Koght⁶.

The territory of Myus Haband covers more than 2200sq. km⁷. "It is the district that lies on the left bank of the Gharuchai and the right bank of the Karkar, on the peak line of Dizapayt and Kirs mountain ranges and field-mouths"⁸. In fact Myus Haband includes the areas of present Martuni, Askeran and a part of Hadrout regions.

Vaykunik (800 sq. km) occupied the upper basin of Tartar, the north-eastern part of present-day Karvajar⁹.

Hartchlank is between the Shoushi-Goris mainroad and the Hagari river. A substantial part of present-day Lachin district is included in Hartchlank.

Berdadzor (450 sq. km.) stretched from the foot of Jermuk up to Zinginakap, the largest streamlet of Hagary. A small part of present-day Shoushi, Lachin, Kubatly districts is included in Berdazor¹⁰.

Parskank occupied mainly the riverside of Araks. It borders Araks in the south, the district of Piank in the east, Myus Haband in the north, and Berdazor in the north-west. Within these borders, the territory of Parskank is 2000 km².

Piank (800 km²), which includes the plain sector of Artsakh, borders Araks in the south, Ishkhanaget in the west, Myus Haband in the south-west, and Bailakan in the east¹¹.

Mukhank (1250km²)¹², which is located in the plain of Milly, extends beyond the province of Piank.

Mets Irank (Metzarank) with 1600km² occupies the upper basin of Khachenaget. It stretches from the Karkar to the Tartar and from the foot of the Kirs mountain to the west end of the Martakert plain¹³.

Metz Kvenk (Mets Koghank), being located in the basins of Trghi (a streamlet of Tartar) and Kurak rivers, includes the territory of present-day Shahoumyan with its adjacent territories and the subdistrict of Getashen.

Kousti (500km²) includes the territory stretching from Akhngy to Aghstev¹⁴.

Parnes (700km²) lies between the middle streamlet of Shamkor river and the continuation of the Geghama mountain range peak line and between Tavush river's south-eastern streamlet, the banks of Akhngy river and the mouth of the field¹⁵. In the Middle Ages, Kousti and Parnes were annexed to the kingdom of Parisos.

Koght (1650km²) includes the area that is between Shamkor and Kurak rivers, that is the location of present-day Dashkesan (Karhat) region and most of present-day Khanlar¹⁶.

Thus, within these borders, the territory of Artsakh is equal to 15500km² ¹⁷.

From the geographical, administrative, political, economical and ethnographic viewpoints, Artsakh constitutes a complete territory. For centuries, the Armenians of Artsakh have endured the hardship caused by their enemies, but have incessantly retained their national identity and persevered with self-dependency, ultimately creating a cultural matrix and protecting the Eastern borders of Armenia (the gates of Artsakh and Utik).

THE PRIMITIVE SOCIETY IN ARTSAKH

During the years of Soviet power, under Azeri rule, the territory of Artsakh was out of bounds for Armenian scientists; as a result, it was never properly studied. Nevertheless, the partial excavations carried out in Artsakh, which resulted in the discovery of different materials related to various aspects of cultural life, as well as the meager archaeological studies that were carried out have shown that humans had been living here since pre-historic times. One can see the ruins, traces of dwellings, and other structures related to the Stone Age and later periods. Different types of ancient weapons, ornamental items, and tools have also been found.

Fossils of animals (village of Krasni) and starfish (Astkhashen-Dashbulakh village) as well as fossil remnants of wood were found in the territory of Artsakh. One of the most striking examples is the fossil head of an archeopterix (archaic bird) found in the village of Petrosashen in the Hadrout region in 1965, which is now kept at the Artsakh State Museum of History and Country Studies. The items and materials found in the Azokh paleolit cave of the village of Azokh (Hadrout region) in 1968 are of special interest. In this cave, 14 layers of softened earth were discovered, which successively present all the stages of Stone Age culture. The bones of the oldest Neanderthals (within the former USSR area) were also found here¹⁸.

In the same Azokh cave, the lower jaw of a Neanderthal dating back to the Middle Acheul culture, as well as the bones of Mesopotamian deer, hippopotamus, and aurochs were found. These excavated items are similar to those found in four other ancient settlements of the world - Morocco, Germany, England, and Italy. The excavated items, dating back to the Azokh and Satan eras, give an opportunity to explore the development of humans in Armenia in the early Acheul era. Moreover, the famous French archeologist, Anri de Ljumleyn, believes that the different items found in Azokh enable us to confirm that here was a "seat

of ancient human civilization"¹⁹. Unfortunately, the excavated items found in the Azokh cave were, in the Soviet era, transferred to Baku and presented as an inseparable part of the Turkish-Azeri culture.

There are also other ancient cave-dwellings, parts of which have not been investigated yet. During the partial archaeological work carried out, traces of Stone Age human activity were noted in the caves of Avanakaran, Aleksanakaran, and Khuzun-karan, which are in the territory of Taghlar and Karin Tak villages, in the cave of Sangyari (village of Dashbulagh) and in the cave of Pakhrayi Karan, which is in the forest of Ulupap village. The stone tools excavated in the Taghlar cave represent close links with the work tools found in the caves of the same period of Iranian Kurdistan and Loristan.

The ancient sites of Artsakh are rich in pottery, pots, stone-boxes, and coffins (buried in grave mounds). The items found from different ancient sites include beads, axes, needles, rings, necklaces, arrows, daggers, ceramic pots, deep water jars, jugs with linear ornaments, porcelain plates, fossil seeds of grape, and grains of corn. These confirm that in early times the main activities of the locals were vineyard/grape cultivation, field cultivation, pot-making, weapon-making and other branches of trade.

In Artsakh, as a result of archaeological expeditions, items mostly related to the Bronze and Iron ages were discovered. These include obsidian weapons, stones, bones, bronze items, iron weapons, ceramic and decorative and luxury items. There are also bird-shaped, animal-shaped, and human-shaped statuettes, bronze belts and clasps with sophisticated compositions, daggers, and golden earrings, which display the techniques of engraving, encrusting, and casting. Among the kinds of weapons, the most interesting examples are a stone club, a rocket-shaped club found in a site called Tandzatap (village of Karakhbjur), a two-spiked fork found in the Arachadzor shrine, bronze war axes, clubs, arrows, daggers, long-tailed arrow spikes, spikes made of obsidian and Skythian arrow spikes. The items of armament found

in the Arachadzor and Khojallu burial sites enable us to reconstruct the appearance of Bronze Age foot soldiers. Some of these warriors "accompanied" their military leader to the "underworld". In the tomb of one of the Karabakhian tribe leaders, skeletons with helmets belonging to 3 warriors were found next to the adorned body of the leader²⁰.

Among items of luxury that capture the eye are bird-shaped and animal-shaped items, a necklace with the representation of a deer, bronze belts with drawings, the animal head of the royal mace, a human-hand-shaped clasp, and bronze perforated pegs from the valley of Khachenaget and the graves of Khojallu, Arevshat, and Artsakh. The agate bead, inscribed with the name of the Assyrian king Adadnirari I (1310-1280BC), was transferred to St. Petersburg in Soviet times.

According to Professor Kh. Samuelyan, the agate bead with the Assyrian inscription was brought to Khojallu by one of the local tribal leaders who most likely served in the Assyrian army and was presented with it by Adadnirari I²¹. This fact demonstrates that Artsakh during the 3rd-2nd millennium BC was part of the civilization of Asia Front and had close relations with one of its centres - Assyria. Like the agate bead, a large part of the valuable excavated items mentioned above are now found in Baku, St. Petersburg, and Germany where they were taken during Soviet times.

Academician Boris Piatrovsky thinks that the exploration of the graves as well as the burial mounds in Nagorno Karabakh, combined with similar items found in earlier excavations, show that they have their parallels in the archaeological sites of the Sevan Lake basin²². In archaeological literature, it is a tradition to combine the material found in Nagorno Karabakh with those of Getabek, Gandzak, the basin of the Sevan as well as the territory of north-eastern Armenia²³. These territories are considered the birthplace of the Armenians and their ancient culture.

ARTSAKH AS A SEAT OF THE FORMATION OF THE ARMENIAN NATION

The issue of the origin of the world's peoples is considered to be one of the most complicated points of historical science and the issue of the birthplace of Indoeuropeans lacks no less complexity. Studying and examining recent sources, V. Ivanov and T. Gamkrelidze came to the conclusion that the original birthplace of Indoeuropeans was the Armenian mountainous lands (in the centre), the north-western part of the Iranian plateau (in the east) and the whole territory of Asia Minor (in the west)²⁴. According to the calculations of American scientists, Armenian diverged from the mother Indoeuropean tongue in 2300 BC²⁵.

The Armenians of Artsakh, besides belonging to the armenoid type of the Indoeuropean family, are the most distinguished representatives of that type²⁶. Some years ago, the famous orientalist R. Virkhov examined different archeological findings in various parts of the Armenian mountainous lands. He compared the results of analyses and came to the conclusion that "The most important and the most characteristic is a common type, and thus even the few and incomplete excavations of this land show that the ancient nations who settled in the territory - from Gougark to the Tartar River - belonged to one and the same culture"²⁷. The outstanding archaeologist A. Israelyan also examined and analyzed similar findings. He found out that in the Bronze Age, the tribes living in the territory of the Armenian mountainous lands (Nagorno Karabakh inclusive) had the same beliefs and rituals²⁸.

This historical fact was recorded by Movses Khorenatsi, who also pointed out that one of the sons of Haik named Sisak became the master of the eastern part of Armenia. Consequently, the land is also called Sisakan. Later, one of the heirs of Sisak named Aran was appointed as the vice-regent of the left part of the Kur. The sons of Aran are the ancestors of the Utians, the Armenian dwellers of the part lying between the Kur and Yeraskh rivers. The

principalities of Gardman, Tsavde (Artsakh) and Gougark originated from them, too²⁹. Facts that have recently come to light testify that the ancestors of Indoeuropean nations had lived in the Armenian mountainous lands (also in its eastern provinces) for millennia.

In the course of time one part of these Indoeuropean tribes, namely the ancestors of Slavic, Germanic, and Celtic nations, separated from their original tribes for the purpose of conquering new territories. And thus, they constituted independent ethnic units settling in their present-day territories. During this time the Armenians, who are Arians of Indoeuropean stock, remained in their original habitat.

Nowadays the genealogical unity of nations is proven by the common denominators in their languages. Many words of the mother Indoeuropean tongue were preserved in a modified way in the languages derived from it, including Armenian. However, in the Artsakhian Armenian dialect, they are preserved in forms closest to the original ones. Kerovbe Patkanyan states that the Armenian dialects, in general, existed in an almost unmodified way until the 5th century AD as heirs of the languages of the tribes who took part in the formation of the Armenian nation³⁰.

In the Artsakhian Armenian dialect, there are certain words which are not even part of the general word stock of the Armenian language proper and are used only in this dialect. With the same phonetic and semantic expression, these words are found in the sacred Indian book, the Rigveda. According to the Rigveda, Yama [jama] was the lord of the kingdom of death - the god that brought death to people. This word, with the same phonetic form and the same semantics, has been preserved in the Artsakhian dialect. Thus the phrase [en yaman tarats] is understood as "the one who bore death"³¹. The Indoeuropean root [ku:l] or [kol] means neck or throat. In Armenian this root is now in the form of [kul tal] [klanel]. The Russian word [glotats] (meaning to swallow), the French word [kolje] (necklace) have originated from the same root. In the

Karabakhian dialect this root has been preserved in the shape of a noun. We say [kjetsav kolavn ingjav] (meaning "went and hugged his neck")³².

In a Sumerian epic, where the events of 28-27th centuries BC are described, there is also the mention of the gods' pantheon of Aratta. The main Goddess, Tutu, is mentioned as Ubar Tutu (the Accadian form of the same goddess) in the epic Gilgamesh. In the course of time, the "Ubar" got lost, but the word "tutu" reached us with a double meaning. In Western Armenian "tutu" means grandmother, keeping a certain notion of its former meaning. In the Karabakhian dialect "tutu" describes a woman with no or little abilities. Legend has it that the rivalry between two goddesses in the pantheon led to "fights". In one such "fight", the winner was the goddess Nane, who became the representation of mother/grandmother, and Tutu, who was defeated, became the symbol of weakness from then on³³.

The words with the initial silent "h" [h] mostly have Indoeuropean origin. This "h" [h] was dropped in Classical Armenian and in many other Indoeuropean languages, but it was partially preserved in Kheto-louviian languages. In the Karabakhian dialect, in several cases, this "h" has similarities with Khetian words:

kar.d. [hnder], [hndrel], [en(d)] - arm. [en(d)], [enker], [entrel]-khet. [hat]

kar.d. [hand] - arm. [and] - kh. (H)andh

kar.d. [hevelu:k], [(h)ivelu:k] - arm. [(h)ivelu:k] - kh.(H)obhel

kar.d. [hghe] - arm. [ughi] - kh. (H)ulio³⁴.

Modern English and the Karabakhian dialect are very similar not only in their expression, but also in their subsidiary meanings. Some examples are: carpet (Eng.)-carpet (K.), cow[kau]-kov, [rock]-rock(stone), hour [hau]-hovur (meaning a moment), Stonehenge-Karahunj, etc.

There are other words in the Karabakhian dialect which have similar meanings/connotations in English and Russian. For instance, [dongi] means silly in the Karabakhian dialect and in

English [donki:] is an animal which is generally considered to be silly and stupid. The word [mroz] is an adjective used in the Karabakhian dialect when speaking about bad, nasty, cold weather, and in Russian [moroz] means cold, frost.

The following is also of interest. The Karabakhian dialect has original Indoeuropean words that have not been passed on either from old literature or written new sources. These do not exist in Modern Armenian either. Below are some examples of Karabakhian dialect words, strictly derived from the original Indoeuropean form.

k.[mghmogh] - arm. [tsets] (means moth)

k. [sikhel] - arm. [saitakel] (means to slip)

k. [lok] - arm. [lortu] (means grass-snake)

k. [digiaskanz] - arm. [hankartsaki] (means suddenly)

k. [kilti] - arm. [tlvat] (means tongue-tied)

k. [dujughanel] - arm. [teghekatsnel] (means to inform)

k. [set]-arm.[teghyak](means informed, aware of smth.)³⁵.

It is remarkable that several case-forms and words of grabar (Classical Armenian) can now be heard in the Karabakhian dialect, e.g. k. [hakji]-G. [agi] (means tail), k. [ksherav]- G. [gisherav] (means in the early morning), k. [kshkor]- G. [koshkor] (means knot).

The initial [p] and [j] in words have been preserved in grabar as well as in the Karabakhian dialect. The following are some examples: k. [purgon] - Arm. [furgon] (means van), K. [pizika] - Arm. [fizika] (means Physics), K. [pransia] - Arm. [fransia] (means France), K. [jghe] - Arm. [hghi] (means pregnant), K. [jeshil] - Arm. [najel] (means to look), K. [jekhnel] - Arm. [hakhtel] (means to win).

These linguistic realities indicate that the Karabakhian dialect is one of the branches of the most ancient forms of the Indoeuropean languages and links the Armenian settlements in the mountainous Armenian lands to pre-historic times. This is an additional evidence of the connection between the archaeological

findings in Artsakh and similar findings from the Armenian plateau.

It is possible, therefore, to conclude that based on the above-mentioned data, 3rd-2nd millennium BC Artsakh and Utik (the eastern provinces of Armenia) were also locations where the formation of the Armenians as a people took place.

ARTSAKH IN THE PERIOD OF THE KINGDOM OF VAN

At the end of the nation-formation process in the Armenian mountainous land, during the 3rd-1st millennium BC, the first state-like structures emerged. The Kingdom of Van or Urartu or Ararat was one such entity. Initially, it was a small state that occupied the littoral parts of Lake Van. Later it grew powerful, countered Assyria and with the use of force conquered other Armenian kingdoms, spreading its control over almost all of the Armenian mountainous lands. With the reign of Menua (810-786) began the period of the Kingdom of Van.

Previously, the kingdom's northern border (the valley of the Araks river) was only a supposition. But on August 11, 1989 the famous geologist Valery Igumnov found an inscription in the mountainous part of Syunik which testifies to the historical fact that Menua invaded Syunik in 810-805 BC³⁶.

The next stage of the occupation of the eastern provinces of Armenia started with the reign of Argishti I (786-764 BC). In the rock inscription of Argishti I found in Kotayk, there is mention of Zar town³⁷. This can be equated to the medieval Artsakh settlement of Tsar and the village of Zar in Karvajar district. This is also supported by the reading of Hovhannes Karagyozyan of the Khorkhorean inscription of Argishti I. Karagyozyan states that the great king reached Baghink Arkunakan (Jermajur-Istisu), not far from the village of Zar³⁸. The same historian supposes that the name of Suse³⁹ given to the edifice erected in Arin Berd (found in 1956) coincides with the names of the villages Sos and Sus in the Martuni and Karvajar districts, respectively. It is highly probable that there was a suse (temple) of the Urartian period near present-day Sos village⁴⁰.

The afore-mentioned historical data points to the fact that

Artsakh was indeed included in the Armenian territory during the rule of Argishti I. Thus the viewpoint that Artsakh was first invaded during the reign of Sarduri II (764-735) is disputable⁴¹. During the rule of Sarduri II, the borders of Van kingdom were officially established. He reinvaded the territories once occupied by his father, including Artsakh. It is in connection with these events, in an inscription found in Tsovak village (Vardenis) Sarduri I recounts that the Urartian troops victoriously marched along the western coast of Sevan, conquered the land of Uelikoukh and then defeated the people of Tulikhu (on the south western bank) and Arkukini (on the southern bank of Sevan), thus reaching Urtekhini⁴².

Another inscription found in the village of Tsovinar on the bank of Sevan testifies that Sarduri conquered 23 kingdoms, including Adakhuni, Uelikukhi, Luerukhi, and Arkukini. B. Piatrovski believes that Uelikukhi was located on the western bank of Sevan, and Adakhuni, the eastern part of the southern bank. Consequently, Sarduri must have marched his troops along the southern bank of Sevan to the east. He states, "There was nothing that could have prevented him from continuing to the east and up to Nagorno Karabakh, which was connected to Armenia"⁴³.

The geographical names Hartchlank, Partskank, Piank, Gishi, Trtu, and Kurakan used in the same inscription of Sarduri II prove that "Urtekhe" or "Adakhuni" denoted Artsakh⁴⁴. The same toponym "Adakhuni" is present in one of the royal chronicles in connection with the events of 741 BC and also in a rock inscription of Rusa I in Tsovinar⁴⁵. "Adakh" is mentioned in the Armenian historical sources of later periods: "...went to Khachen, Tandzeaz and Adakhaj once more"⁴⁶.

The settlement Adakh was in Khachen district and this district's name was mentioned in a medieval Armenian chronicle about Catholicos Anania Mokatsi I (946-968 AD). The following is a short extract: "And the catholicos entered Khachen where he was welcomed by the prince of Khachen, Gregory. And the prince

gathered all the archbishops and sons of the land called Adakh⁴⁷. Adakh is also mentioned in one of the stone inscription (1467 AD) of Gandzasar⁴⁸. It is very likely that Adakh and Artsakh are one and the same settlement.

After Sarduri II, Rusa I (735-713 BC) came to power amid complicated political circumstances. Assyria was at the peak of its might. So Rusa decided to take a neutral stance in relation to the fundamental interests of Assyria in the south. Meanwhile, he began his invasions of the north, conquering the lands on the western and southern banks of Sevan that had risen against Urartu after the death of Sarduri I. Then he subjugated 19 of these (including Artsakh) which lay in the mountains of the eastern bank of Sevan⁴⁹. The toponym Tsama can be found in the rock inscription of Rusa I found in Tsovinar (in the 1st place of the 3rd row of the 19 names)⁵⁰. The cuneiform word Tsama has been preserved in "Tsamdzor", which is the name of a village in the Hadrout district⁵¹. Rusa I also built a town by the name of Teysheba (god) near the village of Tsovinar⁵².

The dominant part of the archaeological finding in the barrows of Stepanakert and Khojalu date to the time of Urartu (Van Kingdom). One of these findings is a sardion ornament with the cuneiform name of King Rusa. This represents one of the evidences that Adakh-Artsakh was part of the kingdom of Urartu⁵³.

According to the famous archaeologist V. Belk, the findings of the barrows of Khojalu are similar to the archeological findings of the Armenian plateau⁵⁴. The Urartian inscription (at Karmrabur) on one of the clay tiles made and sealed during the reign of Rusa IV, testifies that the north-eastern part of Urartu was Kur⁵⁵. This is yet another proof that the Kingdom of Van (Urartu) stretched to the distant, mountainous lands of Artsakh and Utik.

ARTSAKH UNDER THE RULE OF ERVANDUNI AND ARTASHESSYIAN DYNASTIES

The changes which occurred in Asia Front in the 7th century BC influenced the political situation of the Armenian mountainous lands.

Media was on the way to an unprecedented prosperity. Meanwhile, the atmosphere of rebellion reigned in Urartu as opposition to the king became more and more prominent and considerable. The ruler of Arme-Shubria, Paruyr Skayordi dismissed the central authority of Van, invaded and united the whole western part of the mountainous lands, from Lake Van to the Euphrates. By this time, Media and Babylon had concluded an alliance against Assyria. And Paruyr, together with his Armenian troops, joined the alliance. It is the attacks organized by the allies that ruined Nineve, the capital of the once powerful Assyria in 612 BC and destroyed the Kingdom of Van in 580. In return for his support, Paruyr Skayordi was recognized as the new Armenian king by Kiaksar, the king of Media.

As a result, a new royal dynasty was established - the "Ervandunyants" or "Ervandakan" (580-210 BC) - after Ervand Sakavakyats, who was the relative and successor of King Paruyr. In the course of the first years of their reign, the Ervanduni dynasty paid special attention to the Ararat Valley and made it the economic, political, and cultural centre of the Armenian people. Geographically, the Armenians of the eastern provinces (Artsakh, Utik, etc) were closer to the royal residence of the Ervanduni and had a more active participation in the creation of Armenian statehood.

However, this new Armenian kingdom had to confront its yesterday's ally, Media. The latter controlled the routes of the Araks Valley and Mesopotamia and tried to impose its hegemony. Ervand Sakavakyats and his son Tigran led the fight against Media's King Astiages (Azhdahak in mythology). The Armenian king

built an army of men from the different provinces (including Artsakh and Utik) and succeeded in defeating the Medians⁵⁶. The Persian Achaemenids led by Kjuros the Great had rebelled against Media and now supported the Armenians in their fight. Subsequently, Tigran I helped Kjuros create the expansionist Achaemenian-Persian state in 550 BC. Ironically, Artsakh ended up under the hegemony of the Achaemenian state from 550 to 331 BC⁵⁷.

Throughout the reign of Tigran I Armenia witnessed repeated invasions by Skythians, and although the Armenian king repelled them numerous times, eventually, they succeeded in settling on the right bank of the Kur River. Consequently, continuous ethnic conflicts were unavoidable. This resulted in a part of the Armenian population settling on the left bank of the Kur⁵⁸. They had continuously inhabited that area up to the beginning of the Artsakh liberation movement.

In the 4th century BC the Achaemenid Empire was at the brink of collapse and had actually begun to break up. This process was accelerated by the invasion led by Alexander the Great, the king of Macedonia, a land lying in the north of the Balkan Peninsula.

In 331 BC Alexander completely defeated the Achaemenids at Gavgamela and put an end to the once mighty empire. The ruler of Greater Haik (Greater Armenia) Ervand took advantage of this situation and proclaimed himself an independent king. And thus Armenia restored its independence. The restoration of the Armenian independent statehood was also due to the maturity of the Armenian society as a whole. Certainly the unanimity of will and intentions of the Armenian provinces, and the ability to create new, more complex systems of power contributed to the re-establishment of a viable Armenian independent state.

Information about the borders of the Armenian kingdom of that time can be found in Xenophone's *Kyropedia*. According to this great Greek chronicler the borders between Armenia and Atrpatakan stretched from the middle stream of the Araks to the spring of Jerm River (Bohtan su) via the Lakes Urmia and Van. The southern border extended along the River Jerm to the west,

along the western Tigris and the Masios (Tur-Abdin) mountain range to the Euphrates. One part of the western border of Armenia must have stretched along the mountains of Amanos and the western edge of Commagene. From River Euphrates the border extended to the south of Yekeghik. To the west and north of western Euphrates lay Small Haik (Armenia Minor) and its territory spread to the Cappadocian and Ponthian mountains. From the upper stream of the Euphrates, the northern border of the Armenian kingdom stretched to the west most probably through Tchorokh River, thus encircling and including the Pasian, Hesperit, and Taokh areas. The north-eastern border of the Armenian state was the Kur. As it is evident from the historical works of Eastern Transcaucasus of that period the territories east of the River Kur were settled by different Albanian tribes. These were first ruled by the Medians and later were under the tutelage of the state of Atrpatakan⁵⁹.

Historical works show that Artsakh and Utik were included into the Armenian Ervanduni state. During the 4th and 3rd centuries BC the royal estates and camps were in Utik⁶⁰. And it is not a coincidence that in the 2nd century BC the fierce struggle between Artashes and Ervand began in Utik. Khorenatsi confirms that Ervand was in Utik when he was given the news that Smbat, Artashes's army commander, had amassed a large number of troops by forming an alliance with the Persians. Leaving some of his supporters in Utik, Ervand withdrew land the Ararat Valley in order to rally his allies around him.

When Artashes entered Utik, the Armenian leaders joined him and together with their forces, marched to the banks of Sevan, to engage the army of Ervand. Artashes defeated Ervand, occupied the capital Yervandashat and proclaimed himself the ruler of Metz Haik in 201 BC⁶¹. The same was done by Zareh in Tsopk. However, in 189 BC Artashes made use of the outer auspicious circumstances and proclaimed himself the independent king of Metz Haik.

Although Artashes was of the Ervanduni dynasty, his

remarkable reign gave way to a new dynasty, the Artashesian (189BC - 1AD). The Greek historiographer and geographer Strabon wrote that during the reign of Artashes the Armenian state broadened and spread in all four directions (to the North, South, West and East). There were several invasions towards the West, and the invaded lands were Caspiane, Pavnitis, and Bosoropedia. The latter is present-day Parspatunik province. The present-day Pavnitis is not identifiable. Caspiane is the area where the Kur and Araks river streams join. The land that lies to the east of these streams up to the Caspian Sea is identified as Paytakaran⁶². M. Khorenatsi calls this Caspian land⁶³ and referring to the writing of Priest Oghyump recounts Artashes invasion of Paytakaran⁶⁴. According to M. Khorenatsi, this land had originally been ruled by the Armenian king but later it rebelled against King Artashes. The latter sent troops with Smbat at its head who suppressed the rebellion and took the king, Zardmanos, and the majority of the population as captives. That the Caspian land (Caspian as mentioned by Strabon) was considered as the rebellious territory of the Armenian Kingdom is evidence that Armenians indeed lived on that territory.

Speaking about Artsakh, Strabon wrote that it did not border any neighbouring country and is located deep in Greater Haik. Strabon states that Artsakh (Orkhistina) exported war horses⁶⁵. He described 1st century BC Shakashen (Utik) and Orkhistina (Artsakh) as provinces of Armenia. He wrote, "Kur (Kur) starts in Armenia and flows to Albania-Aratajur through a narrow valley"⁶⁶.

The information recorded by Strabon enables us to determine the north-eastern borders of historical Armenia. Hyubshman believes that Armenia, during the reign of Artashes, included Paytakaran, Syunik, Vaspurakan, Ayrarat, Gugark, Tayk, Bardzr Haik, Turuberan, Chorrord Haik, Aghdznik, Mockc, one part of Kortchayk, Utik and Artsakh, that is 13 out of 15 provinces of Armenia⁶⁷. The Greek historian wrote that the 2nd century BC the population of Armenia was monolingual, the only language spoken being Armenian⁶⁸.

The same information is given by Movses Khorenatsi, the father of the Armenian historiography. He states that during the rule of Artashes (Vagharshak) the state borders of Armenia primarily represented the very same areas where the Armenian language was spoken. He also states that Artashes (the same Vagharshak) established his royal court, created government structures and appointed governors in the provinces. Artashes appointed Aran as the vice regent of Artsakh and Utik, the lands lying between the Kur and Araks rivers. "Because of its sweet nature, the land was called Albania", wrote the great historian (Armenian for Albania is Aghvank and aghu meant sweet)⁶⁹.

Speaking about the military significance of these provinces for the existence of the Armenian statehood, Leo the historian mentioned: "...one can not imagine the protection of Armenia's heart, that is the valley of Ararat from attacks from the north-eastern steppes, without the mountains of Karabakh. Karabakh is the immediate continuation of the important defensive stronghold of Gugark (now Lori and neighboring provinces). This is the reason why the founders of the Armenian state, Artashes and Tigran, included Utik, Artsakh, Syunik as well as Gugark into the territory of their land"⁷⁰. The Greek historian writes, "Tigran was the result of the might of the Artashesian dynasty; he ruled from the heart of Armenia that bordered Media, Albania, Iberia (up to Koghkis), Cappadocia, and areas near the Black Sea"⁷¹. Tigran II the Great continued the unification process begun by his grandfather Artashes I, by broadening the borders of his country and by creating an Armenia that stretched from one sea to another. He not only strengthened the united Armenian state created by his predecessors, but also spread its political influence over neighbouring countries. Hyubshman mentions that "the geographical concept of 'Armenia' developed in a concrete way during the reign of Tigran, who was the first to merge Tsopk and Korduk into Armenia. This concept of 'Armenia' has been dominant among the Armenians throughout the next centuries

although the political reality did not always correspond to it. If the southern states were ruled by the Persians, the western ones by the Greeks, the northern ones by the Georgians and if the Romans and Persians divided the country between them, for Armenians, Armenia was always considered as the land that was established in ancient times with the following borders: Masis Mountain in the south (i.e. the Taurus that divides Armenia from Mesopotamia), Atrpatakan and Media in the west, in the north the Parakratryan mountains up to the Caspian Sea (Georgia, Albania lying in them, Caucasus together with Moskyan and Koghkiss mountains), in the west Parkhar and Skydives, and Minor Haik up to the Euphrates (the latter divides Armenia from Cappadocia and Commagene)⁷².

Tigran's vast empire was drawn into the sphere of Hellenistic culture. One of the most characteristic features of this culture was the building of cities. And Tigran II the Great built 4 cities in Armenia and named them after himself - Tigranakert. One of these cities was in Artsakh, not far from Aghdam, where one can see the founding stones even today.

Thanks to the mighty army of Tigran II, the borders of the land were safe. M. Khorenatsi recounts that when Tigran was in the south of his empire he received news "that his authority was being challenged by a brigand named Vaykun, who occupied a mountainous area which up until today is called Vaykunik"⁷³. Tigran, however, successfully put a stop to Vaykun's ambitions. It is very likely that this "Vaykunik" is the present-day district of Karvajar in Artsakh as Karvajar is also known as Vaykunik.

Unfortunately, there is not much specific information about the mode of life and culture of the people living in Artsakh and Utik (the eastern provinces of Armenia) during the reign of Ervanduni and Artashessyan dynasties. Nevertheless, there is an abundance of Armenian and non-Armenian sources describing the Armenian land, its boundaries, and its population in general terms.

THE ANCIENT CULTURE

The Armenian-speaking tribes from different parts of the Armenian mountainous lands, including Utik and Artsakh created a rich Armenian culture.

Under Azeri rule, it was not possible to carry out studies of the Armenian culture in an appropriate way as the eastern provinces of Armenia (Artsakh, Utik) were out of bounds for the Armenian scientists. However, the results of partial excavations as well as the scarce information left by Armenian and non-Armenian authors give us an opportunity to outline the stages of development and distinctive features of this ancient culture.

The discovered items and cave-dwellings have an immense archeological in elucidating the issues related to the early settlements and resettlements of the primitive man in Artsakh. Such caves as the one near the town of Shoushi and the cave in Taghlar (Hadroust district) are very important in this respect. The cave of Azokh (Hadroust district) needs a special mention. It is a 200-meter-long, multi-layered (10 cultural layers) cave where 150000-200000 year old everyday household utensils and stone tools were found. Unfortunately, the majority of these archeological findings was transferred to Azerbaijan and now Azeri scientists claim that these belonged to their ancestors.

The rapid progress in culture in the Bronze and Iron ages and in later periods in Artsakh was hardly possible without a definite level of development during the Stone Age (paleolit). Throughout the Neolithic era (the last period of Stone Age) humans learnt to perceive reality and the world around them through mutual relations. This period also witnessed the development of tales, which had a certain degree of complexity. The most characteristic feature of this era was the ornamentations on various utensils, and their shapes. The human being of the mentioned period liked to draw animal pictures (or silhouettes) as well as scenes of hunting and armed skirmishes.

There are numerous pictures and drawings of the kind in Artsakh which have different subject-matters and are fairly unique. The stylistic specificities and similarities of the Artsakh rock (mountain) drawings and the ones found in other parts of the Armenian mountainous lands indicate that they cover a vast chronological period, ranging from neolithic and early Neolithic era to the Iron Age. The district of Karvajar is especially rich in such rock-drawings. As an example, one can mention the drawings on a basalt rock-fragment (3000 meters above sea-level) which is south of the village of Chragh nearby the Sevlj and Zalkha lakes. Similar pictures and drawings on rocks were found in Hadrout district (Taghlar Village).

In ancient site in Artsakh archaeologists have discovered many barrows (grave covering stones), the so-called megalithian (Greek. mega-great, large; lithos-stone) monuments (menhirs, dolmens, kromlekhs). These monuments made of massive, unshaped stones related to the rituals of burying the deceased which may have had other cult significance. The results of the excavations show that together with the skeletons of the deceased these barrows contained items related to every-day, as well as military life. The German scientist R. Virkhov examined and studied them and came to the following conclusion "... even the few excavations indicate that the old nations that lived on the territory (from Gugark to Tartar) belong to one and the same culture"⁷⁴.

The finding in Artsakh include beads, rings, necklaces, needles, arrow-spikes, daggers, clay pots, and stone, bronze, and bone work tools. One of the most remarkable items found is the tool of a carpet-weaver made from deer horn, called "ktutich". According to bibliographical data this tool was first used in making cloth and later was also used in carpet-weaving. Today the aforementioned articles are displayed at the Artsakh State Museum of History and Country Studies.

The ceramics of Bronze and Iron ages have a prominent place in the ancient culture of Artsakh. Black or with faded gilt ceramic

pots, decorated with bold lines, animal-shaped handles, multi-row zigzags in triangles, found in Artsakh can easily be compared with the similar findings in other parts of Armenia. Plates of different sizes, decorated with spots, sharp triangles, and semi-circle handles, as well as pots with furrows, mugs, and jugs with humped handles are evidence that they were made by a skilled master. All these items help us form an idea about the stages of development and common features of the different branches of applied arts.

Some ceramic pots and jugs have ornamental patterns that are specific to Urartian or Hellenistic cultures. Burials in huge urns are also indicative of Urartian customs. This mode of burying the deceased became especially wide-spread during the 3rd-1st millennia BC. On the other hand, big urns for keeping food and drink were also widely used in Artsakh, which point to the fact that the potter's art was quite developed here.

Among the eye-catching examples used by the ancestors of Arstakians and now kept in the state museum, are various types of weapons such as daggers, arrows, two-spike forks, axes, and rocket-shaped clubs; adornments include necklaces, beads, rings, buttons, decorative pins, earrings, hairpins (slides), bell-shaped, perforated medallions of different sizes, and bronze belts with engraved patterns and drawings. Of special interest are the bronze necklaces which have snake-shaped edges. It is known that in ancient times snake symbolized the ideas of rebirth, wisdom and eternity.

The great amount of agate, sardion, and amber beads again found in barrows prove that they were widely made and used here. In the 1890's the famous German archaeologist Emil Ryosler found an agate bead from the burial grounds of Khojallu. The importance of this archaeological finding is the inscription of the Assyrian king's name - Adadnirari I (1310-1281 BC) on it. Today this bead is at the Hermitage, St. Petersburg. Speaking of articles of adornment, it is worth mentioning that Artsakian ancestors also

used metal mirrors, some of which have been preserved to this day.

The existence of an abundance of various types of stone has conditioned the development of architectural art. Even in ancient times, the Armenians used stone and sometimes crafted extremely simple but always meaningful structures. Armenians have lived on a rugged terrain, but have always managed to build fortified castles and dwellings, and have been able to choose the correct spot in order for the water supply to reach it.

People also built castles known as cyclopean in the eastern provinces of Armenia (Artsakh, Utik) as protection from hostile foreign forces. As a rule, they were located on high ground, not far from the banks of small and large rivers, brooks or fertile plains. One such cyclopien castle is in the district of Kashatagh, towering Hochanz river's left bank. Evidently this castle served its original purpose in the medieval period⁷⁵. Some historians believe that the castle is the same as Kozhoraberd mentioned by St. Orbelyan in medieval times⁷⁶. Later, the newly arrived Kurds called it Gyavurghala (castle of irreligious men)⁷⁷.

Remnants of castles dating back to the 3rd-2nd millennia BC were also found in environs of Aghdam and Fizuli districts⁷⁸. These castles are encircled by cyclopien walls of 3 meter-thick crude stones. Historians note that construction within these walls were of irregular structure and had crooked lanes. From the standpoint of their architectural plan, they are like the habitats of Shengavit which are not so far from Yerevan city in Armenia. Even Akhundov, who was one of the Azeri revisionists of Artsakh History, noted this similarity⁷⁹.

The ruins of a cyclopien castle found at a spot 8 km from Hadrout is especially noteworthy because of the preserved 160m-long and 3m-thick fortress wall. It has 3 towers, 2 of which have a 7m and 12m-long circumference, respectively. The oval and round-shaped dwellings and farm buildings in the area of the castle prove that there were habitats on that hill which later,

between the 3rd and 1st centuries BC became a fortress settlement.

The rugged terrain of Artsakh urged its people to build their houses half-way stuck or completely in the rocks or earth. Large rooms were structured using a base system made up of wood columns and beams. Such stone-built houses with oval, round (circular) and rectangular plans can be seen in Kashatakh, Karvajar, Berdadzor, and Hadrout. Originating from the eneolithic era, the building of such houses underwent a series of developments, resulting in changes in the size, the number of rooms, and the style as a whole.

In different parts of Armenia, men built numerous towns, town-like burghs, palaces, temples, bridges, inns, theatres, and bath-houses. These confirm the continuity of the Armenian building traditions. "The prosperity of the new cities," wrote S. Yeremyan, "was not only due to military-administrative development but also because they were trade and crafts centres (the word city here is taken in its direct meaning). This development began in the 3rd-2nd millennia BC"⁸⁰. The Armenian cities were built on both sides of main routes, exclusively by state funds as they were royal cities. However, very few of these ancient cities have survived.

As mentioned earlier, the Armenian king, Tigran the Great (95-55 BC) built 4 cities, which bore his name. One of them was in Artsakh and was located in the north-east of Shahbulagh castle, in the foot of Vankasar (a mountain), near the villages of Tarnoyut (Tarnagyut) and Gyavurghala. Tigranakert was still in existence in the early Middle Ages⁸¹. Another Tigranakert was built in Utik. In the 1st century AD, it became a trade and crafts centre, representing one of the earliest urbanized centres.

The arts of sculpture and drawing developed alongside architecture. It is known from Armenian and non-Armenian sources that there were small and big statues of gods and kings in clay, marble, ivory, gold, and silver in the Armenian pagan temples, but unfortunately only few examples or fragments have

survived. In 1898, the German archaeologist E. Ryosler analyzed an ancient site near Zabukh Village. The result of his archaeological work was the excavation of different pieces of sculptures which according to him are Armenian. Ryosler wrote, "These sculptures depict saddled horses; moreover, the riders are always depicted in their full armour. It is very probable that this group of sculptures belong to the same type of sculptures found elsewhere in Armenian graves"⁸². The statuettes of women have a great significance as they symbolize the ideas of life, longevity, fecundity, and the mother-deity. The two statuettes of women found in Galagyagh (Fizuli district) are related to the Hellenistic culture (1st century BC). Male statuettes which were found in certain archeological sites in Artsakh indicate that the Armenians also had cults connected with agriculture. Besides this, they point to the existence of a patriarchal society. A typical example is the small statuette with the head of a male and the body of an animal found in the village of Baluja (Askeran district).

The discovery of decorated ceramics (mostly red in colour) prompts us to think that this art form was highly developed in Artsakh. In 1883 Colonel Veys-fon-Veysehof found variegated tile and ceramic articles in a field in the present-day district of Bayat (**Azerbaijan)⁸³.

During the 4th-3rd millennia BC, alongside the nation formation process, religion developed. The pantheistic and cosmic beliefs were especially strong among the Armenians. Their apprehension of natural phenomena translated into giving these supernatural powers. The cult of the Sun was very important among the Armenians of the eastern provinces. This is why it is pictured in the form of a wheel, or a war-chariot on bronze belts of the 2nd millennium BC. Thunder and lightning were given human shapes and depicted next to the Sun. Ancient Armenians believed that the Sun God travelled around the world not only in his war-chariot, but also on his fiery horses. There are many representations of those who worshiped the sun on the ceramics

of the late Bronze Age found in Utik (Shakashen)⁸⁴. Pagan sculptures depicting star or sun cults have also trickled down through the ages and have been incorporated in the Christian culture of Armenia. These symbols are present in many Christian relics and sculptures (Sghnakh Village, Askeran district)⁸⁵.

Additionally, the ancient Armenians had totemic and hunting beliefs. Their fairy tales, myths, and epics were full of images of hunters, heroes, and gods who fought against dragons and monsters. The depiction of these heroes can even be seen on belts which date back to the late Bronze Age. One such belt with scenes depicting armed hunters has been found in Shamkhor. In the Hellenistic period, a whole pantheon of gods was created and developed by the Armenians. In outward appearance, these gods were like human beings, while each wielded power over a particular natural phenomenon. They also had power over various spheres of social relations. Mihr was the god of justice and sun. The ruins of a pagan temple devoted to the worship of Mihr can be seen in Ghazakh⁸⁶. It is highly probable that a Mihr temple existed at the very same location where Dadi-Vank (monastery) stands today. The cults of the gods Aramazd (male) and Anahit (female) were also widely spread in Artsakh and Utik⁸⁷. A sculpture Aramazd has been found in the village of Chaghrtagh in Karvajar and there is a district called Anahit on the left bank of the Kur⁸⁸. One last, but no less important, feature of ancient Artsakhian culture was that the Artsakhian dialect was widely spoken in Utik, Artsakh, Paytakaran, and Syunik.

ARTSAKH AND THE ARSHAKOUNI DYNASTY

Armenia took part in the Roman-Persian conflict after the fall of the Artashesians (1-52AD). The Armenians, being ethnically closer to the Persians, supported them. On the other hand, they also had misgivings vis-à-vis the Persians. However, in the power play of the two empires, Vagharsh I Arshakouni was able to turn circumstances to his own advantage. The brother of Vagharsh I, Trdat forced the Romans to retreat from Armenia with the help of the Armenian-Persian allied forces. Thus, in 64 AD Rome concluded a peace treaty with Armenia in Radea and recognized the leadership of Trdat. In order not to lose his authority in the East completely, Emperor Nero insisted on the inclusion of a condition in the peace document. He wanted the Armenian king himself to come to Rome to receive the royal crown. Trdat fulfilled this demand and returning to Armenia, established the Arshakouni dynasty within the geographical borders of the former Armenian state in 66 AD.

Artsakh was a prosperous and powerful province of Armenia at the time. This is confirmed by a 7th century marble map in Rome on which the province is outlined as such⁸⁹. Artsakh's existence was also noted by earlier Greek and Roman chroniclers. Strabon wrote: "There are many mountains, plateaux, and valleys in Armenia, and it is not so easy to grow grape there, but several areas are very fertile, such as the Arakseni plains through which the Araks flows to the border of Albania and falls into the Caspian Sea, and the Shakashen plains (Utik-V.B.) which borders Albania and the River Kur; there are also the fields of Gugark"⁹⁰. Another historiographer, Pleneous the Elder, noted: "The Albanians settled in the mountains of the Caucasus, the territory that spreads to the River Kur, that is the border of Armenia and Iberia (present-day Georgia)"⁹¹. Another historian, Ptolomeus, wrote, "...Kur that flows through Iberia and Albania, thus separating Armenia from them"⁹². Describing the invasions

of Pompous, Dion Casus noted: "The Albanians live above the stream of the Kur"⁹³.

Armenian historian Stepanos Byuzandian, considering the right bank of the Kur to be part of Armenia, also states that "Otina (Utik) is an Armenian province"⁹⁴. Shirakatsi, who is the author of the distinguished geographical work *Ashkharatsoyts*, also gave his own description of the location of Albania: "Albania lies between the Kur river and the mountains of the Caucasus"⁹⁵. One interesting fact is that Abas-Kouli-Agha Backikhanov, who was a scientist and a public figure in Azerbaijan in 19th century, referring to the eastern Transcaucasus pointed out: "Studying various data, I have come to the conclusion that the right bank of the Kur (up to the place where the river joins Araks) was a part of Armenia"⁹⁶.

The feudal nature of society and hereditary land-ownership during the reign of the Arshakouni dynasty prepared the ground for a conflict between the provincial powers and the king. During the reign of Arshak II (360-368 AD) the leaders of Artsakh (Aranshahiks) and many other provinces proclaimed their independence from the Arshakouni rule. But soon, when Pup became the king, Mushegh Mamikonyan (the head of the royal and state troops) defeated the breakaway rulers of the provinces and again made the Kur the border of the north "as it was before"⁹⁷. This historical event is reflected in such Armenian state documents as the "Gahnamak", which generally recorded the degree of honor conferred upon and the posts given to ministers (the provincial rulers) and the "Zoranamak", which described the ministers' military power. According to the latter document, Paytakaran contributed 300 soldiers to the Armenian central army and their minister was the third in rank among 70 officials of the royal palace. The ruler of Utik contributed 1000 soldiers to the same army⁹⁸.

Metz Haik, located at strategic crossroads, was the battleground of the great powers. Before the 4th century AD, Armenia had managed to stand the invasions of hordes that came from all 4 corners. However, the wars and conflicts between the

Persian and Byzantine Empires brought Armenia untold hardship and destruction.

The Persian-Byzantine agreement concluded in 387, divided the Armenian kingdom between Persia and Byzantine; the eastern part of Armenia was under Persian rule and the western part under Byzantium. In order to break the resistance of the Armenian leaders, both powers kept on carving up the provinces between them and so the "Armenian lands grew smaller and smaller". Thus, Arshak II became the king of the western part of Armenia (the part under Byzantine rule) and Khosrov that of the eastern part (the part under Persian rule)⁹⁹. According to the "shameful agreement" concluded in 387, the provinces of Utik, Baghasakan, Media, Gugark, Aghdznik, Korduk, Nor-Shirakan, and Artsakh (after the Vardanats rebellion) were separated from Metz Haik. The totality of this territory was 103359 km² ¹⁰⁰.

As a result, Metz Haik lost its outlying provinces and territories. Its middle part, the provinces of Bardzr Haik (High Haik), Tzopk, Tzopk Metz, Tourouberan, Mokc, Vaspourakan, Syunik, Taik, and Ayrarat (184916 km²) was also divided between Sassanid Iran (73% of the territory, 134341 km²) and the Roman Empire (27%, 50575 km²)¹⁰¹.

After the death of Arshak III, the Romans did not appoint a new king thus putting an end to Armenian statehood. Consequently, the Armenians living in the western part of the land were in dire straits with no leader of their own. The eastern part of Armenia could have had the same fate, but for a while at least, kept its quasi-autonomous state. "The largest part of Armenia was a vassalage, but managed to preserve its internal government system on the basis of the already established ministerial law"¹⁰².

Taking into consideration the might and importance of the Armenian nobility, the Persian king of kings did not dare deprive Armenia of its crown. However, the Arshakouni dynasty, which was in a dependent position, eventually began to lose its former power and gradually lost its significant role in governing the nation. The Persian royal court used political, military and

economic levers to wipe out the Armenian administrative institutions, which had functioned for centuries, in order to impose a foreign and new system upon the Armenians. In spite of all these circumstances, Artsakh and Utik did not lose their national, heroic spirit and were defiant in the face of Persian tyranny.

In sources describing the spread of the newly invented Armenian script, much is written about the eastern provinces of Armenia. Koryun testifies that Mesrop Mashtots (the creator of the Armenian alphabet) not only spread the light of knowledge, but also preached and spoke the word of God in Utik (Gardmank) and Artsakh (the latter was at that time also called "Minor Syunik")¹⁰³. According to legend, Mesrop Mashtots opened one of the first schools in Amaras (a village in Haband district).

Vram V (the Persian king) used the dissention among the Armenian ministers and with the consent of some of them dethroned Artashes, the last king of the Arshakouni dynasty. Thus, Armenia became one of the provinces of Persia. Persia had bold expansionist ambitions. It wanted to subjugate the whole of Transcaucasia. The obliteration of the political and cultural independence of the Armenians, Georgians and Albanians was part of the realization of this Sassanid plan.

The creation of the Albanian regional government brought about massive political, social, economical and territorial changes in the Transcaucasus. One of these changes was the separation of Artsakh and Utik from Armenia and their annexation to Albania. It is important to note that the Sassanids were ready to implement their plans immediately after the fall of Artashes and it was the resistance of Artsakh that had delayed their realization until the 450's. Chronicler Eghishe recounts that before the battle of Avarayr, Vasak Syuni (one of the Armenian ministers) encouraged dissidence against Persian rule "in Tmoric, Korduk, Artsakh, Albania, Georgia and Khaghtea"¹⁰⁴.

One can, therefore, conclude that the Armenian provinces of Artsakh and Utik, together with other provinces, resisted foreign rule after the collapse of the Armenian kingdom in 428.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE EASTERN PROVINCES OF ARMENIA

The Christian religion, which was in its formative stages during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, had already spread in the eastern provinces of Rome - Assyria, Palestine, and Cappadocia and had begun penetrating the Armenian lands.

In 34 AD Thaddeus (Adde), one of the 12 apostles of Jesus Christ, journeyed to Edessa¹⁰⁵ and from there to Armenia to spread the word of God. He was persecuted and then martyred in Artaz. Then came Apostle Bartholomew whose preaching was mainly centred in the province of Andzevatsots. He also preached in Goghthn, and Aghbak (the place where he died). Stephanos Orbelyan states that Bartholomew also established an episcopal see in Syunik¹⁰⁶.

According to M. Kaghankatvatsi, Thaddeus preached in the western parts of Armenia and then "thrice beatified Gregory, the struggler who deserved the glory he had"¹⁰⁷. When Thaddeus died, his pupils continued his work. One of them, named Eghishe, was ordained by the first patriarch of Jerusalem, Jacob, and started to preach in Artsakh and Utik. He built a church at the boundary of Artsakh and Utik, in a place called Gis. The persecutors of Christians killed Eghishe in the settlement of Homenk or Bomen (now the village of Boom, Kutkashen district) and his followers buried him in the village of Urekan. The famous priest Stephanos buried the head of Saint Eghishe in the church of Jrvshtik which also became known as Gikhovank or Eghishe Preacher. A commemorative column was erected at the same place, with the following inscription: "... and many years later, the pious king of Albania, Vachagan raised this column with the inscription in memory of Eghishe..."¹⁰⁸.

Dadi or Dadoyi was a pupil of apostle Thaddeus. He spread Christianity in Artsakh and died there, too. "Dadi came northwards, to Metz Haik by order of apostle Thaddeus, but upon

hearing the news of Abgar's death, he went to Syunik and built there a church, which was called Dadivank after his name"¹⁰⁹. And in the Middle Ages, the first holy construction was built on the grave of Dadi. This church, which has been rebuilt several times, is one of the best examples of medieval Armenian architecture.

All the other followers of Eghishe had cruel fates, but their memories have been perpetuated through commemorative structures, shrines, and churches which were later built on their graves. It is important to mention here the grave of Kahaltsitsik near Vardashen, that of Gyumratai in Tserik village, the grave of Vlas in Nizh, as well as that of St. Gregoris, the grandson of Gregory the Illuminator (Grigor Lousavorich) in the Vatnyan fields (now the district of Biliji)¹¹⁰.

Under the rule of Trdat III (Tiridates) decisive steps were undertaken not only to spread Christianity, but also to proclaim it as the state religion. By order of Trdat III, the rulers of all the provinces including Tzavdeits the ruler of Artsakh province, gathered and saw Gregory the Illuminator off to Cesaria, where he was anointed as the leading priest of the Armenian land¹¹¹.

Tzavdeits of Artsakh was among the first in the eastern provinces of Armenia who started preaching the christian doctrine to his people after he had been baptized in the Euphrates. Thus Tzavdeits got the support of Gregory the Illuminator in his endeavour to implant the Christian spirit in his countrymen. He founded and built one of the first churches of Armenia in Amaras which was located in Haband. Throughout the time of building the church the patriarch climbed the high hill opposite the church and prayed there. That is why the hill is called "Lousavorich's hill" even today¹¹².

In the early stages of Christianity, a considerable part of Armenia and its neighboring countries were pagan. The teachings of the early fathers were therefore of great importance. They went from one province to another, especially to the remoter ones, to bring them the message of the new religion. In the 4th century, a

priest named Hob (from Vekert) preached in Parskank (Artsakh)¹¹³.

In the time of Gregory the Illuminator, there existed 400 episcopal bishoprics in Armenia¹¹⁴. Vrtanes nominated his 15 year old son Grigoris as the bishop of the eastern provinces. The new bishop was very young, but was very intelligent and a fervent believer, and used his fervour for the benefit of the local Armenians. Grigoris built and renovated many churches; he also finished the building of Amaras, which had been started by his grandfather. This church later became one of the spiritual centres of Artsakh and Albania. The fame of the young bishop even reached Albania, and after delegating responsibility of church affairs to others, he left for that country. The Albanian king Sanesan, when the Greek bishop of Albania (nominated by Gregory the Illuminator) died, appointed Grigoris to this post. The young bishop died in Vatn while he was preaching the word of God to the nomadic Muzkurts. The deacons, who were with Grigoris, brought and buried the body of the saint in the church of Amaras (province of Haband). "And the people who had gone with him brought his body to Amaras, a village in Haband that is in the land of Albania. He was buried at the church built by his grandfather, Grigor"¹¹⁵. "There his body was placed in the church, close to the alter (the northern part). The blood of Zakaria and blissful Pandaleon were filled into 2 flacons and buried with the young body of saint Grigoris"¹¹⁶.

For the Armenians the next period of Christianity is connected with the name of Mesrop Mashtots, who created the Armenian letters. As Khorenatsi wrote, "he founded schools in all the states and provinces of Armenia, in the part that was under the rule of Persia"¹¹⁷.

Mashtots established one of his schools in Amaras. The newly created alphabet enabled the Armenians to open schools, write their literature and develop it. This was also the means of consolidating the Christian religion and doctrine. Writing and the

Christian religion kept the people united, which in turn, favoured the establishment of an independent national church. Apart from spreading the Christian faith and the alphabet, Mashtots also founded monasteries all over Armenia. Koryun wrote, "...and again he settled groups of monks in different places, inhabited and uninhabited areas, and founded monasteries and churches"¹¹⁸.

In the town of Gis, Vachagan the Pious (Barepasht) found a cross which belonged to M. Mashtots. He had hidden it there while fleeing from his persecutors. The sacred relic was taken "to the holy church, where the patriarch and the prince received the cross which Mesrop Mashtots had used to keep the land of Albania from evils"¹¹⁹. This is one more proof that M. Mashtots preached and spread the light of God in Artsakh, too (as Artsakh and Utik were annexed to the Albanian land, Albania very often was used to mean Artsakh and Utik). Thus, in the fifth century Christianity ceased to be the religion of persecuted groups in Artsakh and Utik; instead it became the faith of all. Vachagan the Pious continued the struggle for the freedom to practise this religion that had begun not long before the loss of statehood and political freedom.

THE PARTICIPATION OF ARTSAKH ARMENIANS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY ANTI-PERSIAN INSURRECTIONS

Although Armenia had been deprived of its own king since 428, it did not lose its national dignity and existed as an autonomous political unit. Alongside the new state organization, that is, the regional government, other political structures, which had been established during the reign of the Arshakouni dynasty (Arshakids) continued to exist.

Under the new state of affairs, the Sassanids kept the Armenian Church under strict supervision. Nevertheless, the church played the role of the invaluable consolidator of all the sections of society and the keeper of the Armenian spirit and independence. Naturally, the authority of the church gradually increased during that period. In this connection, H. Manandyan noted that, "after the year 428, there were no significant changes in the organization of the political structures in Persian Armenia (eastern Armenia that was under Persian control)"¹²⁰.

In fact, due to their delicate and flexible policy, Armenian spiritual and feudal leaders managed to mellow the anti-Armenian policies of the Persian royal court. Thus, the country preserved its internal freedom, the self-governing form of ministerial administrations, the Armenian spirit and Christian moral values.

Beginning from the 440s, the Persian royal court (after the enthronement of Hazkert II in 438) did not tolerate the autonomy of the Armenian ministers any longer. It undertook a new approach towards Armenia and started this policy with an unprecedented increase in taxes. The historian Eghishe wrote, "The dues the people were obliged to pay for the fields, mountains and forests were so huge that it is almost impossible to speak about them"¹²¹. The clergy who had never before paid any taxes now had to in the same way as the common people. Aiming at the complete destruction of the Armenian resistance, Hazkert II struck a blow at the Armenian troops. An edict issued by the same

Hazkert, ordered the military forces of the subjugated Christian countries - Albania, Georgia and Armenia - to deploy to the remote eastern parts of Persia; they were thus isolated and later violently killed¹²². Denshapouh, the head of Persian diplomacy, through bribes, gossip and shady deals also succeeded in straining the relations amongst Armenian ministers and created an atmosphere of mistrust, hatred and sedition.

Hazkert II was not satisfied with this and tried to rob the Armenian people of their patriotic beliefs, customs, and traditions by luring them towards the Persian way of life. The Persian king had an uncompromising attitude towards the Armenian Church because, with its inner administrative organization, it reproduced the model of the state structure of Arshakouni times. Despite the fact that the country was politically split, it was nevertheless under the moral authority of the catholicos, the head of the Armenian Church. Thus, the Armenian Church became the mediator between rival Armenian forces and the unifier of the nation in order to confront the Persian onslaught.

With the purpose of subjugating the Armenians, Sassanid Iran began a policy of violence at the start of the fourth century, during the reign of king Arshak, the son of king Tiran. This policy grew tougher when Hazkert II came to power and was given the title of 'king of kings'¹²³.

All the means of pressure used to turn Armenians away from their Christian religion were unsuccessful, and the Persian royal court turned to more brutal means. In February 450 Persia gave Georgia, Armenia, and Albania an ultimatum to give up their Christian religion and to adopt Zoroastrianism. This unacceptable demand shocked all sections of Armenian society. 17 senior ministers and 17 spiritual leaders were summoned to a council in Artashat¹²⁴. Ghazar Parpetsi did not mention any Armenian ministers either from the eastern provinces (Artsakh, Utik) or from the western part of Armenia (the part that was under Byzantine rule) who attended this council. The main reason is most likely the

urgency of the call and the fact that Artsakh and Utik were the remotest provinces of Armenia. Another reason is that of all the 70 ministers, only a few had active roles in the political life of the country. It is not surprising that Hazkert, with the aim of imposing Zoroastrianism on them, had himself invited not 70 but only 10 leaders to Tizbon, the location of his court.

The Armenians refused to adopt Zoroastrianism in a letter addressed to Mihrnerseh, one of the commanders of the Persian army. The nation, which had been Christian for almost one and a half centuries, was unwilling to give up the very basis of its identity.

This infuriated Hazkert and he summoned ten influential ministers to Tizbon¹²⁵. It was obvious that Hazkert intended to convert the country to Zoroastrianism by force. Once there, the Armenian ministers, prince Vache among them, decided to renounce their religion falsely¹²⁶.

Before leaving for Tizbon, the delegations from Armenia, Georgia and Albania (Caucasian Albania) had gathered and sworn upon the Holy Bible saying, "Yes, we shall go, but we shall not agree to renounce our God"¹²⁷.

The reason why the Christian ministers had to adopt the Persian religion in appearance was because of the real threat to the people of Armenia. If they did not accept Zoroastrianism, Hazkert would have sent numerous troops with elephants to Armenia; he would have exiled the relatives of the ministers, annihilated the population of Armenia, and turned the land into a heap of stones.

A group of Zoroastrian magians (700 people) were then sent to preach in Georgia, Albania, the lands of Lpni, Aghdznik, Korduk, Tsavdeits (Artsakh), and Dasn¹²⁸. Hazkert was a cunning politician. He held captive the sons of Vasak (the regional governor), Babik, Amirnerseh, the king of Georgia, Vazgen, the ruler (prince) of the eastern provinces of Armenia, Vache and the

ruler of Gugark, Ashusha¹²⁹. The idea of a general rebellion had ripened in Armenia before the return of the Armenian ministers. The Armenian rebels resisted the Persian magians. They destroyed the fire temples built by the magians in Angegh village, in Zarehavan district and in other places. Some Armenians attacked the Zoroastrians with stones and many of them were killed in this way. The Armenians also attacked the Persian garrison. Then the rebellion entered a new stage developing into a huge movement headed and organized by the Armenian ministers. These were led by Vartan Mamikonyan, the commander of the Armenian state troops (sparapet). The ministers were now forced to defend their national independence and religious beliefs by taking up arms.

The brave warrior Vartan wanted to create a strong front against the mighty enemy. That is why he urgently sent letters to the Emperor of Byzantium, Theodoros II, and to the ministers of western Armenia: the rulers of Aghdznik, Angegh, Tsopk, Hashtyank, Ekeghik and Antioch¹³⁰. The Armenian sparapet did not have to write any letters to the eastern provinces because they had already prepared themselves to fight and defend their religion without the need for any prompting.

The Byzantine Emperor (who had previously promised to help) died before receiving the letter and the new Emperor Marcianos not only refused to help, but also informed the Persian royal court of the imminent rebellion. Consequently, the ministers of the Armenian territories under Byzantine rule could not help their Armenian compatriots in the east. Thus the rebels had to rely only upon their own forces and be ready for a merciless fight. Meanwhile, the Armenians also got news that the Persian army, together with 300 Zoroastrian magians, had attacked Albania.

During this time, the territory of Albania was populated by tribes who did not represent a coherent political unit. Vache Aranshahik, the king of Artsakh and Utik, had taken advantage of

this situation and had been able to impose his rule over the left bank of the Kur. The tribes who lived there were called Lpnik according to historical records of the fifth century AD¹³¹.

The Aranshahiks of Utik and Artsakh (including the left bank of the Kur), led by king Vache, organized the anti-Persian rebellion. Vache's mother was Persian and a Zoroastrian; his wife was the daughter of Hazkert's sister. Hazkert II, believing in Vache's false renouncement of Christianity, set him free from captivity. Upon his release, he went back to Artsakh and restarted his rebellion against the Persian king. The envoys of Vache asked Vartan Mamikonyan and Vasak Syouny to initiate their military actions against the Persians, and then come to his aid as fast as they could.

Upon receiving this request, the sparapet divided the armed forces into three regiments. The first one, led by Nershapouh Artsruni, was sent to the provinces of Her and Zarevand to protect the southern borders. The second regiment was given to Vasak Syunetsi and according to the plan it was to pass through Syunik via a secret route and to strike the Persians from the rear.

The third regiment was commanded by Vartan Mamikonyan himself. The regiment had to pass through Gougark and reach Albania in order to help the rebels there. The regiment of Vartan reached Albania at the end of September or at the beginning of October¹³². Other famous leaders such as Khoren Khorkhorouni, Arshavir Kamsarakan, Tatul Dimaksyan, Artak Palouni, Gyout Vahevouni, and Hmayak Dimaksyan also joined Vartan's troops bringing with them their own military forces.

When Vartan Mamikonyan and his troops left Ayrarat, they marched towards the valley of river Aghstev. It was at this very time that Vasak Syuni betrayed the sparapet, his own nation, and his family. He sent letters to the Persian commander Mihrnerseh in Paytakaran and to Sebukht Nikhorakan, the governor of Tchora. In these letters the traitor informed the enemy of the military plans of the Armenian troops. In order to hinder the advance of the

Armenian troops, Sebukht crossed the Kur and approached Khaghkhagh*. The Persian army waited there for the Armenian regiments. When Vartan learned this, he divided the Armenian troops into 3 sections. The commander of the right wing was Arshavir Kamsarakan from the Arsharouni family, Moush Dimaksyan being his senior assistant. The left wing was led by Khoren Khorkhorouni and aided by Hmayak from the Dimaksyan family. The central regiment was commanded by Vartan Mamikonyan.

The number of soldiers of the Persian troops surpassed that of the Armenian army by far. But Vartan did not leave the initiative to Sebukht and together with forces from Artsakh and Utik attacked the Persians, creating a massive confusing in their ranks, which included some Albanian tribes who had joined the Persians. The sudden attack led by the Armenians resulted in disastrous losses for Sebukht. The regiments of the sparapet struck the right and left wings of the enemy's troops, pushing them into the river and killing them. Many troops also drowned.

The remaining part of the Persian army, with its commanders, retreated and made an attempt to reach the opposite bank of the Kur by crossing it with small boats. But they were attacked by a torrent of arrows coming from the soldiers of Arshavir Kamsarakan. "Arshavir Kamsarakan always followed the orders

*A settlement and winter camp in Metz Haik, to be more exact, in Utik (Tavoush) on the right bank of the Kur, near the mouth of Lopnas river (probably this river was later called Zakam or Zekam). According to Gh. Alishyan, the settlement was near the river Khalkhanaly (Khalikhanly), which was in the district of Tsegam (or Zagam). In the writings of Agatangeghos, Gh. Parpetsi, and Eghishe this place figures as the winter camp of Armenian and Albanian kings.

See T. Kh. Hakobyan, St. T. Melik-Bakhshyan, and H. Kh. Barseghyan Dictionary of toponyms of Armenia and adjacent territories, pl. 2, Yerevan, 1988, page 631. The Armenian chroniclers, especially Eghishe, used the toponym "Khaghkhagh" to mean the winter camp of the Albanian kings. But we should consider it to be the camp of the Aranshahiks of the Armenian eastern provinces because in the 5th century the right bank of the Kur was considered to be Armenian Albania.

of Vartan Mamikonyan and he implemented the wish of the great sparapet. Many Persian troops were thus wounded or killed and their boats capsized. Many Persian soldiers and their commanders drowned in the cold waters of the Kur"¹³³. "Because of the unexpected attack, the number of the drowned was higher than the number killed on dry land. The blood of the enemy painted the serene water of the Kur red. Few survived. One of them managed to keep his weapons and his horse and fled through the forest towards the central army. He hurried to give them the news of their defeat; meanwhile, the central forces were already retreating and heading back to the Persian capital"¹³⁴.

During the fierce fight in the marshlands, Arshavir Kamsarakan and Moush Dimaksyan got stuck in the slime with their horses. The princes of Baghasakan*, seizing the opportunity, attacked them. They killed Moush and wounded Gazrik. Arshavir then came to his companions' aid and killed the brother of the king of Lpnik* and the others.

Historiography presents the battle of Khaghkhagh as the Armenian-Albanian united fight against the Persians. However, from the aforementioned facts, it is obvious that Vartan Mamikonyan and his troops went to help not the Albanians, but the people of the eastern provinces of Armenia (also the princes

*A district on the boundary of Metz Haik, on the road leading to Albania-Aghvankian, Gardman and Tashir. The toponym was used by Koryoun, P. Byuzand, M. Kaghankatvatsi and other historiographers of later periods. Some of them identify it as Paytakaran of Metz Haik. But the opinion of Gh. Alishan and others seem more credible. According to them, Baghasakan is located on the left bank of the River Kur, and is considered to be a separate regional-administrative unit in the structure of Albania-Aghvank. This opinion is also stated by B. Ulubabyan with supporting facts. Dictionary of toponyms of Armenia and adjacent territories, pl. 1, 1986, page 571.

* Lpink was the western part of central Albania; the settlement of the Lpni tribe was the basin of the Lopnas, Khora, and Alazan rivers. It was part of the Albanian kingdom from the 1st century BC to the first half of the 5th century AD. With the creation a regional government, it acquired a semi-independent status and the tribal leader proclaimed himself king. Ghazar Parpetsi, p. 499-500.

of Artsakh). In the battle of Khaghkhagh, the Armenians fought against the allied forces of Persia and Albania.

One cannot exclude the possibility that Vartan could have helped some of the Albanian tribes to liberate their settlements and castles from the Persians. This is mentioned by Movses Kaghankatvatsi, "Many of the Albanian princes, who were Christian believers, hid themselves in the shelters of Kapkoh (the main mountain chain of the Caucasus). When they saw the victories of the Armenian troops, they also joined them and performed heroic deeds"¹³⁵. This fact is an additional proof that some Albanian tribes joined the Armenian troops only after the victory in the battle of Khaghkhagh.

After the glorious triumph, Vartan went forth and liberated many Albanian villages and towns from the Persians. Reaching Tchora Pahak (Derbend), he killed the guardsmen, ordered the locals to destroy the strongholds that blocked the roads of the Caucasian highlanders and the Huns, and concluded an alliance with them. It was at this time that Vartan received the news of Vasak's treachery. He was greatly affected by this news and turned back. The army of Vartan Mamikonyan then crossed the territory that stretched from Tchora Pahak to Ayrarat (Ararat) within one month - an almost impossible feat for those times.

Vasak Syuny, who was taken unawares by Vartan's arrival, went into hiding in Syunik. But being true to his treacherous nature, he ruined the fortifications of Ayrarat and spoilt the provisions before fleeing. This created unbearable conditions for Vartan's troops who were to spend the winter there.

Vasak, together with his supporters, began a campaign of persuading the population to reject the rebellion, and promised a peaceful restoration of the former state of things in the country. He sent his supporters to the different regions of Armenia and neighboring countries (Tmorik, Kordovats, Artsakh, Albania, Georgia and Khaghtia) where "they convinced people not to give lodgings or food to the soldiers of Vartan"¹³⁶.

Meanwhile, Persia was undergoing a military and political crisis because Hazkert II had been defeated by the Huns in Central Asia and realized that he could not suppress the Armenian rebellion. Using this opportunity, Vasak persuaded the Persian king of kings to relax his policy towards Armenia. Hazkert then sent Armenia an edict pardoning the rebels.

These events resulted in a split within Armenian society. Vartan Mamikonyan and his supporters believed that the land should and could be liberated by the force of arms, whereas his civilian opponent, Vasak Syuni, had the conviction that Armenia could be saved through holding negotiations and making compromises. It was this divergence of ideas that led to a civil war before the battle of Avarayr.

Eghishe wrote much about the activities of Vasak Syuni and here is a clear description of the atmosphere that Syuni created in the country: "... he made even brothers, fathers and sons quarrel with each other, sowing the seeds of discord"¹³⁷. This inner turmoil weakened the country and affected the unity of its armed forces. It was therefore no surprise that sections of the Armenian troops appeared on opposing banks of the Tghmout on the day of the battle of Avarayr.

Certain Armenian historical accounts have claimed that the Armenians of Artsakh did not take part in the battle of Avarayr. The works of the chronicler Eghishe, as well as other reliable sources state the opposite. 37 princes from Artsakh joined the rebellion (32 of them being registered in the Gahnamak)¹³⁸. If one accepts the figures given in the Zoranamak (military document), then it is possible to assume that the 37 ministers could have gathered an army of 53600 soldiers. This figure does not include the number of soldiers serving in the regiments of Bak, the military leader from Artsakh, Dymaksyan from Shirak, and those of the Artsrouny and Vahnouny families¹³⁹. 66000 cavalry and foot soldiers arrived to the battle field. The soldiers of Bak were among the other part of the force (12400 soldiers).

The battle of Avarayr took place on May 26, 451. In the early morning, the Persian troops had already reached the banks of the Tghmout, but did not have the courage to cross the river first. Then, under Vartan's orders, one part of the Armenian troops crossed the Tghmout and started the assault. The Persian army was panic-stricken because they had not expected the charge of the cavalry of Vartan Mamikonyan straight into the heart of the Persian troops, the regiment led by Moushkan Nysalavourt. At first it seemed victory was close as Vardan annihilated almost all of the Persian's best regiment (the matyan gund). However, the Persians still had a vast number of soldiers and a whole army of military elephants in reserve, which soon entered the fight by order of Moushkan. The Armenian forces were fighting a number far exceeding theirs; the fight was unequal. Thus, Vartan Mamikonyan died on the field of Avarayr, fighting up to his last breath. But the fierce battle lasted many hours and ended at dawn the next day. The Armenians lost their sparapet, but they did not lose their courage and desire for freedom. The next day they retreated to their strongholds and continued to resist. Later Eghishe, the famous Armenian chronicler, wrote about the end of the battle, "No one won this battle; the two sides defeated each other".

The Armenians lost 1036 warrior-leaders, each of whom became a saint hero for the people. Today, "Vardanants" is a national holiday celebrated not only in Armenia and Artsakh, but also amongst the Armenians of the Diaspora¹⁴⁰. According to the data presented by Ervand Lalayan, the day was also celebrated in the villages of Gandzak at the beginning of the 20th century¹⁴¹. The names of the heroes who gave their lives are engraved in the collective memory of the Armenians.

After the Avarayr battle, many commemorative monuments were built in the Armenian lands to honor the heroes. In Artsakh people built a church in memory of Ghevond Yerez (Priest Ghevond). This sacred construction is on the top of a hill near the

villages of Avetaranots, Sargsashen, Verin Taghavard, and Mosh-Khmhat and it is today called Surb Ghevonda Anapat or Ghevondik church. The icon with the portrait of Ghevond can be seen in this place of worship¹⁴². Among the relics of the priest kept in Ghevondik is his very valuable silver-cross*.

A church in Hadrout district (Amatuk or Tezkharab village) was named after Vartan. A black stone is kept in the church which, according to the ancestors of the locals, was painted with the blood of the great warrior¹⁴³.

A church in honor of Vartan was also built in Mushkapat (Martuni district). Unfortunately only its ruins remain today. Sargis Jalalyants wrote, "Mushkapat had a stone church built in memory of Vartan, which was visited by many pilgrims"¹⁴⁴.

The Armenian struggle against the Persians in the 5th century did not end with the battle of Avarayr. In all parts of the Armenian mountainous lands new, partisan fights were conducted. People retreated to mountain and gorge hideouts from where they attacked Persian detachments. "They left their villages, townships and farms: the newly wed quit their bridal beds, the elderly forgot about their age and mothers stopped carrying their babies...all the people went to mountain hideouts because they were the only safe places. They preferred living in caves, like beasts, than have the comfort they could have if they renounced Christianity.

*The sale and purchase of relics belonging to the deceased (those considered holy or saintly) was part of the customs or norms of those times. Ghazar Parpetsi wrote that a foreign Christian merchant that traded in Armenian cities (and spoke Armenian) witnessed the murder of Ghevond Yerez. He later sold the relics of the saint to the Christian communities in Persia and the other parts of Armenia.

They ate miserly food and did not long for the delicious dishes they had been used to. People endured and bore all this hardship because they still had the hope of freedom and felt that they were called to a great mission"¹⁴⁵. As a result of the bravery of the

Armenians, the enemy could never "sleep or rest" on Armenian land.

Soon the Persians besieged these strongholds. They promised the people mercy in return for surrender. In certain cases, the population had to surrender because of hunger and thirst. But almost in all cases, the Persians did not spare those who surrendered; they killed them or took them as captives, setting their settlements on fire¹⁴⁶.

The castle of Angh was the shelter of the regiment of the warrior Bak (from Artsakh) as well as of many refugees; Catholicos Hovsep, Ghevond and other priests were also there. The army of Mushkan Nysalavurt, together with the regiment of Vasak Syuny, besieged the castle, attacked it, but failed to take it. Then the traitor Vasak sent a message that he would spare the lives of those at the castle if they agreed to surrender. He even swore three times on the Holy Bible that he would do so. But the people did not believe his words. "One of the brave warriors named Bak, ... stood on the wall of the castle and began criticizing that wicked and cruel person, reminding him of all the evils he had caused the Armenian land"¹⁴⁷.

That same night, Bak, with 700 others, broke through the ranks of the besiegers and fled to the forests of Artsakh. Although those who remained in the castle (231 soldiers) surrendered, the enemy executed them all. According to Stepanos Orbelyan, those who fled to the forests of Artsakh also suffered serious losses (in Angeghadzor, Utik, Artabuynk, and Jaghatskhar) because the Persian troops followed them. Many years later, people erected many commemorative monuments at the places where the heroes died¹⁴⁸.

In answer to all the Persian atrocities, the Armenians attacked the strongholds of their detachments in the mountains of Khaghtean, Tmorik, the thick forests of Artsakh, and Mijdashkhar and Kapuyt Ler (Blue Mountain).

The Armenians of Artsakh participated in this partisan war with

special fervour. Artsakh, in fact, became one of the crucial centres of the resistance. Ghevond Alishan wrote, "In those days many of the refugees were deceived by Vasak and then killed by the Persians, but there were also many of them who, after the death of Vartan, moved to the castles of Artsakh and continued the resistance against the Persians"¹⁴⁹.

The rebels of Artsakh sent many delegations to the Huns of the Northern Caucasus reminding them of the promises of help. Eventually, a detachment of Huns marched on the Transcaucasus, attacked and destroyed many Persian provinces, taking the local population as captives. On their way back, the Huns also meted punished onto those tribes of the North Caucasus who had helped the Persians. In spite of terrible ordeals, the Armenians of Artsakh managed to keep their independence. After the great revolt of 451, the Armenian dynasty of Aranshahiks (princes from Utik and Artsakh) took advantage of the political upheavals in Persia, and established their kingdom on the right bank of River Kur (Artsakh and Utik). A History of Albania gives sufficient data about this historical event and even mentions that the Aranshahiks (the princes) were able to subjugate several provinces of Albania¹⁵⁰.

The Aranshahiks organized the anti-Persian rebellion of Armenians from Artsakh. The rebellion was led by Vache Aranshahik. After the death of Vartan, Vache had to falsely renounce his Christian faith in order to keep Artsakh and Utik safe from Persian attacks. Thus, Vache was able to restore his domain and to reorganize his forces. For the same purpose, he even married the daughter of Hazkert's sister, and built a town called Perozapat in 461 (it was later renamed Partav; present-day Barda). Peroz was one of the sons of Hazkert II.

After the death of the Persian king of kings in 457, his sons Vormizd and Peroz started a fierce struggle for the throne. This was a good opportunity for Vache to openly reclaim his Christianity, and with his brave soldiers, he chased the Persians

away from Artsakh and Utik. However, the struggle for the crown did not last long in Persia. Peroz came to power and with his troops marched towards Utik and Artsakh to re-establish his power there. Vache, who had concluded an alliance with eleven Albanian tribes, moved to the north. With his brave warriors, he destroyed the strongholds of Tchora Pahak with the help of the Caucasian tribes and defeated the Persian royal army. Consequently, Peroz was obliged to ask for a ceasefire and a peace deal, but the rebellious king Vache was uncompromising. In reply to all the pleas for peace and friendship he reproached the king of kings the destruction of Armenia. Vache "accused Peroz for ruining Armenia in vain, killing its ministers and torturing the captives; for the suffering he caused to the population and his cruelty. He also said that he would rather die than live and worship fire"¹⁵¹.

Peroz continued seeking other ways of defeating the Armenian king. Thus bribing the hordes of the northern khaylandurs*, he directed their attacks of Armenian Albania (Aghvank). For a whole year Vache's troops, which were small in number, were fighting the much larger forces of the Huns and Persians.

Vache was exhausted, but remained firm and did not back down. Moreover, in some battles he achieved victory. "Many of them died in battles, many were exhausted by horrible diseases. Most parts of the country (Utik and Artsakh) were ruined, but no Armenian left it"¹⁵².

Peroz was still unable to fully defeat the Armenian king and he tried a different approach. He sent Vache the following message: "... send my sister and the son of my uncle to Persia; they should worship fire. You can believe in your own God and rule your own Christian land"¹⁵³. Vache fulfilled Peroz's demands but things were not peacefully settled between the two men.

* *Khaylandurk is the name of one of the Hun tribes. According to Markvart, "Khaylandurk" was the chief tribe of the Huns.*

Historical events in Armenian Albania took a turn for the worse because of internal disagreements and the constant meddling of Peroz in the kingdom's affairs. Many ministers and allies abandoned Vache in his struggle against the Persians and the king, feeling abandoned and unable to accept the injustices, left his palace and devoted himself to an ascetic's life. According to one legend recorded by S. Jalalyants, Vache preached the word of God in Avetaranots¹⁵⁴. Unfortunately, there is no further information about Vache's later life.

THE ARANSHAHIK KINGDOM OF ARTSAKH

The Armenian struggle for freedom, which continued throughout the 5th century, was not futile. As a result of the numerous rebellions, the Armenians of Artsakh and Utik acquired their administrative and political independence and created a proper state, the Albanian kingdom or the kingdom of Aghvank.

In 457 the Persian king Hazkert died and an atmosphere of discord and sedition began to dominate the royal court and the country. Vache took advantage of this circumstance and proclaimed himself the king of Artsakh and Utik.

In the 5th century, tribes living in central Albania were not united and did not represent a stable political unit. Therefore, Vache Aranshahik was able to unite the region and establish a stable entity under his rule, including the left bank of the Kur.

According to M. Kaghankatvatsi, Vache built Partav, the capital of his kingdom¹⁵⁵. However, inner discord and the intrigues of the Persian royal court prevented the Aranshahik king to continue ruling his kingdom of Albania (Aghvank). After being without a king for thirty years, the Armenian eastern provinces acquired a new king in the person of Vachagan, the nephew of Vache. The kingdom of Vachagan included the provinces of Artsakh and Utik as well as the district of Kambejan on the left bank of the Kur. At the time, there was no other king in the other parts of Armenia and the kingdom of Vachagan the Pious (Barepasht) became the centre of Armenian statehood.

King Vachagan built many churches and schools in Albania, realizing that the Christian religion and knowledge would form the basis of his state. Movses Kaghankatvatsi wrote, "Vachagan the Pious built a number of churches in the east equal to the number of days in a year"¹⁵⁶.

The new king, like Artashes I, revered the memories of such Armenian churchmen as Gregory the Illuminator, Grigoris, the grandson of Gregory, Doctor Pandaleon, Mesrop Mashtots and

his pupils. He also collected the relics of St. Grigoris and the virgin martyrs, Gayane and Hripsime. He served his people and their faith so well that he became known as the "Barepasht" (pious).

This new Albanian king fought against the existing pagan customs which included inhuman practices in direct contradiction with Christian values. According to many historical sources, the pagan magians arrested people, chained them, fed them for a year and then sacrificed them as animals¹⁵⁷. Movses Kaghankatvatsi states that the Zoroastrian believers were divided into three groups by their chief magian. Each of these groups had to prepare a sacrifice in the form of a human being. But before "presenting their god with the gift, they tortured the victims by usually cutting parts of their body or scraping their skin"¹⁵⁸.

Under the rule of Vachagan the Pious, the country prospered economically. There was a rapid development of different types of craft. It is known that in Hakob Kamari (Martakert district) there was a workshop, where refined blue silk was made for the court of the Albanian king. Both the workshop and its location were called captarar, which meant 'making blue'¹⁵⁹.

This prosperous country needed a sumptuous capital. Thus Vachagan built his capital on the banks of the Trtu, near Talish (Martakert district). This area is mentioned in many historiographical works and known as Gyutakan or Dyutakan¹⁶⁰. The village of Dastakert (Martakert district) was also built by Vachagan for his daughter Khnchik, whom he loved very much¹⁶¹.

In 488, in order to regulate the political and economic life in the eastern provinces of Armenia, the pious king convened a meeting of the Armenian ecclesiastic and secular leaders in Aghven, his summer abode, where the laws of the new kingdom were discussed and adopted.

It is known that prior to the 21 laws put forward by Vachagan, the Arsacids (the Arshakouni dynasty), a century earlier, had adopted many similar rules and laws regulating the ecclesiastic, political and economic life in Ashtishat and Shahapivan. However,

there was a need to re-create such laws so as to prove the existence of this kingdom in one part of the mountainous land. This act also represented the evidence of the continuity of the Armenian statehood.

"Sahmanadrutyun kanonakan" (constitution) is a valuable document which can contribute greatly to the study of the socio-economic and political relations in the eastern provinces of Armenia. According to this document, the state and church taxes were obligatory for all strata of society; even members of the royal family and the nobility were not exempt from paying them.

The document also includes rules regulating the moral values and norms of the people; the prohibition of marriage between close relatives, divorce because of a man's whim, and a ban on frequenting sorcerers and magians are a few examples of these rules. The king had supreme power according to the "Sahmanadrutyun kanonakan", and people were obliged to obey his commands.

The system of rules used by Vachagan the Pious also speaks about the rule of law in the country. One must note that many European lands adopted similar laws and rules much later, in the late Middle Ages. After the Aghven meeting, a period of peace and prosperity began in Albania.

Vachagan the Pious led a balanced foreign policy and tried to maintain good relations with the neighbouring countries. Thus the Albanian king secured stability for his kingdom. For this purpose Vachagan gave his consent to the marriage of his daughter to Abl-Abas, the son of Persian king. The Persian prince converted to Christianity and lived in Greater Syunik (Metz Syunik), near a temple called "yerkrord Jerusalem" (Second Jerusalem)¹⁶². St. Orbelyan wrote that king Vachagan and his son-in-law became victims of a conspiracy and were murdered in Syunik, at Bargushat (Kashunik)¹⁶³. The body of the pious king was buried in a chapel near the church of Jrvshtik or Eghishe Arakyal (Apostle Eghishe) in the Martakert region. In 1286 a new

tombstone was placed on the grave of Vachagan with the following words: "This is the grave of Vachagan the Pious. Blessed are the patriarch and his parents who built this church in 1286, during the spiritual leadership of Ter Simeon"¹⁶⁴. In spite of the shortness of the great king's reign, it left a positive legacy on the economic, political and cultural spheres of Armenian life.

THE EASTERN PROVINCES OF ARMENIA IN THE SIXTH CENTURY AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY

THE POLICY OF THE PERSIAN ROYAL COURT AND THE RESISTANCE OF THE ARMENIANS OF THE EASTERN PROVINCES. After the death of Vachagan the Pious, the Armenians of the eastern provinces lived in a prosperous and peaceful country for about 75 years. This can be explained by the stability of political situation in Persia. Under the rule of Khosrov I Anoushirvan (531-578), a period of an unprecedented economic and cultural development began in Persia. The military, administrative and tax systems underwent massive changes. Khosrov I Anoushirvan showed a tolerant attitude towards other religions (including Christianity) in order to maintain peace and the course of progress in his country.

Under the rule of Kavut I, Persia had been administratively divided into four unit-states called "kustaks". Khosrov I carried military reforms in four kustaks and turned them into military districts. Each state (kustak) was in turn subdivided into regions and "shahrs" (lands)¹⁶⁵. Armenia, Atrpatakan, Georgia, Albania and several other countries on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea (Dmbavand, Taparstan, Ruan, and Amol) were incorporated into the Northern Kustak, which was also called "Kusti-Kapkoh", that is Caucasian Kustak¹⁶⁶.

The kingdom of the Artsakhian Aranshahiks in the Albanian region was also included in this Northern Kustak and had its significant position in the hierarchical military and administrative system of the Sassanids. In his works S. V. Yushkov, the famous specialist of Caucasian history, states that the feudal kingdom of Aranshahiks was considered to be a part of the once powerful Armenian state. It was under Persian influence, but was internally autonomous¹⁶⁷.

Apart from dividing the Armenian mountainous country politically and geographically, Sassanid Persia made attempts to weaken it economically. To this end, Khosrov I ordered the recording of the number of arable lands, fruit and vegetable orchards, and cattle owned by the Armenians. The Persian king also ordered a census in order to determine the amount of tax to be paid per inhabitant. This was collected three times a year. Land tax was imposed on all the inhabitants, while the tax per head of inhabitant only on commoners¹⁶⁸.

Previously, the Persians had accepted tax payment in the form of part of the harvest of the Armenians. But then they demanded not only their share of the harvest but also money. The new system of taxes created great resentment among the people and they, together with the Armenian princes, rebelled against the Persian yoke. However, the Sassanids managed to suppress the rebellion and to punish the perpetrators. Movses Kaghankatvatsi describes this painful episode: "All the princes of Albania that rebelled against the king of Persia perished - some were killed, some received fatal wounds and some were exiled to remote places"¹⁶⁹.

The establishment of a patriarchate in 552 was aimed at preserving the remainder of the Aranshahik kingdom in the Armenian eastern provinces and resisting the anti-Armenian Persian policy. The first patriarch of Albania was Abas, the bishop of Metsatarank district. The seat of the patriarch was Partav. The Albanian patriarchate depended on the authority of the central Armenian catholicosate in all issues except the ones concerning local affairs.

The newly created Albanian patriarchate also had authority over the believers of the neighbouring provinces and soon extended this authority to farther provinces, including Derbend. The Armenian Albanian patriarchate was thus called "The patriarchate of Albania, Lpni and Chogha". This historical fact can be confirmed by a document sent to Abas by the all-Armenian

catholicos, Hovhannes II Gabeghyan, in which he gives the list of the dioceses of the Albanian kingdom and also mentions the names of their prelates, "...Movses, the bishop of Baghakht, Grigor, the bishop of Kapaghak, Hromik, the bishop of Amaras, Timotheous, the bishop of Baghasakan, Ambakum, the bishop of Shaki, Hohanik, the bishop of Gardmank and Ghevond, the bishop of Metz Koghstants"¹⁷⁰. In the second half of the sixth century Petros, the bishop of Syounik also brought his diocese to the fold of the Patriarchate of Albania¹⁷¹. From the very start of his patriarchate, Abas struggled against heretics with the aim of keeping the unity of the Armenian Church.

ARTSAKH AS PART OF THE "SISAKAN" SHAHR. In the absence of a central authority in Armenia, the Persian royal court sought to strain relations among the ministerial families, create a discord, and establish its hegemony over Armenia. In 571 Vahan, the prince of Syounik, broke away from ministerial Armenia and established a separate shahr (administrative unit) becoming directly subject to the authority of the viceroy of Kusti Kapkoh (the seat in Gandzak). The Persian king was very satisfied with this situation, and Artsakh was eventually annexed to Syounik. The district of Haband (in Artsakh) soon became the centre of Vahan's kingdom. This is mentioned by Anania Shirakatsi in his *Ashkharatsoyts*. Later, Haband was called "Sisakan-Vostan" and the united shahr-kingdom of Syunik and Artsakh was known to the Sassanids as "Sisakan"¹⁷². In the *History of Sebeus*, in the dialogue recorded between Theodoros Rshtouni and Muavia, Armenia and Syunik (including Artsakh-V.B.) were referred to as separate lands. However, recounting the Arab conquests, Sebeus noted that the Armenian lands, Albania and Syunik were plundered. It is also important to note that in many historiographical works, the names "Pokr Syunik" or "Syunyats Erkrord" refer to Artsakh¹⁷³. "Sisakan Vostan" had the status of a separate land for about 83 years (571-654). The Sassanid court

accepted the political importance of "Sisakan" because the prince of this new administrative unit kept Tchora Pahak and the fortifications of Derbend under his strict supervision. The Sisakan troops thus gained a very good reputation¹⁷⁴.

As a result of the Arab conquests, new political conditions were created in the region of Asia Front. Thus parts of the Armenian lands that were under Persia and Byzantine hegemony were united for a short time and ruled by Hamazasp Mamikonyan (654-661). Chronicler Sebeus wrote about this reunification of Syounik, Artsakh and Armenia¹⁷⁵. In fact, in the second half of the seventh century, this Armenian prince ruled the following provinces of Metz Haik (Greater Armenia): Ayrarat, Syunik, Artsakh, Vaspurakan, Mokc Turuberan, Tayk, Tashir in Gugark province, the mountainous parts of Aghdznik and Korjayk.

THE HUN OR KHAZAR INVASIONS. During the seventh century, Artsakh witnessed hardship and great changes. At the beginning of the seventh century, the tribes living in the north of the Caucasian mountain range broke through the Tchora Pahak and Alanats gates and entered the Transcaucasus, spreading death and destruction in the villages and towns. From the 1st century AD, these tribes were known to the peoples of the Transcaucasus as Huns. But the Armenian historiographers also called them khazir¹⁷⁶ or khazar. Initially, they entered the Transcaucasus in the middle of the sixth century and devastated the region on the right bank of the Kur, but did not reach any of the Armenian lands.

The khazar invasions of the Transcaucasus peaked at the beginning of the seventh century when the Persian-Byzantine conflict entered a new era. After the murder of Emperor Mauricius, Pocas took advantage of the rebellion against Khosrov Parvez and started an outright war against the Byzantine Empire in 602. The military actions first began in northern Mesopotamia and only afterwards in the central provinces of Armenia. The war between Persia and Byzantium (608-616) ended by the establishment of

Persian domination over the vast territories of Mesopotamia, Assyria, Armenia, Asia Minor, Palestine and Egypt¹⁷⁷.

In 610 Pocas was dethroned and killed in Byzantium. The throne was then passed on to Heracles (610-641). The new emperor was able to reconstitute efficient troops in order to save his empire and in 622 resumed military actions with a new fervour. While in pursuit of the Persian king Khosrov, the imperial troops ruined Atrpatakan. Then Byzantines reached Utik and Artsakh and seized Partav¹⁷⁸. The princes and the peaceful population of the eastern provinces withdrew to the fortresses of Artsakh. The Byzantine troops set up their camps on the banks of the Tartar, near Gyutakan village¹⁷⁹.

Khosrov, the Persian king decided to encircle the Byzantines and attack them. On his orders, one of his commanders, Shahr Varaz, marched past the field of Sharur which is in the extreme south of Ayrarat, then through the provinces of Syunik, Vayots Dzor, Gegharkunik, Sodk, Parisos-Gardman and then established his camp near "Myus Tigranakert"¹⁸⁰. Khosrov's plan was to hinder the Byzantines from advancing into Georgia and penetrating western Armenia. On the other hand, another Persian regiment led by Shahen reached the left bank of the Kur, to the town of Artsakhian Tigranakert, located between Khachenaget and Karkar¹⁸¹.

Under these circumstances, Heracles took the decision to attack the troops of Shahen. In 621 the emperor defeated the Persians and his troops even reached Syunik-Nakhijevan through Berdadzor in Artsakh¹⁸². Nevertheless, the Byzantine forces were eventually defeated in western Armenia and suffered a humiliating retreat.

The military actions resumed in 626. The two sides succeeded in acquiring allies. Khosrov persuaded the Khakan of the Avar tribe to march towards Constantinople. Heracles, on the other hand, managed to establish an alliance with the Huns. "And by order of Heracles the wild hordes of Khazars attacked our land",

wrote M. Kaghankatvatsi¹⁸³. The chronicler described the horrible plunders of Utik and Artsakh. The tribes of the Khazars or Huns captured Partav and killed many people near the village of Kaghankatuyk. Those who fled from Utik hid in the mountains and impregnable castles of Artsakh.

The Byzantine emperor again hurried to the Transcaucasus to join the Hun hordes of Jebu khan. These troops soon assaulted Tpghis. However, the defenders managed to save the beauty of that picturesque town. But the following year Tpghis was again attacked by the united forces of Khakan and Heracles. After two months of resistance, the town fell. The enemy massacred the unprotected population, blinded the vice-regent of Georgia because he had caricatured Khakan as a blind person in the form of a pumpkin. The allies then continued towards the eastern provinces of Armenia. This time the invasion was led by Shat, the son of Jebu Khakan, who was ordered to kill all males above the age of 15 and to take all the children and females as captives if they showed any resistance¹⁸⁴.

At this fateful moment, the Persian governor of the eastern provinces abandoned the people and fled to Persia. The Huns spread death and destruction everywhere. "Smoke covered the land. Wherever you went you could hear the supplications of widows and orphans. People who became victims of hunger and thirst, surrendered to the enemy. Some ran into the woods terrified of the enemy and became victims of venomous snakes"¹⁸⁵.

It was at this time that Viro, the 25 year old patriarch of Albania tried to negotiate with the Khazars to put an end to their cruelty. At first all his attempts were in vain; so finding no other alternative, the patriarch gathered the secular and ecclesiastic leaders at Charaberd/Jraberd and suggested bribing Shat. Viro, with his delegation, took the collected treasures and jewelry and went to the camp of Shat on the bank of the Tartar, north of Partav.

The bribe was accepted and kept Shat satisfied for some time. The captives were set free and the son of Khakan promised not to

attack the country, but demanded taxes. In spite of this promise, the Huns organized another invasion of the Transcaucasus in 630, bringing new devastation to the land. Those terrible invasions exhausted the wealth of the country. The once fertile fields and orchards became deserts. The land plunged into hunger, plague and death. People were forced to eat anything they could find - the meat of dead animals, leaves and leather. This made many ill, and many died. When the spring came, the survivors went out to the fields to eat grass, but on such an inadequate diet, they continued to suffer from fatal diseases. The land became a huge cemetery covered with the unburied corpses of the deceased¹⁸⁶.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN ARTSAKH FROM THE 30s OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY TO THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINTH CENTURY

THE INSURRECTIONS OF THE ARMENIANS OF ARTSAKH AGAINST THE ARABS. The peace of the Armenian mountainous lands was disturbed again by the deadly invasions of the Arabs. The Byzantine Empire having abandoned them, the Armenians realized that it was senseless to resist the Arab invaders. Theodore Rshtuni, who was a wise statesman, signed a peace treaty in 652 recognizing the authority of the Arab Caliphate¹⁸⁷.

The situation changed after the death of Theodore Rshtuni when Hamazasp Mamikonyan, his son-in-law, was elected as the Armenian ruler of the country. The period of his rule (651-661) brought only peace and prosperity to people. Hamazasp Mamikonyan united under his rule almost all the provinces of Metz Haik, including the principalities of Syunik and Artsakh¹⁸⁸.

Jivanshir (one of the brightest princes of the Myhranyan dynasty) recognized the sovereign power of Hamazasp Mamikonyan, who ruled the largest states of Metz Haik such as Ayrarat, Syunik, Artsakh, Vaspurakan, Mokc, Turuberan, Tayk, Tashir in Gugark, the mountainous parts of Aghdznik and Kortchayk. Bardzr Haik and Chorrord Haik were still ruled by the Arabs because of their strategic location in their fight against the Byzantine Empire¹⁸⁹.

In 661 Grigor Mamikonyan came to power and under his rule (661-686), Armenia refused to pay taxes to the Arabs. However, the mighty Caliphate did not tolerate the attempts of reviving the independent Armenian statehood. Thus, from time to time they made their presence known to the Armenians by appearing at their borders with their troops.

In the eastern provinces, Armenians tried to resist the Arab

incursions first by force and then through diplomatic means. Jivanshir, like Theodore Rshtuni, led a flexible policy in order to weaken the anti-Armenian policies of the Caliph. For this purpose he left for Damascus where he was regally welcomed. Then Muavia (the ruler of Assyria and Upper Mesopotamia) appointed Jivanshir as the prince and ruler of the eastern principalities. He also simultaneously became the mediator in establishing friendly relations between the Arabs and the Huns. Muavia offered precious gifts to the prince and saw him off solemnly. Upon his return, Jivanshir was welcomed in the town of Aruj by Grigor Mamikonyan and Patriarch Anastas.

In order to gain the absolute trust of the Arabs, Jivanshir visited the Caliph again in 671¹⁹⁰. According to many chroniclers, the Caliph received Jivanshir with all kinds of honors and words of praise. He gave many valuable presents to the Armenian prince, among them a parrot and an elephant. Then he offered Jivanshir the position of ruler of Atrpatakan and Syunestanyants but the prince declined¹⁹¹. In spite of the friendly relations between the Arstakh prince and the Caliph, the struggle against Arab domination continued in Armenia (Artsakh) for centuries to come.

According to sources, in the ninth century, the anti-Arab movement in the north-eastern part of Armenia was led by Sahl Smbatyan Aranshahik. In 821 the Arabs started their assault on Artsakh from Partav, advancing later deep into the territory up to Amaras. They took one thousand captives and fortified their position at the castle of Shikakar. "And the brave and handsome Sahl Smbatyan, with his brothers and troops, attacked the enemy at daybreak and set the captives free"¹⁹². The next battle with the Arab army of 12000 took place in the field of Mukhank. "There Sahl Smbatyan, from the Zarmihrakan royal family, swooped on the enemy, like an eagle attacking disabled birds, and killed most of them, making the others flee"¹⁹³.

The atmosphere of discord and mutiny that reigned in the Arab Caliphate throughout the first half of the ninth century enabled the

lands under its yoke to strive for independence. In Armenia, the Bagratuni dynasty grew in force and influence, and starting from the middle of the ninth century, refused to pay taxes. The north-eastern provinces were ruled by several princely dynasties from Syunik, Utik and Artsakh. The Arabs were unwilling to accept this new state of affairs and in 850 Caliph Mutavakil (847-861) sent an inspector called Abu Said to Armenia where he put the land under heavy taxation. He added a new tax called "gizya" to the former list of heavy taxes. "Gizya" was a type of tax collected from non-Muslims only. It was impossible to bear this situation and the Armenians, together with the princely families of the Artsruni (Vaspurakan) and Bagratuni (Taron), organized an insurrection. In Moush, the rebels, led by Khutetsi Hovhan and the Bagratuni (Bagratid) princes, defeated the Arab troops sent to suppress the rebellion. Yusuf, the new Arab inspector ran away from the fight and hid in the dome of Prkich church; but he was killed with an arrow shot by one of the Armenians. The Arabs having been shamefully defeated, sought revenge. Soon the Arabs sent Bugha Sharabi with his 200000 troops to Armenia and the Transcaucasus*. He turned Sasun, Vaspurakan, Rshtunik and Mokc into a sea of blood. The same fate awaited Eastern Georgia with its capital Tpghis (Tiflis). Only the tribes (called Tsanars) that lived in Cakhet, on the slopes of the Caucasian mountain range, could defeat Bugha, who had to flee the battlefield.

From Cakhet, Bugha moved to the field of Gugark, then to Partav, Utik and Artsakh and arrested Ktrij, the prince of Gardman, Atrnerseh and his father Sahl Smbatyan of Khachen¹⁹⁴.

However, the deadly march of Bugha was stopped by the prince of Dizak, Abu-Muse, who relied on his brave warriors and

* Bugha was one of the slaves of Caliph Mutavakil, but the caliph saw his talent of warrior and set him free. Then Bugha organized a mercenary army and became the most influential military figure in the country. Stepanos Con, the prince of mountainous Utik¹⁹⁵.

on the impregnability of his land's castles and strongholds. The troops of the prince as well as the people from all neighboring villages gathered in a castle called Ktish (Gtich)*. In answer to Bugha's demands of obedience, Prince Yesayi Abu-Muse sent him a letter. Chronicler Tovma Artsruni describes the details of the letter in his work. This is the approximate content of the letter: "It is common for a caliph to take care of his subjects, to ease their hardship and relieve their pains. And what have you done? Have you come here from the Caliph's court with good intentions? You have only brought death and destruction with you. Thus I tell you that as long as I am alive and have enough strength, I shall fight you with the help of God. You will not be welcomed in this land, but you will be confronted with arms, arrows and daggers. If you and your men want to live, then leave my land. But if you are eager to die because of your rage, if you want to become food for the animals and birds, then come, I am ready to fight you. I consider it sacred to kill the enemies of God. I am willing to kill you like Moses killed Amaghek and David Goliath. Both peace and war are in your hands. If you move away, there will be peace, if not, there will be war between us. You will be our target and I, the shooter; you will be my enemy, I, the winner, you, the reed and dry grass, I, the fire, easily scorching you, you, a flower, I, a wild wind, you, a construction without basis, I, a destructive flood, you will be the toy, I, the child playing with your might and pride, you, a wild animal, I, the hunter, you, a bird, I, a trap, you will be the sea monster, I, a hook in your throat. I shall indeed make all this come

* Today one can see the remnants of the castle. The northern part of the castle is secretly connected with the outside world. The builders of the castle made provisions for a good supply of water; they dug deep and wide holes, "refrigerators", where the gathered snow was stocked and used as clean water in the summer. Besides these, there were storage pools inside the castle which got filled with rain water. These artificial pools were additional reserves of water for the castle.

For more information see *The architectural monuments of Artsakh* by Sh. Mkrtchyan. Yerevan, 1985, p. 90-92.

true if you do not heed my words and with your troops leave my land"¹⁹⁶.

According to many sources Yesayi was "the son of a priest". In spite of this fact, he was a courageous fighter and was never defeated. Acknowledging the threats of the prince, Bugha began serious preparations for the assault. He raised ramparts opposite the castle, ordered his men to gather huge heaps of stone and located stone-throwing machines there. Thus began the siege of the castle which lasted a year. During this time Bugha attacked the castle twenty-eight times and every time retreated shamefully. These failures reluctantly forced the Arabs to put up their tents around the castle thus forming a kind of tent settlement. According to chronicler Tovma Artsruni, all those defeats made Bugha furious; he isolated himself in his tent for long periods. Being afraid of the brave heroes of Dizak, he ordered his best men to guard him. Only sparapet Smbat, one of the Armenian ministers, who was a traitor, managed to enter the tent and calm the warrior down. Meanwhile, the Caliph was demanding the quick defeat of the defenders of the castle. The military hostilities resumed with a ferocious intensity. This last time the whole of the Muslim army took part in the attack. The scene of the battle was so horrid that it shocked Moushegh, the son of sparapet Smbat. He compared this battle scene to the second coming of Christ and Doomsday¹⁹⁷. Even the participation of the thousands of mercenary soldiers did not help Bugha and he was again defeated. The defenders of Gtich returned victorious from this battle. It is interesting to note that during these very difficult times, the men of Yesayi Abu-Muse managed to build a new church in the place of an old one, which they called Tezh* (In Armenian tezh

* Nowadays the church sits at the edge of a precipice, much admired by people who visit it. It is one more example of the struggling spirit of the Armenian nation and the talent of its architects.

means hot, heated. The church was so called because it was built under very strenuous conditions). In 855 Bugha was called back by the Caliph to Baghdad from where he sent a letter to Yesayi Abu-Muse asking him to come to Baghdad and conclude a peace treaty. Prince Yesayi was very brave, but very naïve at the same time. There in the Arab land, he was first received with honours but soon afterwards was taken to a prison where he died without seeing his homeland ever again.

The defense of Gtich is one of the heroic episodes of the history of the Armenian struggle. Leo, the great chronicler, writes, "the movement led by Yesayi Abu-Muse was the only consolation in those bloody days"¹⁹⁸. Another chronicler, Tovma Artsruni considered Yesayi Abu-Muse to be more important than all the princes of the Artsruni or other princely/ministerial dynasties. There is a church, built of rough stone, on the boulder of Gtich citadel; the locals still call it "Yerizu vordi" which means "son of the priest". To conclude, it is important to note that the struggle against Arab domination was not in vain. It indeed led to the revival of Armenian independence.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE PERSIAN MIHRANYAN DYNASTY AND THE ARANSHAHIS. In the seventh century the numerous invasions of various tribes, and the anti-Armenian intrigues of the Arabs exhausted the vital resources of the eastern provinces of Armenia and paved the way for the establishment and rule of the Persian Mihranyan dynasty in Artsakh and Utik. This dynasty kept the land in a troubled and disorganized state for about two centuries.

It all started at the beginning of the seventh century when Mihran, one of the members of the dynasty of King Khosrov II (Parvez) ran away from Persia, fearing the king's revenge (Mihran had a hand in the death of the king's father). He reached Gardman with 30000 families. There he implemented his plot to kill the 12

ruling Aranshahiks and thus became the master of the land.

After Mihran, came his son Aramayel, then Vard and then Kaj Vartan (Brave Vartan). During a feast, the latter killed 60 Aranshahik princes (except his son-in-law Armihir Aranshahik) and became the ruler of the whole principality. To strengthen his power and position, he built the castle of Gardman. Though the Aranshahiks were forced out of Gardman, they did not stop the struggle to free their homeland.

There were many bloody episodes during the rule of Myhranyan dynasty but there were also a few short periods of peaceful co-existence. The culture and religion of the Armenian land influenced some of these Persian rulers, such as Varaz, his sons Grigor and Jivanshir, who even adopted Christianity.

The rule of Jivanshir, one of the outstanding representatives of the Myhranyan dynasty, was marked by progress and prosperity in the land. He governed the Armenian country using Armenian values and laws. It is no surprise that he married the daughter of the Sisakan prince. He led a balanced policy maintaining good relations with the neighbouring lands and keeping the borders safe. Jivanshir recognized the supremacy of the Persian king but at times fought against him. King Hazkert even called him the sparapet of Albania for all his heroic deeds¹⁹⁹. The authority of Jivanshir grew because he was trying to attain the same glory and power that Vachagan the Pious had had. He defeated the Persian troops when they entered the country, near Kur, in a village of the Kambejan region.

Due to his reconciliatory policy, Jivanshir succeeded in keeping friendly relations with the Byzantines, Arabs, Huns and Persians. For this purpose he left for Vagharshapat to meet the emperor of Byzantium²⁰⁰. Jivanshir also came to terms with Khakan, the leader of Huns. When these tribes had reached the Transcaucasus and were getting near the borders of Utik and Artsakh, it was him who crossed River Kur and signed a friendship

and peace treaty after asking Khakan's daughter's hand in marriage. Thanks to this new friendship about 1200 captives, 120000 sheep²⁰¹, 7000 horses and bull-calves were returned to the eastern provinces. He also reduced the number of taxes in order to secure the economic advancement of the country. Jivanshir also led the country wisely. He resisted the Arab and Persian cultural influences by building churches and schools. Mesrop Mashtots's sacred cross, found in Gis under his orders, was transferred to a church with great pomp and ceremony²⁰². During the rule of Jivanshir, cultural life in Armenian Albania also progressed.

Instead of maintaining a long peaceful co-existence with the Myhranyan dynasty, the Aranshahiks never forgot that the Myhranyans had usurped their former power and sought ways of reestablishing it. Thus, one of the Aranshahik princes stabbed Jivanshir during a walk in his Partav garden after a feast. The murderer fled to Artsakh, where the persecutors failed to arrest him, but set his father's house on fire²⁰³.

After the murder of Jivanshir, his nephew Varaz-Trdat came to power. The Huns took the death of Jivanshir as an opportunity to attack the country. Varaz-Trdat wanted to save the country from imminent destruction and therefore sent a delegation headed by Patriarch Yeghiazar to the Huns, promising to pay them taxes. The country was in danger from another quarter. In 705, the Byzantine Emperor, Justinian, tried to impose taxes on the eastern provinces of Armenia. Consequently, he invited Varaz-Trdat and his two sons to Constantinople for negotiations. In fact the negotiations were just a pretext, for as soon as they arrived, the Emperor imprisoned them²⁰⁴. After five years of imprisonment the Byzantine Emperor set only Varaz-Trdat free. Upon his return to Artsakh, he had to deal with another dangerous situation and under desperate circumstances; Varaz-Trdat had to accept Arab domination once more.

In the eight century the repeated attacks and invasions of the northern Caucasian tribes, the Byzantines, and the Arabs exhausted the eastern provinces and led to the fall of the Myhranyan dynasty. At the beginning of the ninth century, Stepanos, the last Myhranyan prince was killed in the valley of Tartar, near Dadivank. Then the mother of the murdered prince took her daughter, Princess Spram to the castle of Khachen. There she asked the Aranshahik prince, the son of Sahl Smbatyan, to marry her - the last member of the Myhranyan dynasty.

ARTSAKH UNDER THE RULE OF THE BAGRATID (BAGRATUNI) DYNASTY

The anti-Arab uprising of the Armenian people were not in vain; they resulted in the reestablishment of Armenian independence. In 885 the Arab Caliphate recognized Ashot I Bagratid as the supreme ruler of Metz Haik and Artsakhmur once again joined it.

All the Arab sources dating back to the 9-10th centuries give evidence to the fact that all the towns located on the route from Partav to Dvin belonged to the kingdom of Ashot Bagratid²⁰⁵. The contemporary Armenian historians state that the princes of Artsakh accepted the supremacy of Ashot²⁰⁶. Not long after the Bagratids took power, a number of principalities appeared in the provinces of Armenia. According to most historians, this was due to the decentralized nature of the land and the princely dynasties.

In fact the Bagratid dynasty tried to gain the confidence of the Armenian ministerial houses or nobility by fortifying the provincial principalities, especially those located at border-zones. They always considered it important to keep good relations with the nobility. That is why all the principalities agreed to recognize Ashot I as the sovereign ruler of the Armenian lands.

Indeed the Bagratid dynasty managed to unite almost all of Armenia under its rule and to create a confederation-like state. This enabled the provincial rulers, including the principalities of Artsakh, to regulate the political, economic, and cultural aspects of their domains in an autonomous fashion.

THE PRINCIPALITY OF KHACHEN. In the first half of the ninth century the principality of Khachen (centre - Khachen Castle) was created in the western and northern parts of Artsakh. Sahl Smbatyan, the prince of Khachen, won many victories over the Arabs and extended his rule over the basin of Lake Sevan. Under his rule the borders of the principality stretched from the

eastern bank of the Sevan to the field of Mukhank (present-day districts of Martakert, Shahoumyan, Karvajar, Khashatagh, Shoushi, part of the Martouni and Askeran districts of NKR and the eastern parts of Gegharkunik district in RA).

The Khachen principality included almost all of Artsakh. During the last years of Prince Sahl's life, his sons Hovhannes and Atrnerseh ruled the lands of Khachen; Hovhannes ruled Lower Khachen, that is the right bank of the Tartar and the basin of Khachen river, and Atrnerseh - Upper Khachen²⁰⁷. In spite of their equal ranks, Atrnerseh recognized the supremacy of his elder brother, Hovhannes, which can be found in an inscription of the Hakoba Church, dating back to 853, which states clearly that Hovhannes was the chief prince of Armenian Albania²⁰⁸. However, in 855 Bugha deported a lot of Armenian princes to Arabia, Sahl Smbatyan and his two sons being among them. Only Atrnerseh survived the deportation and returned. He then ruled the whole territory.

In the last decades of the ninth century, under the rule of Grigor Aranshahik, the son of Atrnerseh, the principality of Khachen became more powerful and influential. It dominated the territory of Kambejan that lay beyond the Kur²⁰⁹. In the west, the lands of Grigor stretched to the eastern banks of the Sevan, and to Metz Mazra, in the east, bordering Persia.

In Arab sources, Grigor is referred to as Hamam, which is the Arabic translation of the name "Grigor" (Grigor means "alert" and in Arabic alert is "hamam")²¹⁰; thus Hamam Barepasht is the same as Grigor Aranshahik. The prince of Armenian Albania was independent but recognized the supremacy of the Bagratid dynasty who ruled the territories in the west.

Under the leadership of the princely Aranshahik family, Khachen experienced great political, economic and cultural development. On the right bank of the Tartar, Grigor built Havkakhghats Castle, which became the episcopal residence. A number of chapels, impregnable fortresses, such as the

Kachaghakaberd, Khokhanaberd, Levonaberd, and Jraberd were built in Khachen.

Grigor Aranshahik, who ran his principality wisely, also behaved wisely with his neighbours. Many historical documents mention the fact that Grigor Aranshahik had close friendship ties with Constantine, the Byzantine Emperor (10th century). The letters of the Emperor were addressed to "The Prince of Hayastan-Khachen"²¹¹. Hamam Barepasht was also respected by the Arab Caliph. The fact that Grigor helped secure the release of the Armenian Catholicos, Gevorg II Garnetsi, whom the Arabs had taken captive, attests to this reality²¹².

Grigor Hamam had five sons - Apulin, Atrnerseh, Sahak Sevada, Smbat and Vasak, who tore up the principality of their father to bits. There was a struggle amongst the brothers and it was so fierce that Smbat killed his elder brother Apulin²¹³.

In 910 Atrnerseh, another of Hamam's sons, founded the principality of Kambejan-Shaki on the left bank of the Kur River²¹⁴. He ruled the territory up to the middle of the tenth century. After him his son, Ishkhanak came to power. He surrendered to the intrigues of his mother, the sister of the Georgian King. Consequently, he turned away from the Armenian Church doctrine by accepting the doctrine of Chalcedon and imposing it on his subjects; he thus cut himself off completely from his Armenian roots²¹⁵. The Armenian principalities ruled by Sahak Sevada, Smbat and Vasak, on the other hand, continued the struggle of preserving their unique identity.

The bravest and the most intelligent son of Grigor was Sahak Sevada, who ruled the territories of mountainous Parisos, as well as Gardman and Dzoraget²¹⁶. In order to have a close relationship with the central Armenian kingdom, Sahak Sevada asked Smbat, the prince of Syunik to marry his elder daughter, Shahandukht, and the Bagratid king Ashot II Yerkat to marry his younger daughter. This was a very wise move on his part which prompted Catholicos Hovhannes to consider him the "grand

prince Sahak" who was "very wise"²¹⁷.

Ashot II Yerkat was very aggressive towards the Armenian princes and ministers, and Sahak, who was just, could not tolerate this attitude. First a disagreement sprang up between them, which later developed into an armed conflict. Sahak Sevada and his son Grigor were defeated. For Ashot, the Bagratid king, this was not enough punishment, so he blinded them both ²¹⁸. The Armenian princes and ministers did not forgive Ashot II this cruelty and abandoned him in his struggle against the Arabs. Meanwhile, Smbat and Vasak were ruling Khachen, Smbat the Lower and Vasak the upper territories.

During the 12-13th centuries, the descendants of the five princes ruled different parts of the Armenian mountainous country. Some of these include the Vakhtangyans (Haterk), the Vakhtang-Zakaryans (Khokhanabert), the princes of Gerakar, the Desumyans, the Dlenyans and the Khaghbakyan-Proshyans. During the reign of the Zakaryan dynasty, the latter were the princes of Syunik and one part of Ayrarat.

THE PRINCIPALITY OF PARISOS. This principality could be considered one of the most stable and influential state units that existed in Artsakh under the rule of the Bagratid family. The grandson of Sahak Sevada, Hovhannes Senekerim, founded the kingdom of Parisos on the basis of the one that had existed in the 10th century under his grandfather. The territory of this principality stretched along the basin of Shamkor river, the slopes of the Karabakh mountain range northwards and westwards to Shamkor and bordered the river Kur in the north. The Persian royal court and Byzantine Emperor as well as the princes of Gardmank, Dzoraget and Utik²¹⁹ recognized Hovhannes Senekerim as the ruler of Parisos. The prince had close connections with Melik-Shah who resided in Atrpatakan. He expanded the territory, led it to prosperity, built churches, and developed the culture. The centre of the principality was Parisos town. Hovhannes

Senekerim rebuilt the town of Parisos (first built in the early eighth century)²²⁰ and fortified it with impregnable castles and towers. The castle town of Parisos was located on the Shamkhor river, near Calacend²²¹.

The mighty principality of Parisos was envied by its neighbours, especially the Georgian kingdom, the Bagratid family of Ani and the Muslim emirate of Gandzak. Hovhannes Senekerim and his brother Grigor died in 1003. Taking advantage of this, Gagik Bagratid concluded an alliance with Padlun, the emir of Gandzak and tried to divide the territory of Parisos between them²²². However, he failed to do this as Philippe, the son of Grigor, ascended the throne. The principality continued to survive independently but its position became less tenable. This was the result of constant pressure from the Padlunyan Muslim Emirate that was founded in Gandzak in the 70s of the tenth century and had originated from the Iranian-Kurdish Shedadyans. This was the first Muslim administrative unit that violated the unity of the eastern provinces of Armenia. According to some chroniclers, several Armenian princes contributed to the success of the Padlunyans²²³. These soon robbed the Aranshahik princes of the best lands of Artsakh and Utik.

Padlun, the emir of Gandzak occupied the northern provinces of Artsakh. Philippe paid him a friendly visit in order to try and save his lands from danger. But Padlun arrested the prince. According to chronicler Vartan, this incidence occurred in 1044²²⁴.

Thus Parisos, one of the mightiest Armenian principalities came to an end. Part of the Aranshahiks had to resettle in other parts of the territory. One such Aranshahik was Oshin, who had ruled in the Mayreatsajur area near Gandzak. He eventually became the master of Lambron Castle and its surrounding territories in Cilicia. Hetum I was one of the descendants of Oshin and he founded the royal dynasty of the Hetumyans in Cilicia²²⁵.

Although the principality of Parisos collapsed and died, its legacy did not. It was rooted in its people and spread to other

provinces by the new branches of the Aranshahik family. It is known that one of the daughters of Sahak Sevada, Shahandukht, was given in marriage to Kapan and Senekerim's sister was the wife of Mushegh Bagratid.

THE PRINCIPALITY OF DIZAK. At the end of the eighth century one of the Aranshahiks ruled the southern provinces of Artsakh. The principality of Dizak began to prosper with the rule of Yesayi Abu-Muse (the first half of the ninth century). He united the whole of Dizak and part of the Varanda province. Prince Yesayi also took possession of the estates that had belonged to the Myhranyan dynasty²²⁶. Having a significant military power, Prince Yesayi-Abu Muse resisted the numerous attacks of Arabs and other enemies.

As previously mentioned, in 855, Prince Yesayi was invited to Baghdad and treacherously killed. Movses, his son, became the ruler (Abu Muse means 'father of Muse (Moses)' in Arabic). According to the laws of Artsakh of that time, members of princely families had the right to rule different parts of the country if they had the power to do so. Gagik and Vachagan, the sons of Movses, thus became the rulers of Dizak.

Many historical records and inscriptions mention that the centre of Dizak principality was Tumi (a village in present-day Hadrout district). The cemetery of Dizak princes is in Tumi. Not far from it one can see the remnants of a building, which people call the "royal palace" and a tomb stone which according to the historian Makar Barkhudaryan was placed on the grave of King Gagik²²⁷. A "royal fountain" was built to the north of the "royal palace". This is still preserved in its original state.

The evidence that the principality really existed in the southern part of Artsakh can be found in the inscription found on the window-arch of Karmir Eghtsi church in Tumi. It is the following: "In 1000 AD, in the reign of King Gagik, the son of Mushegh, and Sophia, the daughter of Mushegh, this house of God was built".

Today, part of the arch with the inscription is kept at the Artsakh State Museum of History and Country Studies. One more inscription with the mention of Gagik as the Albanian prince of princes was found in Verin Taghavard (Varanda), on the stone cross (khachkar) of Jukht-Paravatsar²²⁸.

Gtich (Ktish), the main castle of Dizak principality is located between the villages of Tumi and Togh, on mount Toghasar. After Gagik, his brother Vachagan became the ruler of Dizak. The Arab historians knew him as "Vashaghia ibn Musa²²⁹, the master of Goroz", that is "Son of Movses, master of Goroz". The principality of Vachagan was recognized by the all-Armenian Catholicos Anania Mocatsi.

It is important to mention that the principalities of Khachen, Parisos and Dizak had close ties with each other; in trying to solve their problems, they united their efforts. One of the best examples of this unity was their fight against heretics²³⁰.

ARTSAKH AND THE SELJUK-TURKS

In the eleventh century, the Seljuk-Turkish invasions interfered with the peaceful and prosperous life of the Artsakhian principalities. The Seljuk-Turks created new historical circumstances and the fate of the Armenian nation depended on these to a great extent.

These Turkic tribes came from the northern parts of China. In the second half of the tenth century, most of the Turkish-speaking tribes united and their leader, Seljuk, eventually founded an empire, resulting from aggressive conquests.

In the 40s of the eleventh century, the Seljuks began their invasions of Iran, Iraq, the Transcaucasus and Asia Minor (including Armenia). Under the leadership of Tughril Bek (1025-1063) the Seljuks ruined and devastated the central, eastern and southern parts of Armenia, not yet reaching the eastern provinces of Armenia. In 1064 when the leader of the empire was Sultan Alpaslan, numerous Seljuk-Turkish troops crossed the Araks and entered Nakhijevan from where troops led by Melikshah, the son of the sultan, were sent to the central parts of Armenia. The sultan then moved towards Georgia²³¹. On his way, Alpaslan massacred the populations of Artsakh and Utik and plundered and ruined Albania²³².

During the rule of Alpaslan (1036-1072), the whole of Armenia and the vast territories of Asia Minor had already been occupied and destroyed. Armenian and non-Armenian historians have written much about the horrifying conquests of the Seljuks. As one contemporary historian reported, after the occupation of Ani, Alpaslan even swam in the blood of the dead captives in order to terrify the Armenian population²³³.

Under the rule of Melikshah, Seljuk-Turks settled in Asia Minor. The coffers of this vast empire were empty. This gave the opportunity to the conquered people to revive their economy. Melikshah had a tolerant policy towards the principalities of the

Armenian eastern provinces, especially those of Baghink and Khachen²³⁴. This is the reason why the villages and towns of the Armenian north-eastern provinces were rebuilt and taxes were fewer. New structures were also erected at this time in the eastern provinces.

However, the death of Melikshah created a real chaos in the country. His sons, brothers and other members of the royal family started a bloody struggle for the throne, which resulted in a change of the political map of the Seljuk Empire. It was divided into many large and small principalities and emirates. Several small principalities and a large number of newly created Seljuk-Turkish emirates divided Armenia into small bits.

One of the most powerful Seljuk emirates was that of the Yeltkuzyans in Atrpatakan. They gradually turkified Atrpatakan. Initially, the capital was Yekbatan (Hamadan) and then it was moved to Davrezh (Tabriz). The Eltkuzyans subjugated not only Atrpatakan but also Utik, including the towns of Partav, Baylakan and Gandzak. They also took Nakhijevan and continued their assault upon Syunik, Artsakh, Dvin, and Ani²³⁵.

As a result of Seljuk conquests, the ethnic structure of Asia Front changed considerably. This had a devastating effect on the ancient peoples of the East, such as the Greeks, Armenians, Persians, Assyrians and others. Many of the regions of Asia Minor were gradually turkified.

At the end of the eleventh century, the Seljuk-Turks made many attempts to conquer the mountainous provinces of Artsakh. Under these conditions Ter-Stepanos, the Patriarch of Albania moved to Syunik²³⁶.

The situation in the Armenian lands was made worse by an earthquake that took place on September 30, 1139. Mkhitar Gosh wrote, "The earthquake caused destruction in Parisos and Khachen. The capital of Gandzak sank in a precipice. In the mountainous parts many palaces, villages, and churches turned into ruins and fell on the heads of the people"²³⁷. Chronicler

Kiracos Gandzaketsi wrote, "The earthquake made Mountain Alharac fall and block the gorge, forming a lake (present-day Gyol-gyol or Kapuyt Lake-V.B.)"²³⁸.

This natural disaster was followed by the Seljuks overrunning Khachen. In 1142 the emir of Gandzak attacked the settlements of the Tartar valley. A year later, Emir Cholin entered Khachen and destroyed the castles and churches of the province, killed the population, took many captives and left for Persia with a rich booty²³⁹.

Cholin repeated his attack on Khachen. This time he failed to occupy the castle, but plundered the settlements and churches situated near the castle. He set Dadi Vank on fire²⁴⁰. The incursions into Artsakh and Syunik became more frequent and more horrifying when, in the 12th century, the Yeltkuzyan or Pahlavanyan dynasty took over the viceregency of Gandzak.

The king of Syunik who had no male heir, gave his daughter, Kata, in marriage to Hasan Gerakaretsi, the prince of Khachen, and made him the crown prince of Syunik²⁴¹. Hasan tried to cooperate with the Georgians to save his kingdom. However, it was impossible to resist the military might of the Seljuks. In 1170 the Seljuks besieged Bagh Castle (Baghaberd), the last stronghold of the kingdom. Prince Hasan Gerakaretsi was obliged to flee at night with his family, leaving his paternal estates behind. Not long after, the Seljuks occupied the castle of Bagh and razed it to the ground. Thus many valuables (about 10000 manuscripts²⁴²), expensive church sets, and holy relics were lost.

After the collapse of Syunik, the principality of Khachen was divided into three regions. The centre of the first region was Khokhanaberd, near Gandzasar, the centre of the second was Haterk Castle, which is situated on the left bank of the Tartar, and the centre of the third was Handaberd in Tsar province. A similar political situation prevailed in Artsakh when the Armenian and Georgian troops, with the Zakarians at their helm, began the liberation of the north-eastern provinces of Armenia.

ARTSAKH UNDER THE RULE OF THE ZAKARYAN DYNASTY

In parallel with the gradual exhaustion and down-fall of the Seljuk-Turkish Empire, the kingdom of Georgia was strengthening and gaining influence. Meanwhile the Armenians were still under the yoke of the Seljuk-Turks.

One branch of the Armenian Bagratids which was ruling in a part of Georgia realized the necessity of Armenian-Georgian close friendship .

The Armenians needed the help of the Georgians for getting rid of the Seljuk hegemony, whereas the Georgians lacked a loyal and serious ally in Georgian-Seljuk rivalry and for preserving a political dominance in Transcaucasus.

The Armenian princes, who served to the Georgian royal court, especially the representatives of the famous Zakaryan dynasty contributed greatly to the making of the Armenian-Georgian military-political cooperation more serious and efficient. They took the honour and responsibility of leading the liberation movement of the Armenian north-eastern provinces thus securing the revival of the Armenian statehood.

The intensity of the Armenian liberation movement of the 90s (12th cent.) was conditioned by the activities of brothers Zakare and Ivane Zakaryans, the sons of Sargis, the commander of the Georgian-Armenian troops. Chronicler Kirakos Gandzaketsi wrote the following about the brothers, "They were brave and strong and were honoured by the Georgian queen"²⁴³.

So the Zakaryans started military actions and emerged as victors from almost all the fights and thus liberated a considerable part of Armenia.

In 1196 Zakare and Ivane crushed the military forces of Gandzak, took back the impregnable castle of Ambert in Aragatsotn province, then one after another liberated the north-eastern provinces of Armenia.

The success of the brothers woke the anxiety of the ruler of Atrpatakan and Gandzak - Abu Bakr, who made an attempt of stopping the triumphal march of the Armenia-Georgian troops. There were decisive fights at a place between Shamkor and Gandzak, where the Georgian-Armenian united troops won. The victories in Shamkor and Gandzak made the liberation of Artsakh, Utik, Syunik, Shirak and the Ararat valley easier.

The defeat and weakening of the emir of Gandzak made the liberation of the lands in Artsakh and Utik easier for the Vahramyans, a branch of the Zakaryan dynasty. Vahram, the uncle (father's brother) of Zakare and Ivane, had estates in provinces Dzorapor or Kayen (now Ghazakh). In a further period, during the uprising led by the Russian husband of the Georgian queen Tamar, the people of the province Kayen and the neighboring lands joined the rebels. Only Zakare, the son of Vahram Zakaryan remained loyal to the queen, who as a sign of gratitude presented him with the castle of Gag and many other castles and burghes²⁴⁴.

The united forces of Armenia and Georgia took back Gardman, Karaherz, Yergevank, Tavush, Katsaret, Terunakan, Gag, Shamkor²⁴⁵.

Before that the allies had cleared Gegharkunik and Tsar of the Seljuks.

The success of the Armenian-Georgian troops inspired the rulers of Lower Khachen to the liberation of their motherland (Khachen) with their own forces. The ruling of the liberated territories was bestowed either to the representatives of princely families or to the best warriors of the fight. One of the princes of Artsakh-Vasak Khaghbakyan and his three brave sons were given vast estates in Vayots Dzor²⁴⁶. They possessed lands also in Shahapunik, Varazhnunik, Kotayk and in Ayrarat province. The centre of Khaghbakyan principality was Srkghunk (present-day Vernashen) and Boloraberd. In 1223 Prosh, the son of Vasak took the place of his father and was the sparapet (commander) of the Zakaryan army up to 1284. Prosh was not only a brave warrior but

also an outstanding political and military figure. Later the dynasty he came from was called Proshyan in his name.

With the sponsorship of the Khaghbakyan or Proshyan dynasty many churches, temples and other sumptuous buildings were raised. The most eye-striking one was the temple complex of Geghard.

Some of the offsprings of Khaghbakyan-Proshyan dynasty remained in Artsakh. Though Dlen, the son of Khaghbak owned many lands in Syunik or the principality of Bagh, he decided to choose Artsakh as the main seat of the heir princes²⁴⁷.

In spite of all this, the Zakaryans did not manage to create a monolithic centripetal state. And the Zakaryan princes built relationships with other mighty dynasties of princes by means of intermarriages.

Vakhtang-Tangik, the ruler of Lower Khachen, married Kho-rishah, who was the daughter of prince Sargis Zakaryan, the commander of the united troops. Their offsprings were called the Hasan-Jalalyans in the name of their son Hasan-Jalal Dola. Brother princes Zakare and Ivane gave Dop-their sister, in marriage to Hasan, the master of Upper Khachen and Tsar. Dop was extremely broad-minded and fervent. She performed many heroic deeds for her lands. That is why the dynasty began to be called Dopyan in her name. The principality of the Dopyans included the eastern and southern banks of Sevan, up to Shoghvag, that is the greater part of Gegharkunik. Their seat was Tsar (present-day vill. Zar of Karvajar district).

Prince Vakhtang, the son of Mamkan, daughter of Kyurike II ruled over the territory that lay between the principalities of the Dopyans and the Vakhtangyans. The wife of Vakhtang, was Arzu khatun, the famous daughter of the Kurd prince of the Artsruni family. The kurd was the emir and major of Tpghis, the main ruler of Kayen and Mankanaberd. His sister got married to Sargis Zakaryan, that is, she became the mother of the brave brothers, Zakare and Ivane.

Khachen and its powerful military nobility played a significant role during the rule of the Zakaryans. The princely dynasties of Khachen not only ruled the principalities of the Khaghbakians, Dopyans, Vakhtangians and Hasan-Jalalyans, but also were senior officials in the court of Ivane and were the guardians of his son²⁴⁸.

Nana, one of the daughters of Sargis Zakaryan, was married to Abas from the Lori Kyurikyan family and Nrgis, the other daughter, was given in a marriage to Mamikonyan prince of Dsegh²⁴⁹.

In medieval Armenia the Zakaryan dynasty greatly contributed to the unification of the Armenians, to the attaining of the idea of self-dependence thus creating a breeding ground for the political, economic, cultural progress of the country.

During the period in question the three principalities of Artsakh (Upper Khachen, Haterk, Lower Khachen) were in different relations with the Zakaryans.

Upper Khachen (Verin Khachen) or Tsar, that was liberated with the help of the Zakaryans recognized the supremacy of the Zakaryans. Under the domain of the Zakaryans, the ruler of Upper Khachen was Prince Hasan. After the untimely death of Hasan, Dop undertook her husband's role. The seat of the principality was Tsar and the cemetery of the dynasty was the temple Mayrakaghak and Khada of Vaghuhas. Temple Khada was built by Hovhannes, brother of Hasan.

Dop ruled her lands with great fervour. She extended her territories and built numerous temple complexes. However Grigor, the son of Dop did not want to follow his mother and soon left the royal castle for ascetic life. Dop died in Haghbat and her body was buried in the parvis of its main temple. The grave-stone of the princess has been preserved up to our days.

Throughout 1142-1182 Hasan was the master of Haterk principality. He won numerous victories over his enemies and ruled in peace the territories of Haterk, Handaberd, Khachena-berd and Havkakhagats²⁵⁰.

Most of the princes of Artsakh (the prince of princes Hasan from Haterk and his wife Mamkan- the daughter of Bagratid Kyurike) devoted themselves to an ecclesiastic life after they had completed their mission.

Hasan and Mamkan had six sons but only one of them named Vakhtang became the ruler of Haterk principality, which grew more prosperous during his rule²⁵¹. The troops of Vakhtang always emerged as victors from the fights with the Seljuk emirates. He also helped his neighbours to hold off the Turkish invaders.

After the death of Vakhtang in 1241, there was no heir to the throne because Hasan, the elder son had died in a battle against the Seljuk-Turks, and Grigor had died in early youth.

Under such conditions the western part of their territory was given to the Dopyans of Tsar and the part of the land lying to the east of Dadi Vank was passed to the Hasan-Jalalyans of Lower Khachen with the consent of the remaining members of the princely family. Lower Khachen started to experience a great advance from the 60s of the 12th century, when Vakhtang I ruled the country. In a further period Hasan the Great (the son of Vakhtang) ordered to make many Khachkars (cross stones) and left his inscriptions on them. After Hasan the Great, Vakhtang-Tangik ruled in Lower Khachen with the right of a prince. He married Khorishah, the daughter of Sargis Zakaryan the sovereign commander of Georgian-Armenian united troops. Vakhtang-Tangik had authority in Georgian royal court, and was protected by the Zakaryans. Vakhtang-Tangik died in 1214²⁵².

After his death, the ruler of Lower Khachen was Hasan-Jalal Davla. This name has an Arab origin. Hasan means handsome, Jalal-glory honour, and Davla-wealth, state.

Most probably the master of Lower Khachen had another Armenian name. Simply he was given the name "Hasan-Jalal Davla" for his wise, patriotic deeds. Under the rule of Hasan-Jalal the country (Lower Khachen) experienced an unprecedented progress in economy and culture. These circumstances also

conditioned the attaining of political independence in the country. Hasan Jalal had the title of "autocrat" of Lower Khachen, he considered himself to be "the king of Artsakh"²⁵³. Even the Georgian powerful kings recognized this political status of Hasan Jalal²⁵⁴. However, it was not the fortune of the principalities of Artsakh to have a long-lasting peace.

Soon Mongol-Tatar hordes appeared on the historical stage bringing new disasters and horrors to the Armenian people.

ARTSAKH UNDER THE MONGOL YOKE

THE FIRST MONGOL INVASIONS OF TRANSCAUCASUS AND THE RESISTANCE OF THE ARMENIAN PEOPLE. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the Mongol tribes led by Temuchin (who later got the title Chingiz, which means the king of seas) founded a state in Central Asia which played a fatal role not only in Asian but also in Eastern European history.

Mongols started their invasions in 1209. At first Chingiz Khan occupied a considerable part of China, from 1217-20 Eastern Turkestan, the state of Khorezm and one part of Iran. Having conquered Middle Asia, a part of Iran the Mongols had at their command incalculable wealth which also helped them to move westwards. In summer 1220 Chingiz Khan sent out a 30,000 reconnaissance army with Jebe Noyin and Subaday Bahatur at its head²⁵⁵ to Iran and Transcaucasus. They also were ordered to persecute Ala ad-Din Muhammadin, the shah of Khorezm.

This Mongol detachment occupied a number of towns in Khorasan and in Persian Iraq. Then they started for Atrpatakan. Crossing Araks, Mongols reached Mughan from where they moved to Partav-Gandzak-Shamkor-Tpghis. After the occupation of Shamkor, the Mongol detachment moved further, but collided with the 10,000 Armenian-Georgian army. The latter got defeated and had to retreat. After the battle Mongols plunged into Georgia from Gugark and reached Tpghis. However they did not have enough forces and the dangerousness of the roads held them (Mongols) back. They put up their tents in a field between Partav and Baylakan, that is the region of Beghamej. The Georgian court tried to make alliances with the neighbouring countries in order to repel the Mongols and to make up a united front. However, the Mongols did not want to yield the initiative and they again moved to Georgia. The Armenian-Georgian troops led by Georgy Lashay and Ivane collided with them half-way. The battle took place at the river Kotman (now Touz) in January 1221.

The Armenian-Georgian united forces lost the battle.

Then Mongols attacked the northern parts of Armenia and the south-eastern parts of Georgia and then went back to Utik. In spring 1221, they ruined the towns Hamadan, Khoys, Salmast, Nakhjavan, Ardabil, Sarab. The population of Baylakan (Utik) first heroically held off the Mongols but in a month the enemy managed to break the resistance and occupy the town. After this they moved to Gandzak, but knowing about the bravery of the local population they just gathered money from them and went away²⁵⁶.

The second clash of the two, Mongol and Armenian-Georgian armies took place in the field of Khunan, on the bank of Kur River in 1222. Although, warrior Vahram Gagetsi fighting in the right wing first had success, the Armenian-Georgian army suffered heavy losses and was defeated.

Nevertheless the Armenia-Georgian united troops came off Tpphis and started to prepare for a counter-strike.

Receiving the news about this the Mongols avoided the attack and moved from north-eastern Armenia to Shirvan. They belaguered Shamakhi and occupied it.

Considering their mission to be over in Transcaucasus, Mongols passed round Derbend, overcame the hardships caused by mountainous impassable roads and tracks and reached Northern Caucasus.

With this the Mongols finished their first invasion of Transcaucasus which mostly aimed at reconnoitering the lands.

But even after this the Armenians could not enjoy a peaceful life because the tribes of ghpchaghs broke into Transcaucasus from Northern Caucasus.

The ghpchaghs concluded an alliance with the emir of Gandzak and spread death and destruction in settlements of Armenia and Georgia.

After several resultless fights against the new enemy, the Armenian-Georgian troops emerged as victors in 1223. They

managed to smash those wild tribes and drive them away from Transcaucasus but they also lost such princes as Grigor and Papac, the son and grandson of Khaghbak (Khachen). However the situation in Transcaucasus continued to be strained even after the end of Mongol and ghpchagh invasions. One of the reasons of the strain, was that Jalal ad-Din, the shah of Khorezm, who had moved to the north-western part of Iran started to attack the neighbouring countries (some of which were Christian) instead of concluding military alliances for the fight against the Mongols. Thus with all his unjust and unwise deeds he was digging his own grave. The seven year long invasions of Jalal ad-Din (1225-31) resulted in heavy losses for the Armenians. The once beautiful towns and villages were destroyed, the economy was extremely weak, the military forces exhausted. The country, could not avoid famine, epidemic. The population was left to the mercy of fate.

Mongols persecuted Jalal ad-Din and defeated him in 1231. Then Mongols spread destruction and devastation in Persia, reached Edessa and Samosat, then Euphrates. They massacred the population of Diarbekir and Jazira²⁵⁷. Only after this they returned to Atrpatakan.

Passing Araks the Mongols settled in the fertile field of Mughan²⁵⁸. In early spring, 1232 they moved to north-west and besieged Gandzak. The attempts of the population to repel the siege infuriated the Mongols and when they occupied the settlement they killed the population not sparing even the lives of children and women²⁵⁹. And this time the Mongols did not stay there and with thousands of captives and a rich trophy left for the depths of Persia.

THE SECOND MONGOL INVASION OF ARMENIA AND THE OCCUPATION OF ARTSAKH. In 1235 Udegay the younger son of Chingiz Khan summoned the all-Mongol council called "ghurultai" during which it was decided to start new invasions and occupy Russia, the countries of Eastern Europe and Transcaucasus.

In 1236 the military actions started in two directions. The invasion of Russia was led by Batu, and that of Transcaucasus by Charmaghan.

The only power of Transcaucasus that had formerly resisted all the invasions of Mongols was the kingdom of Georgia which this time was dissolved and disorganized because of the throne battle that David, the son of queen Rusudan waged against the legal heir of the throne David, who was the son of Georgy Lashay.

So Mongols were free to enter Transcaucasus. Charmaghan broke up camps in the field of Mughan, which thus became the centre of Mongol forces. By casting lots they decided what principality of Armenia, Georgia and Albania should be invaded by each of them²⁶⁰.

Molar Noyin moved to the north-eastern provinces of Armenia. He belaguered Shamkhor and suffering heavy losses invaded and destroyed it. After this Molar Noyin occupied castles and strongholds of Vahram Gagetsi who had gone away to Kutayis.

Mongols took preacher Vanakan and his disciples, Kirakos Gandzaketsi among them, as captives.

Later the Armenians saved Vanakan by paying a ransom, and Kirakos managed to escape at night and came back to Getik temple which had already been ruined and burnt by the enemy²⁶¹.

Conquering the north-eastern settlements of Armenia Mongols devastated also Georgia. One of the Georgian chroniclers wrote, "Tatars deed such awesome, detestable things, that many Georgians abandoned their strongholds and ran to Caucasian mountains"²⁶². It was at this time that some of the Armenian feudals decided to submit to Mongols in order not to lose their estates.

Mongols besieged the stronghold of Kayen, the shelter of Avag Zakaryan, who being sure that he was not able to resist long, went to Charmaghan, the commander of Mongol troops. The latter had put up his tent at the bank of Sevan. There he promised submission and obedience to the military leader of Mongols. In

this way Avag Zakaryan, the son of Ivane was the first who was obliged to promise submission in order not to lose his estates.

The regiment led by Jughbuga Noyin started the conquering of Khachen after they had occupied the lakeside districts of Sevan. Part of the population of Lower Khachen found shelter in a stronghold called Havcakhaghats. But Mongols managed to break the persistent resistance of the defenders of the stronghold. According to Kirakos Gandzaketsi they entered the stronghold, stabbed with swords part of the population and violently rushed down the others. Then the wild enemy went to the impregnable castle of Khokhanaberd, that is opposite church Gandzasar and where Hasan-Jalal- the ruler of Lower Khachen had found shelter. Hasan Jalal had no hope of receiving help from the outside and he also had to recognize the rule of the Mongols. Even after this the conquering of Khachen was slow because the people showed resistance. This lasted to the year 1238²⁶⁴.

Conquering Persia, Transcaucasus and the western parts of Asia, Mongols made up new administrative units. Georgia, Armenia, Aran, Shirvan and Atrpatakan then made up one viceregency and Charmaghan was its ruler. In their turn the principalities of Georgia and Armenia formed one independent unit, which Mongols called Gyurjistan vilayet (an administrative unit).

Udegay, the great khan of the Mongol Empire ordered Charmaghan to stay in Gyurjistan and annually sent a large number of expensive things and much gold to the capital²⁶⁵. With heavy taxation Mongols snatched the last piece of bread from the people. Moreover in order to press the liberation movements they organized slaughters from time to time. They urged the men to take part in their conquerings and which is more horrible, to fight against their own people.

As historiographer Hamadallah Ghazvini wrote, "No doubt, if even there are no disasters in coming millennium, it will be impossible to set right the destructions caused by Mongol invasions and rule"²⁶⁶.

One of the princes of Artsakh who also had to fight within Mongol troops was Hasan-Jalal. He took part in the invasion of Karin. Sevada, the son of prince Grigor of Upper Khachen also had to attack Tigranakert.

However the Armenians of Khachen were save for some period because of the flexible policy that Hasan-Jalal led. Mongols became kindly disposed towards Hasan-Jalal, when Bora-Noyin, the son of Charmaghan married Ruzukan, the daughter of the ruler of Lower Khachen.

Due to the mediation of Hasan-Jalal more or less secure and bearable circumstances were created for the other Armenian provinces. Hundreds of Armenians were saved from captivity and inevitable death. Thanks to the broad-minded ruler of Khachen a treaty of an alliance was signed between Mongols and Hetum I, the king of Cilicia. This treaty saved Cilicia from the imminent disaster.

Nevertheless, soon the situation turned to the worse for Hasan-Jalal. At the beginning of 1242 Charmaghan, the Mongol viceregent of Armenia was followed by general Bachu. The latter involved more Armenians into his military actions, mostly the final conquering of western and southern part of Armenia.

The situation was made still worse by the increase of taxes, which aimed at covering all the expenses of the Empire's wars. In 1246 Guyuk khakan sent a commission with Arghun and Bugha at its head. The task of this commission was to collect the taxes from the settlements of Iran and Transcaucasus. It is in this connection that historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi wrote, "This Bugha... entered the houses of aldermen, ruthlessly took anything he liked, and no one dared to speak a word..."²⁶⁷.

"People were not able to pay the taxes, because they were incredibly high and heavy. They tried to run. But many got caught and killed. Sometimes, when a family failed to pay the taxes Mongols took their children..."²⁶⁸.

The policy of Mongols was marked with cruelties, heavy

taxation, plundering; thus the population of the conquered lands loathed them.

The heavy taxes led the people of Khachen to an uprising. The rebels moved to the impregnable castle Khokhanaberd. But Bugha brought too much military force to the walls of Khokhanaberd and the Armenians were too few. So, Mongols occupied the castle and in front of the aldermen inflicted corporal punishments upon Hasan-Jalal²⁶⁹.

After this horrible event, Hasan-Jalal and Grigor (Hejub Grigor), the steward who served Ivane Zakaryan left for Itil the residence of Batu (present-day Astrakhan town). With mediation of Sartakh, the Christian son of Batu khan, Hasan-Jalal managed to persuade Batu to give back many of his native estates. Batu then ordered his Mongol viceregents to treat the population of Khachen kindly²⁷⁰.

Hasan-Jalal returned home, but again found no peace, because this time Arghun, the Mongol tax-collector started to use violence.

Finding no other way-out Hasan-Jalal together with Mamkan, his wife and Atabek, his only son left for Mongolia in 1255 accompanied by Sartakh. It took him 5 years to reach that land, where he told about the unjust deeds of Arghun to Mangu khan. Although the latter fulfilled the requests of the ruler of Khachen and promised him peace, Arghun continued weaving plots against Hasan-Jalal. Thus by and by it became obvious for the Armenian princes and particularly Hasan-Jalal that Mongol khans led a double-face policy. They promised peace and friendship in the face of the Armenian princes in order to extort their wealth. But then they instigated their officials to exploit the Armenian subjects as much as possible.

Thus the tyranny of Mongol nobles and officials inevitably led to a rebellion in Armenia and Georgia.

It broke out in 1260 and was led by Ulu David, the Georgian king. Hasan-Jalal also joined the rebels and defeated the troops

of Arghun. In order to press the rebellion, Arghun asked Mongol khan to arrest Gontsa- the Georgian queen and her daughter princess Khoshak, Hasan-Jalal, Shahنشah Zakaryan and other princes. However the arrested bribed some officials and were soon set free²⁷¹.

The military actions between the rebels and Mongols lasted up to 1261. Soon Ulu David again recognized the domain of Mongols, because the forces were incredibly unequal.

After it Arghun again arrested the organizers of the rebellion (Hasan-Jalal among them) and took them to Ghazvini.

Ruzukan, the daughter of Hasan-Jalal tried to save her father asking Toghus-khatun, the wife of Hulavu for help. But by that time Arghun had already ordered his headsmen to kill Hasan-Jalal²⁷².

Atabek, the son of Hasan-Jalal, brought the body of his father to Khachen and buried it in the porch of Gandzasar church.

Hasan-Jalal was such an outstanding, broad-minded representative of the Aranshahik princely family of Khachen that in further centuries the branch of the dynasty he belonged to started to be called Hasan Jalalyans. Many of the generations still learnt about the heroic deeds of that Armenian prince.

Since the 13th cent. the ecclesiastic offsprings of the same dynasty, controlled the episcopacy of the province and owned the patriarchal See of the eastern provinces of Armenia since the 15th century. Ivane or Atabek (1261-1281) became the only heir of his father's throne. Under his rule the population of Lower Khachen had a comparatively peaceful period of life. Ivane completed the building of the porch of Gandzasar, which his father had left unfinished.

At that time there were similar conditions of life in Upper Khachen which since 1220s had been ruled by Grigor, the son of Hasan and Dop. Like other Armenian princes, Grigor was also forced to participate in Mongol invasions, during which however he and many other princes of Armenian eastern provinces, set free the captives and saved many cultural values, especially

hand-written manuscripts. In Upper Khachen Hasan-Jalal II, the son of Grigor came to power in 1250s. In many historical sources Hasan is featured with such epithets as "brave", "valiant", "victor"²⁷³. Supporting good-neighbourly relations with Mongols Hasan II secured a peaceful life for the Armenians of his principality.

The period of rule of Atabek and Hasan II coincided with the period of the weakening of the central Mongol Empire. The reason was perhaps the struggle that the Mongol-Tatar aldermen waged against each other for supremacy.

In 1256 Hulavu defeated the Mongol viceregents (officials) of Iran, Atrpatakan, Eastern Georgia, Armenia, Run, Kurdistan, Iraq and subjugating the old feudal families of these countries, in fact founded the Hulavian Mongol-Iranian state which became known as "ilkhanate" (ilkhan means master of people).

Under the rule of Hulavu and his successor Abagha khan (1265-1282) a relatively peaceful atmosphere reigned in the country. The Hulavian kingdom was looking for a stable and loyal ally among the dynasties of princes. Thus it favoured the prosperity, strengthening and also the development of economic and cultural life of the conquered people.

However those life conditions did not exist long. In 1282, after the death of Abagha, his brother Tagudar schemed a number of conspiracies and accended the throne. He was the first of the Hulavian princes to adopt the Muslim religion. With this a new period of sufferings began for the Christian Armenians. The plunder and devastation, the unspeakably heavy taxes placed the country in a state of extreme poverty and despair. But since the beginning of the 14th century Mongol-Iranian state started to collapse slowly but constantly. Mongol viceregents and generals who struggled against each other refused to obey the central power. The state of the Armenians became really tragic when Mongols officially adopted Mohammedanism under Ghazan khan. At that time religious pressures added to social and ethnic ones.

From many parts of Armenia people immigrated. No active cultural life was led in temples and churches. Once densely-populated and rich lands turned to deserted places.

Nevertheless, the Armenians of Artsakh still relied on the help of the mother-mountainous land and endured all the hardships and experiences.

ARTSAKH DURING THE INVASIONS OF TAMERLANE(TIMUR) AND THE TURKOMAN TRIBES OF THE 'WHITE SHEEP' AND THE 'BLACK SHEEP'

TAMERLANE'S INVASIONS OF ARTSAKH. At the end of the fourteenth century, exactly in 1380's sanguinary wild hordes of Golden Horde broke into entire Transcaucasus. They spread death and devastation everywhere and Armenia which by that time had not managed to treat her wounds, could not escape the disaster. The hordes ruined and plundered mostly its north-eastern provinces.

The blood thirsty leader of the hordes, which invaded Armenia was Tamerlane. He came from a Mongolian tribe called Barlas. He was the son of Taragha and had the nickname "Lank" (lank-lame). Being a brave military man and a crafty politician he gathered his co-thinkers around him and founded a Mongol-Turkic military-feudal state with Samarghand as its centre in Middle Asia in 1370. Gathering mighty and efficient troops he made The Golden Horde, Russia, India, Iran, Transcaucasus, Asia Minor his own tread rugs.

In spring, 1386, he occupied Tavis, then crossed Araks and intruded into Syunik. Tamerlane's troops went forth in different directions and breaking the resistance of people reached Karbi, Bjni, Garni, Surmari and Koghb in a very short time.

Then the troops intruded into Artsakh and occupied Upper Khachen. Prince Hasan-the representative of Tsar Dopyans died in an unequal fight²⁷⁴. His wife Khondza and his six sons - Grigor, Sargis, Shanshi, Jhanshi, Aghbugh and Shirvan also died with him. Only one son of Hasan, named Vahram, survived. The once prosperous settlements of Khachen now were destroyed. For the prevention of any further uprising the men of Tamerlane killed not only the local authorities but also village functionaries²⁷⁵.

After all those invasions Tamerlane moved to Georgia and on

November 21, 1386 occupied and plundered Tpghis(Tiflis).

Soon in Transcaucasus Tamerlane chose the province of Mukhank as the place of spending the winter. His choice was explained by the fact that Mukhank had mild climate in winter. Province Mukhank was also called Kharabakh field and in this connection it is important to note that the name "Karabakh" was first recorded in such historical sources as the "Georgian chronicle" and the works of the Persian historiographer Hamadalah Ghazvini²⁷⁶. All these works date back to the fourteenth century.

In 1394 Tamerlane started his second invasion of Armenia. This time his troops passed from Northern Mesopotamia to western Armenia, cruelly massacred most of the population and then reached Ayrarat. But Tamerlane did not stay long there, because he was obliged to move to Albania in order to counter-strike Toghtamish, the Khan of the Golden Horde, which had intruded into Shirvan²⁷⁷. Toghtamish avoided a collision and went back to Golden Horde. So Tamerlane and his troops again went to province Mukhank to spend winter there. From this province they repeatedly attacked the neighboring settlement of Artsakh and Utik.

Tamerlane's third invasion of Transcaucasus took place in 1399. Invading the northern provinces of Iran, he crossed Araks, again intruded into Mukhank and spent seven months there. From Mukhank he continuously attacked Georgia and the north-eastern parts of Armenia. In this way many settlements were turned to heaps of stones and deserts.

With the end of the military actions of 1399-1403 Tamerlane became the sovereign ruler of entire Transcaucasus, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Syria. Even the sultan of Egypt then recognized his sovereignty.

1403-1404 Tamerlane and his troops spent the winter in field Karabakh, then returned to Samarghand with trophy and captives.

Many historiographical works describe the invasions of

Tamerlane, the brutality with which his hordes annihilated people and their spiritual, cultural values. Because of military actions many of the lands were left uncultivated and this led to famine. In 1407 a disastrous epidemic started. Thousands of people died from it. The country was practically deprived of local Armenian authorities. Under such conditions the field provinces of Artsakh (Mukhank among them) were cut from the Armenian land and thus lost their ethnic peculiarities. To sum up, we must note that after those numerous attacks, invasions, massacres organized by Tamerlane and his wild troops, the offsprings of Aranshahik ministerial dynasties of Artsakh got few in number. Nevertheless they firmly held to their motherland hopefully waiting for better times.

ARTSAKH UNDER THE DOMINION OF THE TRIBES OF THE "WHITE SHEEP" (AGI-KOYUNLU) AND THE "BLACK SHEEP" (KARA-KOYUNLU). After the death of Tamerlane, his vast state, which had been founded and existed by force and tyranny, started its speedy collapse.

Making use of the chaotic state of the country, Kara-Yusuf, the leader of one of the Turkmenian tribes, occupied Tavriz, Atrpatakan, Armenia and the entire Mesopotamia through 1407-1410. Thus the Turkmenian tribes of Kara-Koyunlu invaded the countries of Asia Front and created a hegemonic state (1410-1468).

The new rulers realized that the economies of the conquered lands were not in a good state, and thus could not fill the treasury of the new state. So they led a relatively mild policy in relation to the Armenian local rulers and nobles. They gave high ranks or offices to the Armenian princes.

Armenia was under similar conditions during the domain of the Turkmenian tribes of Agh-Koyunlu (1468-1502). The rights of the members of Hasan Jalalyan and Dopyan dynasties (Lower Khachen, Upper Khachen) were regained within this period.

Jalal I, who in many sources is featured as a believer and

church-builder, ruled in Lower Khachen after the death of Ivane-Atabek in 1287. After Jalal I, came his son Ivane the Great, whose supremacy was recognized not only by the princes of Lower Khachen but also by those of Upper Khachen and Haterk.

The 15 th century lithographic writings of Gandzasar give us much interesting information about the patriotic activities of the the sons of Ivane - princes Jalal II, Zazan, Aghbast, Saytun, Velijan..

In 1470 after the death of the Albanian catholicos Hovhannes, the patriarchal See was transmitted from temple St Hakoba (which is near village Kolatak) to Gandzasar. The patriarchs who came from the dynasty of Hasan Jalalyans protected the borders of Artsakh with their sanctified crosses and if needed with bare swords.

During this period the representatives of the Dopyan princely dynasty continued to rule in Upper Khachen. They did not have their former glory and might but according to tradition of the old days they ruled the Armenians of the province.

The Dopyans were gradually weakening. In the 80s of the fourteenth century the troops of the Golden Horde attacked Lower Khachen. After it , at the end of the fifteenth and at the beginning of the sixteenth centuries the Dopyans were divided into three branches - Shahanshenk, Aghbughenk, Jhanshenk. The famous family of Melik-Shahnazaryans, which promoted activities in Varanda later came from these branches.

In 14-15th centuries most of the Armenian ministerial families yielded their political and economic positions to the aldermen of those nomadic tribes which were the masters of the Armenian provinces. In spite of this, separate branches of Aranshahik ministerial dynasties in some mountainous provinces of Artsakh had courage and enough strength to resist the pressure of the strangers. They were weak and exhausted but succeeded in preserving the viable fragments of state institutes that had existed in the Armenian land for centuries.

The edict of Jhanshah (1437-1467), who came from the Turkmenian tribe of Kara-Koyunlu testifies to the recognition of the authority of Meliks - the rulers of mountainous Artsakh. Since that time the princes of eastern provinces of Armenia started to be called meliks in almost all Armenian historiographical sources*. "Melik was a ruler, master. He was sovereign and autocratic". Everyone was obliged to obey meliks and fulfill their orders, because meliks were appointed by high authorities. On his part melik had to be just and care for the well-fare of his country"²⁷⁸. Meliks of Artsakh had absolute authority in their lands. Nevertheless at that time some democratic principles had effect in Artsakh. Thus though meliks were usually succeeded by their elder sons, they assumed their responsibilities and rights after the unanimous consent of the people²⁷⁹. This unity of people and authorities in Artsakh became the main pledge of the national self-dependency, which later gave birth to the idea of liberation of "Great Armenia".

* "Melik" is a word which has Arabic origin. It means prince, ruler, king.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION OF ARTSAKH DURING THE TURKISH-PERSIAN WARS

From the beginning of the sixteenth century to the end of the 30s of the seventeenth century Armenia was the theatre of war of Iran (Sefyan Iran) and the Ottoman Turkey, which both tried to attain political superiority in Asia Front.

In 1502 shah Ismail defeated the Turkmenian tribe of agh-koyunlu, occupied capital Tavriz and founded the Sefyan state of Kzlbashs ("red hats"). Shiism was proclaimed as state religion and an uncompromising struggle was begun against sunnism-another branch of Islam. Turkey, the main follower of sunnism accepted that battle-call and made Armenia, that lay between them both, (Iran and Turkey) their war theatre.

By 1507 shah Ismayil had conquered the greater part of Armenia, Kurdistan, Baghdad and Arab Iraq. However Selim the Terrible (Selim Ahegh) took on the priority by his attacks. In a very short time Turks conquered the south-western part of Armenia- that is the numerous provinces of Bardzr (High) Haik, Turuberan, Tsopk, Moush field and the districts of Yerznka, Kamakhi. So for the first time in the history the Ottoman Turks captured Armenian lands. In further years the war between Turkey and Iran continued with variable success.

The repeated invasions, massacres led to famine and epidemic. This desolated Armenian towns and villages, annihilated productive forces.

Being the eye-witness of many conquerings Pechevin, the 16th century Turk historiographer described the destructions, that the Ottoman army made in Yerevan, Nakhijevan, Syunik and Karabakh. The chronicler wrote, "In Yerevan they burnt to the ground the magnificent and picturesque palaces and gardens which belonged to shah's son, sultan and famous khans. They razed to the ground the heavenly gardens called "Sultanakan bagh". Then

the Turks invaded the land called Karabakh. It was a province in Ajem (Persia-V.B.), known for its beautiful mountains and gardens. Unexpectedly the land got covered with dust and in an instant the bright day turned into a dark night. Most of the population of this province was annihilated. The army gathered a rich trophy and burnt the part of riches it was unable to take with"²⁸⁰.

According to an Armenian chronicler Hovhannes Tsaretsi (16th century), after those horrible events the land plunged into epidemic²⁸¹.

In 1552 Shah Tahmaz moved to western Armenia. But the Turks attacked the shah and he retreated deportating thousands of Armenians on his way back. Part of the Armenians who were deportated settled within the borders of Tsara principality, where they felt more or less safe²⁸².

In 1552 Turkey and Iran concluded peace in Amasia according to which Transcaucasus went to Persia.

In the 16th century the territory under Persia was divided into three military administrative units- the districts of Shirvan, Chukhur-Sad (Yerevan and Nakhijevan) and Karabakh²⁸³.

This division aimed at frustrating any possible liberation movement of Armenians or other peoples of Transcaucasus. However Turkey and Persia were not satisfied with this division of Transcaucasus.

Mohammed Khudabanday ascended the throne of Persia in 1578 and the opposing kzlbash aldermen and tribal chiefs started a fierce struggle against him. The civil wars between them were held in Khorasan, Hamadan, Aran and Karabakh.

Turkey took advantage of the complicated situation and began expansive military actions against Persia.

In 1578 the Turkish troops led by general Mustafa Lala Pasha intruded into Transcaucasus and occupied Shirvan. Two years later they invaded Karabakh, then destroyed Yerevan and reached Gegharkunik.

As it was written by many historiographers after the wars

hunger and epidemic spread all over the country. People then ate whatever they found. Sometimes they attacked protectless animals and ate their meat uncooked. And the famished gathered bones from the streets. People boiled and ate old shoes and leather thongs. When spring came they wandered in the fields like cattle and ate grass. Most of them died. Their corpses were left unburied. Dogs, which very often ate human corpses grew wild. Packs of wolves broke into villages and devoured protectless people²⁸⁴.

But the Ottoman Turks were still not satisfied. A few years later the Tatars of Crimea, the tribes of Northern Caucasus led by Ottoman general Yuzdemir crossed Kur and attacked Gandzak, Partav, Jraberd, Khachen, Varanda, Dizak thus spreading death and devastation in the territories that stretched to Eraskh (Araks) River²⁸⁵. In 1582 another Turkish regiment took the possession of the Sevan basin provinces, invaded Tsar and started harassing the local population, that lived on the territory stretching to Gandzak²⁸⁶.

The numerous attacks of Turks in 1580's forced Persians out of Armenia, Georgia and Atrpatakan. For saving their state which then was at the edge of extinction the Sefyans, particularly Shah Abas (1587-1629) (who had come to the throne) started to negotiate with the Turks. These negotiations resulted in conclusion of peace, which costed Persia too high a price, Shah Abas had to cede Armenia, Georgia, Albania and Atrpatakan as well as the city of Tavriz to Turkey.

A new horrible situation was created for the Armenians. The gathering of babies became a real evil for the Armenian parents. Sultan Suleyman I ordered to take by force 2-5 years old children, bring them up in isolation- in special military barracks. These all the sultan did for the remanning of the yenicher military regiments. Under such conditions the Armenian people chose the lesser of the two evils. They tried to cooperate with the Persians and get rid of the unmerciful Turkish yoke. Many Armenian, Georgian, Kurdian envoys went to Shah Abas and asked him to set their

lands free of the Ottoman yoke.

Armenian envoys of Artsakh were Sarukhan bek, and his brother Nazar (vill. Voskanapat), Oghlankeshish and his brother Ghalabekin (Haterk), Jalal bek and his nephews (Khachen) melik Sujum (Dizak), melik Pashik (vill. Cochez), melik Baban (vill. Britas), bishop Melikset (Upper Zakam, vill. Melikzada), melik Haykaz (province of Kashatak, vill. Khanatsakh). The population of four villages of Dizak migrated to Persia and Shah settled them in Spahan²⁸⁷.

In 1603 Shah Abas also managed to occupy the castle of Yerevan. However the Turks massed their forces and took to counter-strike. Shah Abas ordered his troops to retreat and devastate the parts that lay in the direction of the Turkish attack. The population of those devastated lands was driven to the deep rear. Thus Shah-Abas deprived the enemy of the possibilities of finding shelter or provisions.

The population of littoral districts of Sevan including part of the people of Tsar fled to Ararat valley which soon became the camp of the refugees.

This terrible, unprecedented migration and deportation appeared to be disastrous for the Armenians. About thousand Armenians were deported to the depths of Persia. The battles between Turkey and Persia waged on the Armenian land continued to 1639. They ended in conclusion of a peace in Constantinople. Per this peace treaty the Ottoman Empire obtained almost all of Armenia except the eastern provinces of Armenia-Gugark, Shirak, part of Arsharunik, Ararat valley, Syunik, Artsakh, the eastern part of Vaspurakan, which went to Iran. Shah Abas and his followers were very often unjust towards the Armenians, but realizing the influence and authority of meliks, they tried to use their force against the hegemonic policy of the Ottoman Empire.

Soon Iran legalized the title of "melik", gave them new rights and responsibilities. Melik was the official that had to defend the borders of the land, pay the taxes to shahs, take an active part in

Persian invasions.

For special merits and loyal service some meliks were presented with villages. But the most important among the privileges of meliks, was the right of keeping permanent troops.

Five smaller Armenian principalities ("Melikutian") in the Karabakhi mountains preserved their independence or a wide degree of autonomy under Iranian rule and became the breeding ground of the Armenian independence movement.

Many of the Karabakhian meliks carried great authority in Persian (Iranian) royal court.

According to some historical sources Melik-Shahnazar I (1570s-1606) of Gegharkunik had the protectorship of the Persian royal court. He together with his son-Javri managed to force Turk invaders out of Gegharkunik.

For this service Shah Abas ratified the right of Melik-Shahnazaryans to pass the title of the ruler of their province from one generation to another with ²⁸⁸.

In 1606, on his way back from Mazra Shah-Abas was received with great honours by Javri and Kamal bek, the sons of Melik Shahnazar I. Shah gave precious gifts, villages, burghes to them. and with the seal of Shah confirmed the right of beks over Gegharkunik²⁸⁹.

Melik-Haykaz from Kashatagh²⁹⁰ also carried great authority in the court of Shah. Even today we can see his palace standing in one of the villages of Aghavnaget valley, in Sultankyand district of former Lachin region. "Meliks lived luxuriously like real vassals and lords of manors. They accumulated wealth, followed Persian taste and the modes and manners of high-ranking councilors. Meliks had vast estates and a great number of servants. Nevertheless they were still the men of their people, who lived and communicated with them in all spheres of life"²⁹¹.

In order to preserve the peace of their lands meliks of Artsakh built numerous castles on forbidding mountains of Artsakh and repeatedly resisted the prevailing forces of the horrible enemy.

On the one hand Shah Abas encouraged meliks, on the other hand he was afraid of their unity. For averting any further complexities he ordered some Kurdian troops to move from the depths of Persia to the territory lying between the principalities of Syunik and Artsakh-from the bank of Araks to the slopes of Mrav. It was at that time that many linguistic borrowings and penetrations occurred. In this way the province of Berdadzor started to be called Lachin, Karvajar became Kelbajar, Tsar-Zar, Levonaberd-Levi, Moz-Mozkyandi, Jermajur-Istisu etc.

Times were hard but the melik families of Artsakh still relied on the impregnability of their mountain heights and continued to keep the pieces of Armenian statehood. Unfortunately we do not have much information about the principalities of Artsakh in the second half of the seventeenth century and in the beginning of the eighteenth century. But the inscriptions found on churches, cross-stones, bridges and other buildings throw light on the dark points of this part of history.

Many names of meliks became known due to these inscriptions.

In one of them it is mentioned that melik Kamal of Sodk was succeeded by his elder son Astvatsapov. The latter was later succeeded by Melik-bek, his son (the 70s of the seventeenth century). And Melik-bek was succeeded by Shahnazar II²⁹².

Besides the above mentioned names, those of Jhangir bek (1676)²⁹³, Melik Mirzakhan (1684²⁹⁴- 1701)²⁹⁵ (from the dynasty of Tsara), Melik Bek (1717)²⁹⁶ can be read in many inscriptions of the period.

In one of the historical writings Tsar is mentioned as Pokr (smaller) Syunik²⁹⁷, where only Armenians lived up to the 30s of the eighteenth century. There were about 140 small and large villages in this territory (present-day Karvajar)²⁹⁸. Thus enduring many hardships and horrors of their rough life the Armenians of Artsakh entered the period of independence movement of the eighteenth century.

THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT OF ARTSAKH ARMENIANS (1722-30)

From the beginning of the eighteenth century and throughout next decades, despite difficult political situation Armenian meliks led national independence movement.

In those times the foundation of Persian state shattered down because of the inner cleavage and the long-winded war with the Apghans. Under such conditions meliks of Artsakh acquired a wider degree of independence and their legal-political status became higher and more stable. They refused to pay taxes to Persia and this greatly improved the life conditions of the Armenian population of Artsakh.

On the other hand, Turkey-the centuries-old enemy of Persia, was eager to see the complete collapse of its enemy. So it kept instigating the wild highlanders of Daghestan (Lezgins), who on their part always horrified the population of northern provinces of Iran. But in the result of this the Armenians suffered most of all.

Many writings have been preserved about the destructive invasions of Lezgins. One of them runs, "The temple of Khota (Dadi Vank-V.B.) was very rich. But ruthless Lezgins robbed and destroyed it. They were shameless and impudent and whenever they were in need of something, they came to our ancestors, stayed in their houses for months demanding and enjoying everything. When all the people lost hope, they decided to find a way out of the situation. All the princes, councilors gathered and then priest Spitak known all over Jraberd put an end to the heated discussion by the advice that people should kill at night those Lezgins sleeping in their houses. That, Spitak believed, would frighten them and they would never come to Armenia again. Many people followed his advice and the news about it reached Daghestan. An incalculable number of Lezgins broke into the environs of Khota. Then the locals took their families and ran to the dense woods and the Lezgins set on fire their houses and possessions"²⁹⁹.

The Armenian meliks of Artsakh acted separately but for the aversion of the repeated attacks they created military unions, which became known as "sghnakhs". "Sghnakh" or "Sghmakh" is a Turkish word which means "to press" or "to make firmer". In Russian historical sources the phrase "armyanskoe sobranie" is used which should be translated as "armenian assemblage or Armenian assemblage place". Weapon makers used the iron, copper, lead, silver found in local mines. They also used sulphur for making gun powder. The military forces of the sghnakhs were numerous. If needed the number of soldiers increased from 1000 to tens of thousands including thirty-thousand riders and ten thousands of infantry men³⁰⁰.

As soon as the spring of 1722 came, the highlanders of Daghestan passed Tchora Pahak, ruined the trade town of Shamakhi and appeared in Artsakh³⁰¹. This time the country was fairly protected and the well-trained troops inflicted a counter-strike upon the enemy near Jraberd.

Meliks of Karabakh told about this counter-attack in their letter to Peter the Great, the Russian Czar, "It is one year the Lezgins have been invading Albania, devastating and plundering the land. The Turks also make us suffer by demanding taxes and robbing the people. In this situation, Yesayi I, together with Shirvan and Sargis from Jraberd, melik Hovsep from Gandzak have gathered 10-12,000 men, fought a war against the Lezgins and the Turks of Albania and won a victory in this battle"³⁰².

The armies of the meliks, whose names were mentioned in the letter were massed in Jraberd and Giulistan, at the foot of mountain Mrav. The leader of the army of Metz (Greater) Sghnakh was Yesayi Hasan-Jalalyan, the catholicos of Gandzasar. One part of the Armenian troops was at the foot of Kirs (the territory of Avetaranots and Sghnakh villages of Varanda) and in the environs of Shoushi town. Pokr (Smaller) Sghnakh was led by Avan Haryurapet ("haryurapet" means the commander of 100 persons) who before that(up to 1717) had been an Armenian soldier in the troops of the khan of Shamakhi.

Besides those Greater and Smaller Sghnakhs new ones appeared in the places of medieval castles and strongholds, in junctions of the roads which led to the depth of the mountainous land. So besides the Sghnakhs of Giulistan, Jraber, Avetaranots and Shoushi, there were sghnakhs also near the village Badara, in Kochiz, that is beyond villages Herher and Tsovategh, also in villages Togh and Tumi. At that time many small local military stations were built in different provinces of Artsakh, including Tsar. The highlanders defeated by the Armenian troops retreated to the left bank of Kur and did not dare to come near to the borders of Karabakh any more.

The desire to defeat the enemy, the strivings of holding them off, united all meliks of Artsakh as well as all other stratum of society. Even Catholicos Yesayi of Gandzasar and his opponent, the anti-cathodrist catholicos Nerses of temple Yerits Mankants* united against the enemy.

The Armenian self-defense against the southern highlanders spontaneously turned into an anti-Persian national-independence movement. In those times the leaders of the movement called the new strivings for freedom "revival"³⁰³ of the perished statehood. The local bodies of the Armenian autonomy strained their forces in Artsakh to defeat completely the remnants of the Persian rule in the Armenian land.

In 1722 the armed forces of Giulistan, Jraber and Gandzak spared no efforts for the protection of the approaches of Mountainous Karabakh and blocked the roads of Gandzak and Tiflis before Persian khans and the other khans who joined them. Similar armed military (clashes) collisions occurred also in neighbouring regions. In October 1723, the armed Armenian

* In 1691 bishop Simeon, the son of Sargis, the priest of village Metz Shen (Jraber) built the temple of Yerits Mankants on a deep wood-covered gorge of Mountain Mrav. The bishop settled there, proclaimed himself a catholicos and started to oppose the catholicos of Gandzasar.

detachments fought a war in Dizak (Hadrou) against the riders of khan, during which the latter lost 2,000 men³⁰⁴.

Thus after many military collisions the Armenians of Artsakh not only threw off the Persian yoke but also in 1724 joined the brave troops of David-Bek which fought in Syunik. The decision of the sghnakhs to help Syunik (Kapan) was quite unexpected. A letter was sent from Kapan in which the meliks of Artsakh were put aware that the sultan of Bargushat, the Persian Khan of Nakhijevan had intruded into Syunik, slaughtered four-five thousands of men and took women as captives³⁰⁵. However with the united forces the enemy was expelled from Syunik.

The independence movement of the local bodies of Artsakh Armenians was simultaneous with the famous Caspian invasions of Peter the Great. The Russian Czar wanted to shift the export route of Iran silk from the continental roads of Turkey to the waterways of the Dnieper, the Caspian sea and the Volga. Peter the Great also claimed to the coastal provinces of Persia. The realization of this Russian plan became possible when the Northern war came to its end. This was imperative, as the Ottoman Turkey took advantage of the complicated situation of Iran and proclaimed itself the "legal heir" of Transcaucasus and Atrpatakan. It also threatened to take by force the lands that had been taken by Sefyans but were without local rulers at the time. In this way the Armenian-Georgian-Russian military political treaty that had been signed and consolidated in previous periods, entered the stage of concrete actions. The treaty aimed at liberation of Transcaucasus from the Persian and Turkish rule and the creation of the Armenian-Georgian united state under the Russian protection.

By the order of Peter the Great the Armenian-Georgian united forces were to meet in Shirvan. So the Russian troops and fleet moved in that direction. The Armenian and Georgian military forces met in Cholak village (Gandzak) on September 22, 1722. The 10.000 first rate Armenian troops were led by catholicos

Yesayi and Avan, Shirvan, Shahni and Sarukhan Haryurapets. As it was later said by catholicos Yesayi at that time the Armenians made their souls, sons and possessions serve only to that patriotic deed³⁰⁶. But the Russian and Georgian-Armenian troops failed to meet and unite. The intensification of the international strained situation and the wreck of the Russian ships, the enormous loss of provisions and armament, deceases and losses of men prevented the Russian Empire from the realization of its plans concerning Armenia and Georgia.

The course of events in Transcaucasus brought to non-favourable changes for the Armenian-Georgian alliance. The Shah deprived Vakhtang VI of the post of kartli (pasha) of Vali and of that of the army commander. In addition he accused Vakhtang VI of "betrayal". To this post the shah appointed Constantine, the King of Kakhet, who before that had adopted mohammedanism (was given the name Mahmud-Ghuli). Constantine was also the bek of Yerevan, Gandzak and Karabakh. The newly appointed bek was given the order of attacking Vakhtang and invading Tiflis. So Vakhtang was obliged to move to Russia.

In this way the Armenian forces got isolated from the outer world, and stood alone against Persians, Lezgins, Turks. However, even in this situation the military forces of the sghnakhs did not lose hope, instead they strained their remaining power for the self-defense of their motherland.

The Armenian army thus assumed an exceptional role. It became the sovereign ruler and master of the land, consolidated its might and then in the name of all sghnakhs began to negotiate.

But in 1723 a period of real ordeals began for the sghnakhs of Artsakh. This time the Armenians of this mountainous land had to face the attacks of Turks- a more fierce and horrible enemy, which persistently tried to reach the shores of the Caspian sea. In 1723 after the occupation of Tiflis, the 80.000 Turkish troops led by Ibrahim Pasha moved in direction of Gandzak. Only one part of the forces of sghnakhs took part in defense of the city. Bearing a

heavy defeat, the Turkish troops retreated leaving thousands of dead corpses at the walls of Gandzak. Then by the demand of the Armenian army Ibrahim Pasha set free those Armenians whom they had taken as captives from the neighbouring villages. Witnessing the fighting abilities of the Armenian army Ibrahim suggested to Avan Haryurapet that the Turkish and Armenian forces should unite against Persia and Russia. However he received a categoric rejection.

For the creation of an anti-Turkish front and clearing out the further deeds of sghnakhs Peter the Great sent an envoy (Ivan Karapet) to Transcaucasus. In the same year the envoy reached Karabakh and brought with him the edict of the Russian king.

As it was mentioned in that document Peter promised to take the Armenians under his protection and help them. But before that it (Russia), had to reinforce its positions in lands close Caspian Sea and recruit its military units located at Gilan and Baku. The Armenians were called to show resistance and in case of danger settle on the coasts of the Caspian sea³⁰⁷ that had been invaded by Russia.

As it turned out later the promise of the Russian Czar was indeterminate and vague. On July 12, 1724 the Russian envoy Nepluyev signed a treaty with Turkey in Constantinople. According to that political document the Turks recognized the domain of Russia over the regions lying from Derbend to Mazandaran. In return Russia recognized the rule of the Turks over the Transcaucasian domains of Iran, including Tiflis, Gandzak, Nakhijevan cities and the regions of Karabakh and Kapan. Russia also gave its consent to the Turkish rule over the Iranian Lands³⁰⁸ that lay to the north of Ardebil-Tavriz and to the west of Tavriz-Kermanshah border-lines.

The Russian-Turkish treaty did not allow its parties to interfere with the affairs of the conquered countries. So the Russian royal court did not answer positively the Armenian letters that asked for promised help. At the same time, they also warned the Georgian

and Armenian political and military leaders against provoking the Turks.

Under the new conditions the heads of sghnakhs continued their negotiations with the Russian authorities and at the same time looked for allies for averting the upcoming Turkish aggression. Those diplomatic scrutinies prepared a breeding ground for signing a treaty between Armenian sghnakhs and Georgian Muslim feudals who had Iranian orientation. The document was signed on March 24, 1724. From the Armenian party catholicos Yesayi from Gandzasar, catholicos Nerses from Yerits Mankants, Haryurapets Avan, Mirza, Tarkhan, Baghi, Sargis, Abraham, meliks Tamraz, Baghi, Grigor, Yegan and Daniel signed this document. The treaty obliged the meliks to refuse their plans of rebel against the Shia muslims of Gandzak. The Armenian party also promised to help the population of Gandzak in case it was attacked by Turks or Lezgins.

In return the governors of Gandzak promised to punish ghajars, or its citizens if they tried to rob the Christian population of Karabakh, or if they refused to help the Armenians of Karabakh to resist the invasions of the Turkish and Yezdi tribes. In 1725 a delegation of 200 members was sent to Shah Tahmaz. The delegation was to inform the shah about the signing of the treaty. The delegates returned with gifts sent to the heads of the sghnakhs of Karabakh and Kapan.

In this way, after the signing of Gandzak treaty the Armenian independence movement temporarily lost its anti-Iranian course. With the Russian-Turkish treaty of 1724 the Turkish command undertook to annihilation of the the Armenian land that lay between Russia and Turkey. In June, 1724 the Turkish troops intruded into Ararat valley , conquered Nakhijevan and Ordubad, then sneaked into Goghthn and only after it conquered Hamadan. Yerevan was belaguered from all four parts. First the population of the town showed heroic resistance but on September 26 it surrendered. After the Turkish army had conquered Yerevan, it

moved forth and occupying Tiflis, Gandzak, Lori came nearer to Gandzak.

The Turkish command that had occupied Yerevan made catholicos Astvatsatur of Ejmiatsin write a letter to catholicos Yesayi of Gandzasar and advise him to sent delegates (meliks of Artsakh) to the Turkish command. The delegates had to recognize their people and themselves subjects of Turkey, or else the Turks threatened to invade Karabakh and massacre the population. The political circles of Karabakh decided to fight to the last, so they rejected the suggestions made by Turks. After receiving a negative answer, the Turkish troops (4,700) led by Shahin, Salah and Ali pashas intruded into Varanda and put up their tents in thirty-three villages of the province. The locals realized that they could not resist the enemy the number and forces of which prevailed over theirs. So they pretendedly recognized the supremacy of Turks. But after a feast a group of men led by melik Yegan of Dizak and by Gayane, the daughter of melik of Varanda, attacked the Turks and killed them at night. Gayane herself led the operation in Avetaranots and killed Suleyman bek, that persecuted her. According to the information that later was recorded by Yesayi Hasan Jalalyan only 150 Turks managed to flee. The Karabakhians set 200 captives free and for their part took Salah pasha as captive.

In his letter addressed to the commandant of Derbend in January, 1726 bishop Martiros wrote about this event in Artsakh, "The Turkish pasha wrote to the Armenians of sghnakhs from Gandzak. He demanded the taxes of five years and gave time to prepare the money. He threatened that they would themselves come after it, in case the people did not send it. To this the Armenians of sghnakhs answered that they had no money, but each had a gun and a sword with which they would "welcome" them"³⁰⁹.

The military forces of sghnakhs continued to struggle against the Turks. Catholicos Yesayi, meliks, military leaders and the

envoys to the Russian royal court did not lose their hope of receiving help from Russia and sent numerous letters, in which they asked the Russian Czar and his influential representatives for the promised help and protection. Up to the last, the Armenians of Karabakh waited for help from the North and fought to keep safe the borders of the homeland. In one of his letters addressed to the chancellor of Russia- G. I. Golovinin, Ivan Karapet wrote, "The people of Karabakh are real fighters. You can not see such fighters in any other place of the world. Now about 12.000 riders are ready for a battle. Each of them has a gun. Every day 10 guns are made of the iron, copper and lead that the people found in local mines..."³¹⁰.

Severe battles against the Turkish army took place throughout 1726. On June 15, 1726 catholicos Yesayi, Haryurapets Karapet, Avan, Abraham, Tarkhan and others informed Vakhtang that on June 10 the Turkish army had attacked Khachen from Gandzak, then ruined villages Ghazanchi, Chaprtu, Chankatagh, robbed and took the population as captive. But the Armenian troops of the sghnakhs reached the enemy, set free the captives and returned back the trophy³¹¹.

On August 1, 1726 general Levashov informed that the Armenians of sghnakhs threw of the four massive attacks of the Turks³¹².

The writing which was sent to the Russian royal court by Avan and Ohan Haryurapets on November 15, 1726 informed about one of the recurrent battles. These Haryurapets did not mention the date of the battle that had taken place at the walls of their castle but they gave the figure 800, that is the exact number of the Turks killed during that battle. The enemy, received a heavy counter-strike and retreated to Gandzak³¹³. Ivan Karapet gave a more detailed information about that battle. According to the envoy the 40.000 Ottoman army and the Lezgin forces led by Sar Mustafa pasha invaded Karabakh in autumn of 1726. The first armed collision took place in the environs of Shoushi castle. Being

pressed by the Turkish army, the Armenian military men moved to the neighbouring castles. The persistent fights lasted four days and ended with the victory of the Armenians. Two commanders of the Turkish army, Ghrkhcheshme Aghasi and Enkichar Aghasi were killed and Sar Mustafa pasha took to flee³¹⁴.

The Armenian-Turkish war became more and more fierce and merciless. As Minas Vardapet wrote bloody battles took place almost every day³¹⁵. On May 11, 1727 in a document addressed to the Russian court, general Dolgorukov expressed his astonishment concerning the resistance that the Armenians showed, "Only with the help of God could the Armenians stand before the mighty enemy"³¹⁶. Then on July 26, 1727 the Russian general wrote, "It is the third day that an Armenian envoy named Hakob has come here and brought a letter written by catholicos Nerses, Abraham, Sargis, Petros, in which they put me aware that with the God's help they had killed a large number of Turks. I, in my turn wish them further success..."³¹⁷.

Being unable to break the persistent resistance showed by the Armenians of sghnakhs the Turks tried to sow dissidence among the leaders of the independence movement. They even tried to bribe Yesayi, the catholicos of Gandzasar, who unfortunately died at a fatal moment in 1728.

After the death of the catholicos, Avan Haryurapet no longer believed in the promises of Russia and considered the further resistance to be resultless.

And so together with his co-thinkers Avan moved to Russia and started to serve in the army of Czar. On August 18, 1730, 137 Armenians of sghnakhs with Haryurapets Abraham, Alaverdi, Baghir, Simeon, bishop Petros and general Grigor³¹⁸ moved to Derbend and settled there. This turned out to be baneful for Karabakh because, many people followed them and also stood on the way of emigration; which exhausted the country and "sucked out its vital juice". The situation was really serious in the province of Tsar, from which during only several decades almost

all of its Armenian population migrated. One part of the emigrants settled in Georgia. Thus the Armenian population of Chirkin Yanshagh, Khutavank emigrated to such Georgian settlements as Trghis, Tabakhmelik (a village in the present region of Gardaban) and Shulaver. The emigration was unprecedented and already by 1760-s the Armenians lived only in two places of the province-village Khutavan and the environs of Dadi Vank³¹⁹.

The nomadic Muslim tribes meanwhile fixed their eyes upon the mountainous pastures of Tsar.

The Armenian population of the other provinces of Artsakh also joined this emigration. Some of the meliks of Giulistan settled Kakhet, the city of Telav and in Boghnopor (Bolnis) province of Gugark, that was in the territory of Georgia. Part of the emigrants found shelter in numerous Georgian villages of Kartli. The Armenians of Artsakh founded about hundred villages in Shaki and Shirvan provinces³²⁰ and nine villages³²¹ in Northern Caucasus.

Despite those facts the sghnakhs continued their struggle. In one of his reports addressed to the Russian Czar in 1729, general Dolgorukov mentioned that thousands of Artsakhian soldiers held their grounds in sghnakhs and none of them was going to surrender³²². In 1729-1731 the centre of the Armenian resistance was the castle of Giulistan, which was commanded by "sparapet Abraham", who was mentioned as "Gyavur Abraham"³²³ in those historical works written by the order of the sultans. It is worthy to note that a group of warriors led by Yuzbashi Grigor Stepanyan which had fled to Poland in 1722 and returned to Karabakh in 1728 also took part in the resistance fights of Giulistan³²⁴.

This time the sultan of Turkey announced a "holy war" against the Armenians and by a special "farman" (Turkish official document, a manifesto) ordered Ibrahim pasha of Yerevan, Mahmud pasha of Bayazet, Kurd emirs and his troops which were then in Daghestan, Shirvan, Gandzak to unite their forces and

raize to the ground the Armenian dwellings and strongholds³²⁵.

However the sghnakhs did not lose hope and in 1723 catholicos Nerses appealed (with a letter) to V. Levashov for receiving support in the struggle against the Turkish yoke³²⁶. On September 14, 1733 P. Shafirov delivered a report to the Russian royal court. In his report this official also made several suggestions concerning the political platforms of Russia in Transcaucasus. He particularly mentioned, "We can take the rule of the entire Smaller Armenia (Artsakh) which is populated by brave Armenian Christians who had been throwing the attacks of the Turks and Persians for many years only relying on their own forces. For this we just need to occupy Shamakhi with the help of the Armenians of sghnakhs..."³²⁷.

In 1740s when the Armenians of Artsakh still fought against the Turks, there occurred serious changes in Persia. The Persian people under the rule of Nadir Shah, also started to struggle against the Turkish pressure. In parallel with the anti-Turkish movement of Persia new administrative - political units appeared in Artsakh on the basis of sghnakhs. These new administrative - political units started to be called principalities (melikutiun) of Khamsa. They became the new centres of the independence movement.

THE PRINCIPALITIES OF KHAMSA

Under the rule of Shah Abas' successors the country lived at peace, but a danger of economic and political collapse overhung Persia.

And under the rule of Shah-Husein Afghans led by Mahmud conquered southern Persia, killed almost all the members of Sefyan dynasty and temporarily came to power.

The lands that had no local ruler or lord were repeatedly terrorized and plundered. All those horrors were followed by the atrocities of the Turks. According to the treaty signed in October, 1729 Afghans ceded Transcaucasus and several provinces of Kurdistan and Central Iran to Turkey.

On receiving the news of his father's dethronement Shah-tamaz, the son of Shah-Husein (that had moved to Mazandaran) proclaimed himself the ruler of Persia, gathered troops and came to Tavriz. And with this a national struggle began not only against the Turkish but also against the Afghan tyranny.

At that time the rebellions of the Turkmenian tribe of "kzlbashs" were led by Nadirkuli khan, who was a warrior of Krklu tribe (Afshar). In a very short time he managed to emerge as a victor from several fatal battles.

Shah-Tahmaz soon noticed that brave khan, who in his turn won his trust and sympathy. Nadirkuli started to serve Shah-Tahmaz and became the commander of the shah's troops. As a sign of his loyalty to the shah he changed his name and was called "Tahmazkuli" (servant of Tahmaz). Tahmazkuli drove all the Afghans out of Persia and consolidated the Persian rule in Iran. Due to his brave deeds he had great authority in the army and among the people. Then Tahmazkuli fought in many wars against the Ottomans.

Thus it was natural that the Armenians, that were heroically fighting against the Turks in the sghnakhs of Artsakh, Syunik and Ayrarat became the ally of Nadir under those new conditions. The

Armenian regiments within the troops of Nadir were recruited especially in 1735, during the months of siege of Gandzak. When the Persian troops moved in direction of Kars, the military forces of Artsakh and Syunik led by meliks joined them. When Nadir passed along Gegharkunik, he did Melik-Shahnazaryans honour by visiting them³²⁸.

After the invasion of Kars Nadir and his troops crossed Akhuryan and broke up camps in the environs of Eghvard.

In those days almost all the political leaders of Eastern Armenia -Melik Yegan of Dizak, Melikjan Melik- Shahnazaryans of Gegharkunik, Melik Mkrtum and Melik-Hakobyan of Yeravan supported Nadir. The future sly ruler of Iran felt the anti-Turkish moods of Armenians, that is why he regarded Armenian meliks as reliable allies in the fight against the Ottomans. Nadir had especially good relations with Melik Yegan of Dizak. In his records Mohammad-Kyazim, the chronicler of the royal court of Nadir described Yegan as a wise politician and a person of exclusive abilities³²⁹.

Melik Yegan gave many princely gifts to Nadir and persuaded him to visit Ejmiatsin and confirm the rights of the catholicos and the clergy by new edicts³³⁰.

According to the historiographical works of Mohamad-Kyazim, Nadir ordered the best architects of Transcaucasus to reconstruct the church of Ejmiatsin. For this he gave one thousand tumans (the national currency of Persia of that time). He also ordered to decorate the church with a 15 kilogram golden chandelier and the best carpets of Kirman³³¹.

The Armenians of Artsakh not only took part in anti-Turkish movement of Persians, but also supplied the Persian army with provisions and uniform. One of Turkish chroniclers wrote that it was melik Yegan who fed the whole of shah's army as long as it stayed in Mughan³³².

On July 8, 1735 Nadir defeated the Turkish army at Eghvard with the help of the Armenians. After that victory Nadir invaded