

Caucasian Albania

An International Handbook

Edited by
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DE GRUYTER

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Preface

The background of the present Handbook

In Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, the Southern Caucasus was divided into three countries, Greater Armenia, Iberia (Eastern Georgia, *Kartli*) and the so-called Caucasian “Albania”. These three countries formed an ethnic, linguistic and religious conglomeration which bordered both geographically and culturally with South-Eastern Europe and Western Asia. Their official Christianisation began as early as the 4th century, leaving a lasting mark on the entire region. In the following centuries, it became a well-connected and strategically important buffer zone for Byzantine, Persian, Arab, Turkic, and Mongol powers. And although the borders constantly shifted, the ancient countries of the Southern Caucasus formed a geographical and historical unity that was diverse in itself, yet sharing not only the same history but also common cultural traits.

For both Armenians and Georgians, history and culture of their countries are well known through their own languages, which have been written continuously since the 4th century CE. In contrast to this, Caucasian Albania with the peoples inhabiting it, its history and culture and, ultimately, its “disappearance” have remained by and large obscure, due to the scarcity of autochthonous sources.

Nevertheless, interest in the ancient state of Caucasian Albania has been revived on a large scale, especially in recent years. After the Second Karabakh War in autumn 2020 and the ceasefire agreed between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the (internationally unrecognised) Republic of Artsakh in November 2020, massive media attention was paid to this historical region and especially to “supposedly” Albanian monuments such as churches and monasteries which are now under the administrative control of Azerbaijan. In particular, the Azerbaijani government and scientists affiliated to it have most intensively promoted a theory which, put simply, relates the history of the Azerbaijanis back to the Albanians, thus putting the state of Azerbaijan on a similar historical footing as Armenia and Georgia which can both demonstrate their millennia-long existence on the basis of textual, archaeological and architectural monuments. The “Albanianising” approach, first put forward by the Soviet-Azerbaijani historian Ziya Bunyatov in the 1950s and 60s, has now acquired new topicality by being instrumentalised in abnegating the Armenian background of the disputed territory of Karabakh, even though international scholars such as Nora Dudwick and Harun Yilmaz have argued against this theory in several academic publications since the late 1980s, already during the outbreak of the First Karabakh War, and declared it politically motivated, as a form of historical revisionism that is based on nationalist attitudes.

Since the end of the Second Karabakh War in November 2020, the Azerbaijani government, falling back on the “Albanianising” theory, has quickly started to classify medieval Armenian sites in Karabakh as Albanian, even demonstrably removing Armenian inscriptions. Armenia, in turn, refers to its strong ecclesiastical links with Caucasian Albania which are believed to have brought the country very close to the Armenian culture. However, all this is often built upon distorted, media-spread but not scientifically substantiated ideas about who the “Albanians” really were, and thus on the fact that many things have for long been – and are still being – misinterpreted, willingly or unwillingly, following various hypotheses that are not based on up-to-date, scientifically substantiated facts. Several traditional assumptions, even though outdated and obsolete, are mixed with manipulated narratives and historical claims as well as an inconsiderate and often erroneous exploitation of still understudied, newly discovered material.

There are indeed several competing theories about what happened to the Albanians after the Middle Ages, whether they were absorbed into the Armenian, Georgian, Iranian or, lastly, Turkish population of the region. To shed light on this debate, which seems to have been fought mostly on the backs of the Armenians with their long-lasting presence, historically irrefutable, in the disputed region of Karabakh, and on that of the Udi people who are now being talked up as the true successors of the Caucasian Albanians, supported (if not directed) by the Azerbaijani government in a new post-Soviet “ethnogenesis”, we deemed it overdue to counter the (definitely not harmless) myths on Caucasian Albania that are swirling around today, with scientifically sound and proven facts. For this purpose, a group of internationally acknowledged scholars and distinguished representatives of their scientific fields have agreed to compile the present Handbook, bringing together in a neutral way up-to-date accounts of the historical realities of Caucasian Albania, based on their own research into the textual and archaeological sources available. The Handbook thus reflects the present state of scientific knowledge on ancient medieval Caucasian Albania, including the most recent findings.

The interdisciplinary nature of the Handbook, which spans a wide range from historical, linguistic-philological, archaeological, church and art historical up to ethnological and sociological contributions, warrants a comprehensive picture of Caucasian Albania and its inhabitants. It was by no means compiled to support nationalistic or revisionist points of view but aims solely at a clear and neutral, scientific presentation of the existing facts. It is obvious that one or the other piece of the “puzzle” that Caucasian Albania presents is still missing if we intend to provide a complete, truly coherent and yet scientifically sound image. No doubt, much more research needs to be undertaken in this area in order to get rid of insubstantial national, political and territorial disputes and claims. But even now we may underline an important result of this Handbook, which lies so

to say in the heart of the puzzle: it is clear now that Armenians, Georgians, and a multitude of Caucasian and other peoples have lived together on the territory of ancient and medieval Caucasian Albania since Antiquity, leaving their traces in the history, culture and language of Caucasian Albania as one of the ancient states of the Southern Caucasus.

Content and contributors

All in all, the Handbook comprises 16 Chapters contributed by 15 different authors. In Chapter 1 (Caucasian Albania in Greek and Latin Sources), **Marco Bais**, Faculty member of the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome as an expert of Oriental Ecclesiastical Sciences, evaluates with a special focus on the methodology of historical research the information on Albania and the Albanians that is provided by authors of Classical Antiquity, thus illustrating the oldest witnesses of the country that are known. In Chapter 2 (Caucasian Albania in Medieval Armenian Sources), **Jasmine Dum-Tragut**, specialist for Armenian studies, linguistics and equine sciences at the Center for the Study of the Christian East, Paris-Lodron University in Salzburg, and **Jost Gippert**, comparative linguist and Caucasiologist now working at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg, provide an overview of the historiographical accounts of Albania in Armenian language, covering the period from the 5th to the 13th century; the Chapter largely builds upon previous work by Zaza Aleksidze, who unfortunately did not live to see the present volume published, and Jean-Pierre Mahé, whose readiness to support the Handbook is greatly acknowledged.

The following three Chapters are devoted to the written heritage of the Albanian language. In Chapter 3 (The Textual Heritage of Caucasian Albanian), **Jost Gippert** summarises the present knowledge on the textual remains in Albanian, i.e., the fragments of Bible translation that were found in palimpsest manuscripts with Georgian overwriting in St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai, as well as the few inscriptions that have been detected so far. Chapter 4 (The Language of the Caucasian Albanians), co-authored by **Jost Gippert** and the late **Wolfgang Schulze**, up to his untimely decease in April 2020 teaching as a linguist at the universities of Munich and Banská Bystrica and one of the leading specialists of East Caucasian languages, provides a comprehensive description of the Albanian language as preserved in the textual witnesses, taking into account the many amendments that have become possible by the utilisation of new imaging methods in analysing the palimpsests. Chapter 5 (Caucasian Albanian and Modern Udi), again co-authored by **Wolfgang Schulze** and **Jost Gippert**, outlines the mutual relationship of the Albanian language and that of the Udi people of today,

which is regarded as its successor. In an appended Chapter (5A: The Udis' Petition to Tsar Peter), **Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev**, historian with a focus on the Caucasus and the ancient Near East, until recently working at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg, explains the background of a petition translated by him, which was sent by Udis to Tsar Peter in 1724.

The next three Chapters deal in more detail with the Albanian Church and questions of its relation to the surrounding Christian Churches. In Chapter 6 (Albanians, Armenians and Georgians: a Common Liturgy), **Charles Renoux** OSB, Orientalist formerly of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique and the leading scholar on the Christian rite of Jerusalem, evaluates the liturgical information that is contained in the Albanian palimpsests with regard to their connection with the early Armenian and Georgian lectionaries. In Chapter 7 (One or two? On Christological and Hierarchical Disputes and the Development of the "Church of Albania"), **Jasmine Dum-Tragut** summarises the knowledge on the interrelation of the Albanian Church with those of the Armenians and the Georgians, illustrating the developments between the 4th and the 8th century along the track of the relevant ecumenical and inner-Caucasian councils. In an appended Chapter (7A: The Holy Covenant), **Armenuhi Drost-Abgaryan**, Armenologist at the Seminar for the Christian East and Byzantium, University of Halle-Wittenburg, thematises the "Holy Covenant" that was struck up by Armenians, Georgians and Albanians in their common war of defence against Sasanian Iran in the 4th century. In Chapter 8 (Albanians in the Holy Land – Absence of Archaeological Evidence or Evidence of Absence?), **Yana Tchekhanovets**, archaeologist and specialist for the ancient Near East at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, discusses the question as to whether the Albanians possessed monasteries of their own in Jerusalem and around.

Three more Chapters are concerned with archaeological remnants that have been related to the Caucasian Albanians and their Church. In Chapter 9 (Urban Planning and Architecture of Caucasian Albania. Main Monuments and Trends of Development), **Armen Kazaryan**, director of the Institute of Architecture and Urban-Planning of the Moscow State University of Civil Engineering, provides an overview of the cities, fortresses and other fortifications as well as churches and other monuments that have been associated with the Albanians. In Chapter 10 (The Ensemble of the "Seven Churches" – an Ecumenical Monastery Ahead of Time?), **Patrick Donabédian**, specialist of Early and Medieval Islamic art and architecture of Aix-Marseille University, Aix-en-Provence, scrutinises the architectural properties of the ruined ensemble of churches named *Yeddi Kilsə* in North-west Azerbaijan and its architectural relations to the neighbouring regions. In Chapter 11 (Tigranakert in Artsakh), **Hamlet Petrosyan**, historian, archeologist and anthropologist of the Department of Cultural Studies, Yerevan State Universi-

ty, and the Institute for Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan, gives a comprehensive account of the present state of the excavations undertaken at the site of Tigranakert in Northeast Karabakh, with special emphasis on the reforms of the Albanian king Vachagan III manifesting themselves there.

The final five Chapters of the Handbook are devoted to ethnic, religious and social issues of Caucasian Albania, from Late Antiquity up to the present day. In Chapter 12 (The Ethnic Situation in Antique and Medieval Caucasian Albania), **Aleksan Hakobyan**, renowned historian specialised on the Christian East at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan, examines the question whether the late antique state of Albania was ethnically homogeneous and traces the emergence of an Albanian “meta-ethnos” through the centuries. Chapter 13 (The Rebels of Early Abbasid Albania) by **Alison Vacca**, historian of early Islam working on the caliphal provinces Armenia and Caucasian Albania at Columbia University in the City of New York, analyses the Arabic sources concerning rebellions in and around Albania during the Abbasid era (c. 566–809 CE) and the information these sources provide as to the inhabitants of the Caucasian provinces under Arab rule and their relation to the Caliphate. In Chapter 14 (“You say Albanian, I say Armenian”: Discourses of Ethnicity and Power Around an Albanian King of Armenia), **Sergio La Porta**, specialist on Near Eastern Languages and Civilisation in the Armenian Studies Program of California State University, Fresno, investigates the identity and positionality of a local king of the 11th century named Senekerim and ideologies of kinship manifesting themselves in contemporary and later discourses. In Chapter 15 (Between the Planes and the Mountains: the Albanian-Armenian Marches in the 12th Century and David of Gandzak), **Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev** studies the relation of Christian and Muslim inhabitants of the city of Ganja/Gandzak during the rule of the Kurdish Shaddadids and the first decades of the Turkic colonisation of the south-eastern Caucasus, with a focus on the “Admonitory Exhortations” of the Christian Armenian author David son of Alavik (c. 1065–1140) which mirror this relation. In an appended Chapter (15A: The Gate of Ganja), **Jost Gippert** provides a short account of the iron gate of Gandzak which was transferred as booty to Georgia by king Demetre after capturing the city in 1139. Lastly, Chapter 16 (Reverse Engineering: A State-Created “Albanian Apostolic Church”) by **Hratch Tchilingirian**, researcher on the sociology of minorities and inter-ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus at the Oriental Institute of the University of Oxford, examines the way how Azerbaijan is constructing an “Albanian Apostolic” or “Udi Orthodox Church” as part of a new narrative that connects the modern state to ancient peoples, cultures and early Christianity in the Caucasus.

Structural preliminaries

Due to its broad historical scope, the Handbook deals with original sources in various languages and scripts, from (Caucasian) Albanian via Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Middle Persian, Parthian, and Russian up to Syriac. Given the chaos of different systems of transcription that are spread over the scholarly literature, we decided to use a simplified English transcription throughout the main text of the Handbook, thus rendering it as easily readable as possible. This accounts for all kinds of names and terms which are known from, or identifiable via, English reference works, but also for author's names, which are resolved in their original spelling in the bibliographical references. Non-Latin scripts are usually only reproduced as such in quotations from original texts; the same is true for scientific transcription systems, which are here and there used in rendering names and special terms, especially when the actual sounding is thematised. In these cases, the transcription systems are those applied in the first edition of the Albanian palimpsests of Mt Sinai (Gippert et al. 2008) for Caucasian languages, Hübschmann-Benveniste for Armenian, DIN for Arabic, and Orientalists' systems for other languages; Greek remains untranscribed.

To help our readers cope with the wide range of publications referred to, many of which are hard to find in public or scientific libraries, we have added links to online representations (mostly in PDF format) wherever possible. In some cases, access will be limited to certain persons or institutions, and sometimes it will depend on fees; we hope that this will not result in severe problems for anybody. We have added links to Google Books only if it provides at least partial access to the contents of a given book or source, and we have refrained from linking to booksellers as we do not regard commercial support as our task. Publications that are only available online are labelled as such.

Acknowledgements

As editors, we are extremely grateful to the contributors of the Handbook who, alongside their many other duties, were ready to provide their Chapters in a remarkably short period of time so that the volume can now go into the press just one and a half year after the first online meeting of its participants. Beyond the authors of the Chapters, we wish to express our thanks to several other colleagues who have supported the publication with help and advice. Besides the late Zaza Aleksidze and Jean-Pierre Mahé, who generously let us make use of their introduction to the first edition of the Albanian palimpsests, this is true for the team of the Sinai Palimpsests Project (Claudia Rapp, Michael Phelps, Keith

Knox, Robert Easton and various other members of the Early Manuscripts Electronic Library, EMEL, as well as Dawn Childress and other members of the staff of the library of the University of California at Los Angeles, UCLA), who made excellent multispectral and transmissive light images available and thus facilitated a thorough re-analysis of the only manuscript remnants of the Albanian language. We are further grateful to many people who generously shared photographs and drawings with us; this is true, first of all, for the participants of the Artsakh archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, National Academy of Sciences, Republic of Armenia, but also for Arshak Banouchyan, Andranik Kekishyan, Timur Maisak, Slava Sargsyan, Jon Seligman, Nikolaus von Twickel, and several online users who share their images via the internet. Our thanks are also due to a lot of librarians world-wide who undertook the efforts of digitising manuscripts, microfilms, and ancient and rare books which we needed for our research; in place of all, let us name the staff of the Matenadaran (Research Institute of Ancient Manuscripts named after Mesrop Mashtots) and the Tache and Tamar Manoukian Library of the Mother See of St Ejmiatsin in Armenia, and Emzar Jgerenaia and Nineli Mikadze of the National Parliament Library of Georgia as well as Maia Machavariani and Temo Jojua of the Korneli Kekelidze Georgian National Centre of Manuscripts, Tbilisi, who helped us searching for old journals and manuscripts and identifying unknown authors.

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