

## ARMENIAN MELIK'S AND KHOJAS OF TRANSCAUCASIA DURING NĀDIR SHĀH'S RULE

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### **Abstract**

After the wars waged against Ottomans in 1734-1736 Nādir Shāh succeeded in the annexation of the greater part of Transcaucasia to his state. The elite of the local Armenian population consisted of hereditary landlords (melik's) and wealthy merchants (khojas and bazzazes)<sup>11</sup> once again after the fall of the Şafavid rule appeared under the rule of an Iranian state. Being representatives of a similar social group of Iranian society, Armenian meliks were acknowledged by Persian government and encouraged by Nādir to render him assistance during his wars against Ottoman forces in Iran and Transcaucasia. Nādir Shāh rewarded their major assistance with confirmation of their rights as meliks of some regions of Eastern Armenia and also few of them were appointed to high posts in local administration. However, Nādir's generosity ended shortly after his unsuccessful campaigns in Daghestan and western Transcaucasia in 1740s. The heavy taxes and tax extortion, also great fines put on wealthy Armenians and the Armenian Church resulted in their later estrangement from Nādir's enterprises and lack of any cooperation with him. Inability to pay great fines and extra taxes was observed as signs of disobedience and resulted in persecutions exercised in respect of some representatives of the mentioned social groups.

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<sup>11</sup> As the article refers to the mentioned social groups of Armenian people, we preferred to transcribe the words 'ملک - malik', 'خواجه khvājah' and 'بزاز - bazzāz' borrowed in Armenian from Persian in the way as they are pronounced in Armenian.

Due to the economic decline observed during Nādir's reign Armenian merchants faced the difficulties of the unfavourable conditions for trade: insecurity of the trade routes, high taxes and extortion, heavy fines put on the rich merchants with the purpose to take as much money as possible and severe punishments in case of inability to pay the assigned fines and tributes. We have the evidence of contemporary sources about the Armenian wealthy merchants of New Julfa as well as those functioning in the regions of Eastern Armenia in the period that reveal some peculiarities in their activities.

**Keywords:** Armenian melik's, khoja, Nādir Shāh, Persian documents, post, rights.

### **Introduction**

The elite of Armenian society living under the rule of Nādir Shāh consisted of the rich and noble landlords (melik's) and merchants (khojas and bazzazes). The two groups of wealthy Armenians had similar characterizing features, like involvement in trade, having significant private property and land estates, also holding some administrative posts and duties. However, they also had distinct differences.

Since Nādir Shāh's state was a military empire where frequent wars were waged against its neighbours with the purpose of expansion and plunder, the melik's having armed detachments, were in high respect and often held administrative posts. However, for any act of disobedience they were punished with all strength of the sovereign's order. The merchants of Nādir's state like its economy were in a worse situation as they were observed exceptionally as a source of income for financing the sovereign's military enterprises. The excesses and extortion of officials were widespread in Nādir's empire, and, usually, high taxes were imposed on the merchants and they were often fined under any pretext.

### **Armenian Melik's as remnants of princely families and military landlords of Armenia**

The word “melik” is the Turkish version of the Arabic word “malik” having the meaning of “master, prince, landowner” and derives from the general Semitic root “mlk”, “own, have, possess” [4: 294]. The word has a direct tie with its meaning in Persian (malik): the hereditary governor of a province or region who had not entirely independent and paid taxes to his sovereign [17: 1087]. The researchers of Soviet period considered melik’s as representatives of the group of old local sovereign, landlords, one of the four groups of feudal lords in Transcaucasia in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries [51: 89].

There is information on the maliks of Iran in the Persian historiographical works of already in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were landowners-maliks in the Ilkhanid state and also later states including the territory of Iran within their boundaries<sup>12</sup>. In Armenian environment the title of ‘Paron’ was used with the equivalent meaning of ‘melik’, and it is mentioned already in the Armenian inscriptions of the 13<sup>th</sup> century [48: 65]. In the case of the Melik’ Šahnazaryans of Geğark’uni, usually both titles were used in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Armenian inscriptions on the walls of monasteries and epitaphs of the representatives of this family [16: 291, 293, 339-340].

The term ‘malik’ was not usually used in regard to the Armenian noble and wealthy landowners living under Ottoman rule and there was no such position in the elite (ayan) of the Ottoman society [61: 434]. Although there was the institution of ‘malikane’ as a form of landownership, confirmed as the property of some rulers, princes and statesmen, there were few cases of use of the title ‘malik’ with the name of some persons in the state of the Ottomans. “Paron Melik’ Gulijan’, mentioned in 1564 in Van for his donations to various monasteries around the town [62: 28] and also some others [14: 146, 147], in our opinion, were the remnants from the times of Qarā Quyūnlū and Aq Quyūnlū Turkoman rulers, since their states included almost the whole territory of historical Armenia. Thus, we observe mentions about the melik’ of

<sup>12</sup> See the names of Malik Shams ad-Din Kurd, Malik Mansur, Malik Rāstdil mentioned by Rashīd al-Dīn Hamadānī [53: 25, 27, 46, 57, 67, 195] Malik Qubad Garmrudi, Malik Ahmad Esfahbod-e Gilan, Malik Ashraf mentioned by Ibn Bazzaz Ardabili, 14<sup>th</sup> century historian [18: 221, 251, 392, 393, 772, 999, 1001, 1005, 1009, 1060, 1063].

Sasun, also the names of Malik Aslan Zu-l-Qadar and other maliks in the 15<sup>th</sup> century historiography written by Abū Bakr-i Ṭihrānī [3: 229, 303, 369, 395]. Besides we should consider also that in Ṣafavid times, periodically Persian rule had been established over the bordering regions of the Ottoman Empire. As observed by Dina Rizk Khoury 'on the one hand, the Ottoman state needed the cooperation of the local elites to maintain order in its provinces; on the other, it was at all times acutely aware of the tenuousness of its alliances with them' [26: 137]. So, the local elites managed to keep their ownership and power under Ottoman rule as well. However, we haven't come across any Ottoman document authorizing the position of 'a melik' in Eastern Armenia, which means that this title and its position had no official recognition under Ottoman rule. There we frequently meet the title of 'mir' or 'amir' applied as regards some Armenian landowners and wealthy people [14: 142-144]. So, no wonder that the melik's of Eastern Armenia were strongly opposed to the Ottoman predomination established temporarily in the region, which officially did not recognize their rights, wealth and privileges.

Although the Ottoman government usually tried to forge alliances with local powerful elites of the newly conquered regions [26: 137], however the melik's in Eastern Armenia often were depressed as Aṛakel Davrizhets'i gives evidence about some Armenian Melik's (Melik' Sujum of Dizak, Melik' Pašik of Kočiz, Melik' Babe of Bretis and Melik' Haykaz of K'ašatagh) and other civil and religious leaders (Oghlan keshish, Jalal Beg, Melk'isedek bishop) having visited Shāh 'Abbas I before his campaign in 1603 to express their complaints against the oppressions of the Ottoman rule, and request for shāh's advance, promising him their assistance [6: 19].

Melik's had definite and firm ownership rights as regards their 'mulk[s]' under Persian rule [48: 86]. The verbose texts of *sharī'a*<sup>13</sup> documents, containing deeds of purchases (qabālah) of the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, fixed and legally confirmed that "the bought estate entirely within its borders and with

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<sup>13</sup> Sharī'a, the canon law of Islam, by which the highest religious – judicial instance (shar') of the clergymen was guided. This establishment was often called by the name of these laws, but usually it was called "shar'".

all that belonged to it, was the indisputable property and wealth of the buyer, as the landowners (*maliks*) have their property (*mulk*), or the landlords – their rights and they can deal with it anyway they like’ [47: doc. 8, 11-14, 18]. This formula phrase with slight changes is present also in the deeds of purchase of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries [31: doc. 2, 3, 5]. This right is confirmed and formulated in the decree issued by Shāh Isma‘il II in 1577, the subjects of ‘a malik’ had to pay ‘*mālikāna*’<sup>14</sup> to him for cultivation of the land belonging to him [44: doc. 19]. Thus, the property of a melik’ was a *mulk* which belonged to him and he had the right to receive its *malikānah*.

The preserved decrees of Şafavid, Afshārid and Qājār shāhs confirming the rights of the Armenian melik’s as regards their property and authorizing their role as the civil leaders of the people, living in the villages belonging to the melik’s, allow us to draw some other peculiarities of their rights, functions and duties<sup>15</sup>. According to the decree of Shāh ‘Abbās I ‘the subjects had to acknowledge him as their malik and rīshsafīd, and obey to his will’ [28: 316]. The same statement is present also in the decrees of later Şafavid Shāhs, which instruct the malik to keep control ‘so that no misappropriation and injustice’ happened in his domain. He had ‘to revive the region and make it prosper’. His subjects in their turn were to ‘obey to his reasonable words and will, perform no deals out of his awareness, and concede the rights and duties of that position (of a malik) to him’ [28: 320-321]. So, we may conclude that the melik’s had some judicial rights over their subjects and kept control over their trade and deals.

Apart of this melik’s had also other rights and administrative duties under the rule of the Qarā Quyūnlū, Āq Quyūnlū Turkomans, Şafavid, Afshārid and Qājār dynasties of Iran, which may be observed in the Persian documents and other contemporary sources.

<sup>14</sup> *Mālikāna*, the land tax paid to the landlord or *mālek*, synonym to “*bāhricha*, *mulk*”. Its size varied from 1/10 to 2/10 of the crops, depending upon agreement signed between the owner and cultivators of the land.

<sup>15</sup> Some documents had been preserved in the Archive funds of the Matenadaran and National Archive of Armenia and most of them are published [45: doc. 9, 15], [28].

'*Maliks*', alongside with "*kadkhudās (village-elders), shāhnas* and *dārughas*<sup>16</sup>" of Yerevan and Ğarabağ provinces are mentioned already in the decrees of Qarā Quyūnlū and Aq Quyūnlū rulers granted to the Armenian monasteries of Tat'ev and Gandzasar in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as those who were responsible for the execution of the order [44: doc. 1-4, 6, 8]. Melik's had administrative duties in the regions allotted to them, as Zak'aria of K'anak'er mentions about a 'melik' Davit' being appointed at the head of a region (*maḥāl*)<sup>17</sup> by Amīr Gūna Biğlarbiğ of Yerevan province<sup>18</sup> [60: 63]. We meet the names of Melik' Hakob and Melik' Simeon as the '*maliks of the maḥāls of Karpi and Abaran*', confirming the document on the boundaries of the land-estates of Sağmosavank' Monastery in a *sharī'a* document composed in A.H. 1082 (AD 1671/2)<sup>19</sup>. So, some of the *maḥāls* of Yerevan province as well as the *maḥāls* of Ğarabağ were headed by the Armenian melik's.

In Armenian reality melik's were the leaders and owners of one or more villages in a region, and, most likely, the remnants of the Armenian noble families having dynastic origin as stated by R. Hewsen [22: 285, 292], although the ties of many of them with the old princely families of Armenia are very vague and can be traced only in few cases: those of the Hasan-Jalalyans of Khaçen and Melik'-Šahnazaryans of Geğark'uni [57: 44]. The Persian documents confirming the rights of melik's, always state about their hereditary rights to the post coming from their parents and relative ties with the family of melik's [47: doc. 12; 27: doc. 37]. In case of the absence of such ties the position of a melik' usually was not legalized. A similar case is found in Nādir's decrees addressed to the priest Davit' of Dovšanlu (Arajadzor) village. In

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<sup>16</sup> *Shāhna* and *Dārūgha* were the head of the local police, who took an active part in the realization of the taxes received from the population.

<sup>17</sup> *Maḥāl*, region, district. In the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries it was an administrative unit.

<sup>18</sup> Yerevan is mentioned as Irevan, Iravan and vilāyat-i Chukhūr Sa'ad in contemporary sources. Chukhūr-i Sa'ad was a term applied to the regions of Ayarat and Yerevan in the 14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As considered by H. P'ap'azyan, the term had originated from the name of Amīr Sa'ad, the 14<sup>th</sup> century leader of Turkoman tribes living in Erasxadzor, Surmali and adjacent regions [46: 25].

<sup>19</sup> Matenadaran, Archive of Catholicosate (hereafter MAC), f. 1b, doc. 167.

autumn of 1734 in accordance with the Persian document expressing common consent of the village elders (*kadkhudās*) of 15 villages of the Khačen *maḥāl* [29: 266-267] and his petition, the priest Davit‘ was appointed as their leader (*rīshsafīd*) [30: doc. 2]. Although he uses the title ‘malik’ with his name in the petition, Nādir’s decrees entitle him with the position of ‘village elder [*rīshsafīd*]’ and ‘leader [*pīshvā*]’, and none of the high orders addresses him with the title ‘malik’ [30: doc. 2, 3, 4]. Whereas the documents, expressing the common consent to his leadership (*malik* and *pīshvā*), contains also the evidence of ‘Malik Egan’ about the rightness of the statement.

Another characteristic feature of the Armenian melik’s was the existence of armed forces at their disposal, which allowed them to keep control over their people and protect their rights and position in case of various encroachments. Although under Islamic rule *zimmīs* were freed from military service, however Iranian rule, very flexible in the historical circumstances, allowed the existence of small quantity of armed people in service to the melik’s, as they were needed also during their wars against the Ottomans.

### **Armenian melik’s and the rulers of Iran: from cooperation to acknowledgement of their rights and high appointments in local administration**

Due to their social economic position acknowledged by the rulers of Iran, the Armenian melik’s of Eastern Armenia had natural inclination to Iran and often, till the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century they cooperated with them against the Ottomans. The provident rulers of Iran like Shāh ‘Abbas I and Nādir Shāh encouraged Armenians and received the military assistance of the Armenian melik’s, reflected in the contemporary historiography as well as documentary sources. Fazli Beg Isfahani speaks about ‘Malik Yavri’, the son of ‘Malik Shāhnazar’ of Geğark‘uni, who had joined Shāh ‘Abbās I’s army with his military detachment consisted of 300 Armenian warriors during his campaign in Yerevan province in A.H. 1012 (1603/4). He mentions also ‘Malik Haykāz’ and ‘Ughlān Kishish’, who with their 500 warriors had joined Shāh ‘Abbās I’s commander Ḥusayn Khān fighting against Ottomans in Ğarabağ in A.H. 1013

(1604/5). At the same time 'Malik Yādgar' and other melik's of Šamkhor came to the Persian military camp at Ganja to serve the shāh [19: 357, 360]. Shāh 'Abbās I in his turn rewarded the Armenian melik's with confirmation of their rights with royal decrees [45: doc. 9, 15; 29: 310-311, 318) and even granted some of them high positions in local administration, like Melik' Yavri Melik'-Šahnazaryan who was appointed as *kalāntar*<sup>20</sup> of Yerevan [19: 356].

In the later period the Armenian melik's kept their armed regiments and had their yūzbāshīs, the commanders of groups consisted of 100 warriors. According to the Persian historiographer they were subordinated to Ṭahmāsb Qulī, the khān of Yerevan [19: 1003] in 1625-1635 [49: 33]. These armed regiments were the main core of the forces fighting against the Ottoman troops after the fall of the Šafavid state in Transcaucasia, and which offered a rather strong resistance to Ottoman attacks in the regions of Arts'akh and Siunik' in 1720s. The general number of their forces in that period is counted to be about 20000-30000 [13: 582]. The historical sources have kept evidence about cooperation of the Armenian armed forces of Syunik' and Ğarabağ with those of Ṭahmāsb II Šafavid in the wars against Ottomans attacking the south-eastern regions of Armenia and Tabriz [54: 59, 63; 35: 178). Ṭahmāsb II even had acknowledged Davit' Beg, the leader of the Armenian troops as the head of the region of Kapan giving him the right to mint coins in his own name [54: 59].

Armenian melik's and their subjects joined Nādir's troops and assisted him not only during his wars in Transcaucasia but also in the inner regions of Iran. Abraham of Yerevan gives evidence about the considerable number of Armenians lead by six Armenian yūzbāshīs in the army of Nādir Shāh fighting against Ottomans in early 1730s [2: 80]. Nādir, aware of the moods among

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<sup>20</sup> Kalāntar is a Persian word with the meaning of "an elder, greater". In Safavid period it started to be used as a term for mayor, the official at the head of town administration. According to "Dastur al-muluk" kalāntar appointed the kadkhudās of the town blocks and masters (ustāds) of the handicraft guilds. He also regulated civil matters and problems, allotted the taxes of the artisans, merchants and trade companies. Kalāntars had several officials in their disposal to help them manage all these affairs and functions [41: 240].



Armenians, inclined to cooperation against Ottomans, encouraged them with his special attention and precious gifts granted to catholicos Abraham of Crete and Holy Ējmiatsin [42: 310b]. Consequently, Nādir received the important military assistance and supply in food needed for the success of his forces against the Ottomans in Transcaucasia and it is well attested in Persian and Armenian sources [42: 310b; 1; 30: doc. 1-4]. Afterwards, Armenian melik's were rewarded with not only confirmation of their rights, special tax exemptions, but also special honor granted to some of their representatives and their appointment to some administrative posts<sup>21</sup>. Thus, Melik' Allahquli of Ćaraberd (or Jraberd) was granted the title of a *sulṭān*<sup>22</sup> for his courage shown in Nādir's war against Ottomans [41: 43].

We have information about the following posts run by the Armenian melik's during Nādir Shāh's rule. The melik's of Ćarabağ lead by Melik' Egan of Dizak were able to achieve a kind of autonomy under the rule of Nādir Shāh. They were separated from the *bīglarbīgī* of Ganja in a special administrative unit called '*maḥall-i khamsa*' run by Melik' Egan, who was assigned as the *zābiṭ*<sup>23</sup> and 'head (*rīshsafīd*) of all Armenians of Aẓarbāyjān'<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See some of the documents published in [30: doc. 13; 56: 67, 68, 71]. See below about the offices held by the meliks.

<sup>22</sup> In Safavid period *sulṭān* was a title of the rank higher, than that of a malik and lower than khan, and may be considered as deputy governor [39: 25, 43]. *Sulṭāns* had domains smaller than *khāns* and after Nādir's death there were several *sulṭānates* formed in Transcaucasia with small territories, like the *sulṭānate* of Shuragyal included in the territory of Yerevan khanate. There were also semi-independent sultanates of Elisu, Kutkashen, Aresh, Ghazakh and Shamsadil [51: 134-138].

<sup>23</sup> Revenue collector, controller; bailiff. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century *zābiṭs* were the tenants, who paid some money to the state treasury in order to have the right of getting the taxes of a certain object. In wartime *zābiṭs* were responsible for the food and arm supply of the troops as well [43: 296b]. *Zābiṭs* like the other administrative officials of Nādir Shāh received salary from state treasury and could not have portion from the income and profits of the region [43: 12a].

<sup>24</sup> Aẓarbāyjān was the administrative unit with its center in Tabriz formed during Nādir's rule, the governor of which was his brother Ibrāhīm. The regions of Yerevan, Nakhijevan, Gharabagh, Shirvan and Eastern Georgia were included in the boundaries of that administrative unit [1: 96].

[42: 310b]. There are two royal decrees confirming this statement: one was issued in 1736 on passing of the villages Kavart (Qabārtū) and Aradjadzor (Dovshanlu) to the *zabiṭ* of Melik' Egan and the other - confirming Melik' Šahnazar as melik' of Varanda in 1743 according to the petition of Melik' Egan, *zābiṭ* of Khamsa *maḥāls* (*zābiṭ-i mahall-i khamsa*)<sup>25</sup>. As stated in the inscription on the stone above the entrance of Melik' Egan's house, he was equal to a khān and a biglarbīg and five melik's of Tališ, Čaraberd, Khačen, Varanda, and Kočiz were subject to him [50: 76-77]. Consequently, he was responsible for the levy of taxes from six melikdoms of the *maḥall-i khamsa*: those of T'ališ, Čaraberd, Khačen, Varanda, Kočiz, Dizak, to be delivered to Ibrāhīm Mirzā, the viceroy of Azarbayjan having his seat in Tabriz.

The seal of Melik' Egan is stamped on many deeds of purchase and deals from Ğarabağ witnessing of his high position as the head of the named administrative unit (*maḥall-i khamsa*) and keeping control over the trade and deals in the region.<sup>26</sup>

Melik'jan, a representative of the family of Melik'-Šahnazaryans of Geğark'uni held the post of the *kalāntar* of Yerevan during Nādir Shāh's rule. He has been mentioned for several times in the history of Catholicos Abraham Kretats'i as *kalāntar* of Yerevan, and was present during the coronation of Nādir as Shāh of Iran in Mughan Steppe in March 1736 [1: 29, 59]. The catholicos gives a very distinct definition for the position of *kalāntar* Melik'jan as he notes that the Armenian melik's of Yerevan province, which are melik's Hakobjan and Mkrtum, also those of 'the nine mahals of Karbi, Ğirkbulağ, Šoragel, Igdir, Gaṛni, C'ağknaydzor, Geğark'uni, Aparan, Širakovan are under the rule of the *kalāntar* and tremble in his presence like servants' [1: 103]. An Armenian equivalent for the position of a *kalāntar* is in the epitaph

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<sup>25</sup> The document is kept now by the scions of Melik' Šahnazaryan family and was presented to us by Rafael Abrahamyan. The document we have published with its Russian translation in another article already in 2021 [32: 79], but considering its importance for the theme of this article and history of Armenia we included the document with its English translation as a supplement to this article.

<sup>26</sup> See in the following documents: MAC, f. 2b, doc. 175, 178, 184b, 189a, 208a.

of Melik' Yavri: as “paronats paron” [16: 341], where “paron” is the Armenian equivalent for both melik's and rich merchants (khoja), and consequently the meaning is: “the head of melik's and merchants”.

The considered functions and the rights of melik's show that they had close ties with trade and merchandise, so no wonder that Melik' Hakobjan, also held the post of the head of the mint (*žarrābī bāshī*) in Yerevan during Nādir Shāh's reign [1: 49].

### **Disobedience and persecution of melik's in the final phase of Nādir's rule**

As it was mentioned above, the state of Nādir Shāh was a typical military despotism and the military elites were the main support of the ruler [7: 105], so no wonder that the Armenian melik's, who rendered him significant assistance during his wars, were rewarded with special attention of Nādir and were in high esteem. However, whenever they took a false step (fell short in their service and showed any kind of disobedience), they were severely punished.

Most featuring is the case of Melik' Mirzabeg of Varanda, who was killed by Nādir's order in 1744 because of his refusal to pay the taxes [36: 67]. The same year is also the time when Melik' Egan, the head of the '*maḥall-i khamsa*', died. Melik' Aram, Melik' Egan's son and successor held his father's post only for one year. As stated in his epitaph he had paid a fine of 6000 *tūmān* and assumed the post of his father, but died a year later, in 1745 [15: 199]. We don't know whether Esayi, his brother and successor held the same office as his father during Nādir's reign. We have an obscure information about a decree on his rights, preserved in the archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which is mentioned in the article of F. Poğosian with the following statement about Esayi: “[He] was appointed as the malik and governor of Dizak, who had to comply with all his [Nādir's] demands, follow the state interests and show his devotion to the government” [52: 204]. The phrases about melik's compliance with all demands of Nādir Shāh and devotion to his

state are unusual for the decrees on the rights of the melik's<sup>27</sup>, because in other decrees it is not stressed and it stands to reason. Most likely, these duties are emphasized in the decree because of Nādir's displeasure with the activities of his brother and predecessor, Melik Aram, who was fined as mentioned above and died (or maybe murdered for political reasons?) only after a year of his appointment.

For the same period we have also the case of Melik'jan Melik'-Šahnazarian, the *kalāntar* of Yerevan, who was dismissed and executed in result of some intrigues by Nādir Shāh's order. We don't know anything about the circumstances and the time of his death, but it should be after Nādir's Indian campaign and during or after his unsuccessful wars in the Caucasus against North Caucasian tribes and Ottomans in 1741-1744 [8: 44-46]. After Melik'jan, his son Manučar was appointed at the same post of *kalāntar* of Yerevan<sup>28</sup>.

These dates are not a mere coincidence as in that period are attested heavy taxes and fines levied from not only Armenians, including New Julfa and Holy Ējmiatsin [58: 65] but also other subjects of the state [24: 536-537]. There were also persecutions of Catholicos Ghazar of Ējmiatsin who was fined with 24000 dīnār in 1742 [25: 265] and then - with 5000 tūmān in 1745 and dethroned by Nādir's order [5: 639-40]. There should be disappointment and complaints among the Armenians of Transcaucasia and elsewhere, unable to pay the heavy taxes and fines. Consequently, they would have tried to avoid any support or cooperation with Nādir Shāh and his administration; therefore, there were persecutions and repressions as regards some of their leaders.

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<sup>27</sup> Compare with the decrees published in [28: 318, 321].

<sup>28</sup> Matenadaran, ms. 2888, 341a [23].

### **The decline of Armenian merchandise in Iran during Nādir's rule**

Armenian merchants who had trade as their main occupation formed a rather big social group since several transit trade routes passed through the territory of Armenia connecting the countries of the East, like China, Iran and India with the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Europe. The wealthy merchants who had significant trade capital held the title of a *khoja* [44: 111]. This title was very frequent among the Armenian merchants of Nakhijevan and Yerevan provinces<sup>29</sup> and some of them occupied the posts of local *kalāntar* and *zarrābīs* in Şafavid period. According to Zakariya of Agulis in the short period of 1663-1664 two Armenian merchants (Khoja Sark'is of Anapat and Khoja Sarkis of Dzoragegh) managed the mint for rent, in 1670-1674 Khoja Aghabeg of Jahuk held the post of *zarrābī*, then - Khoja Sarkis of Dzoragegh till 1679 [59: 128, 129]. Khoja Sahak was the *kalāntar* of Yerevan in mid-seventeenth century [33: 87].

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the development of manufactory production in Europe, there were manufactories also in some places of Transcaucasia [21: 25-37]. The Armenian merchants, involved in the trade of manufactory products, were called 'bazazes'<sup>30</sup>. We see the names of 'former *kalāntar* Avī, Khoja Nikoghos, the son of Pedros, Bazzāz Avan and Bazzāz Hayrum' and over 40 other persons signed as witnesses of a deal recorded in a Persian document from Agulis dated 1711 (MAC, f. 1b, doc. 237).

Nādir's indifference towards economic situation in Iran and increased insecurity on the roads resulted in the decline of trade there in general [7: 227]. Although there is evidence about special attention of Nādir as regards foreign merchants and he granted some privileges to them with the purpose to encourage their trade with Iran, however, at the same time hard taxes and fines were put on the merchants with the purpose of getting as much as

<sup>29</sup> The title of *khoja* is often written with the names of the Armenian merchants in their epitaphs on the tombstones (*khach'kars*) of the many villages and towns of Nakhijevan [9-12].

<sup>30</sup> 'Bazzāz' is a Persian word meaning the merchant engaged in the trade of manufactory products.

possible from them for the state treasury [7: 241-246]. Thus, the trading conditions were unfavourable in Iran during Nādir's reign [20: 351].

If earlier, under Šafavid rule we have information about the Armenian khojas, who held the posts of the *kalāntar* and *zarrābī*, during Nādir's reign they were kept away from the high posts, except for the post of *kalāntar* of New Julfa. The contemporary sources have kept evidence about Nādir's unfair treatment with the Armenian merchants already during his rise and struggle against Ottomans, when he appropriated their robbed property in Hamadan [2: 59-60]. Then the merchants of New Julfa suffered hardships because of tax excesses, heavy fines and severe punishments exercised as regards some of them [5: 649-652]. Unable to pay the great fines put on them, some of the wealthy merchants of New Julfa such as Emniyaz Ağa of Khoja Minasean family and Harut'yun Šahrimanyan were burnt alive by Nādir's order [25: 269].

There is evidence about widespread corruption and heavy fines put on the merchants of New Julfa [56: 253] as well as on the wealthy merchants in the other regions of Nādir's empire. There was a practice of putting additional taxes, extortion named *shiltāq* and *zīadat* attested in many complaints and petitions addressed to the Shāh [34: 173-174].

The research on some Persian documents (letters, various shari'a-notarial documents, bills, receipts, orders, etc.) of the Matenadaran dating 1699-1755 reveals the details referring to the life, different aspects of trade and social activities of some wealthy merchants of Agulis, and also other social-economic realities of the town and the region around it [34: 171]. The documents have kept information about the involvement of Khoja Hovhannes and his brother Martiros in the international trade by the continental transit trade routes connecting their homeland with the ports in Aleppo, Izmir and Constantinople and presence of their companions at various spots (Ganja, Šaki and Ğabala) of Eastern Caucasus by which the northern transit trade route passed. Khoja Hovhannes and his brother were wealthy merchants and landlords, having bought land estates in Agulis and nearby villages, and they had also their share from the exploitation of a caravanserai, a manufactory of calico production and a mill in Urdūbād [34: 171]. As evident from some documents of the

Matenadaran Khoja Hovhannes was involved in the tax levy from several villages of Nakhijevan region. The duty was put on him by the order of Ibrāhīm, the governor of Azerbaijan<sup>31</sup>. Other documents show that he often paid the taxes instead of the cultivators as they had debts to him<sup>32</sup>. This secured the regular entry of the revenue into the state treasury, and at the same time freed the local cultivators from the oppression of local officials in case of delays and their inability to pay the taxes.

In mid-eighteenth century the merchants of Agulis like the other inhabitants of the region faced the hardships of Nādir Shāh's rule characterized with increase in abuses and tax-extortion of state officials. Khoja Hovhannes even applied to Nādir Shāh with a petition on account of the unlawful tax demands and encroachments and received a decree protecting his rights [34].

Thus, Armenian merchants suffered much more difficulties during Nādir's rule than melik's, as they were considered as a source of income and money needed for the military campaigns. As a result of Nādir Shāh's mistreatment of the Armenian merchants, many of them left Iran for the countries where they had already established commercial ties and network. Many merchant families left the territory of Nādir's empire with their finances for the other countries, such as India, Russia and European states.

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<sup>31</sup> MAC, f. 1h, 1216.

<sup>32</sup> MAC, f. 1h, doc. 1209, 1232.

## Conclusion

The social groups of Armenian melik's and merchants were treated in different ways during Nādir Shāh's rule. Armenian melik's as military leaders had been considered as elite needed for the expansionist policy of Nādir Shāh and they were encouraged to extensive cooperation with his forces. Consequently, the rights of the melik's were confirmed and some of them received high titles (*sulṭān*) and posts (*kalāntar*, *ẓarrābī bāshī*, *ẓābiṭ*) in local administration. The six melikdoms of Ğarabağ attained a kind of autonomy in a separate administrative unit of '*maḥall-i khamsa*', governed by Melik' Egan, the *ẓābiṭ* of that unit. However, there was also oppression and punishment exercised as regards some of them in case of any disobedience or false step.

Nādir's rule furthered the economic decline in Iran, which worsened the economic climate needed for trade. The sources of the period have kept evidence and facts about high additional taxes and fines put on them, and severe punishments executed by the high order. As a result, Armenian merchants faced difficulties to continue their trade activities and preferred to migrate to other countries with their families and finances.

## Supplement

The decree of Nādir Shāh appointing Melik' Šahnazar as melik' of Varanda  
Dated February 12, 1743

[*Persian text*]

هو 1

بسم الله خير الاسماء 2

مهر: بسم الله. نکین دولت و دین رفته بود چون از جا بنام نادر ایران قرار داد خدا 3  
اعوذ بالله تعالی فرمان همایون شد آنکه درینوقت حسب الاستدعاء عارض ملکی محال ورنده را

بدستوریکه 4

با ملک حسین بوده بشاهنظر ولد او شفقت فرمودیم که متوجه امر مزبور بوده بلوازم و مراسم آن قیام و  
اقدام نماید. تحریرا" ۱۷ ذیحجه الحرام سنه ۱۱۵۵. 5



عرضه داشت کمترین بندکان یکن ضابط محال خمسه ارامنه بذروه عرض حجاب درگاه فلک اسا [اقدس]  
 اعلى ميرساند که 6  
 چون ملک حسين ملک محال ورنده بتصدق فرق فرقدان سان مبارک اقدس اعلى کردیده و شاهنظر ولد  
 مشاراليه 7  
 قابليت ملکی دارد استدعا آنکه رقم مبارک اقدس اعلى شفقت و مرحمت کردد که بدستور سابق 8  
 ولد مشاراليه ملک محالمزبوره و بامور ديوانی اشتغال نمايد. چون واجب بود جرئت عرض کردیده  
 كما امره العالی جر[یان]. 9

[English translation]

He is

In the name of Allah, the best of the names

[Seal]: In the name of Allah; the gem of the state and faith was lost, when God established Iran under the rule of Nādir.

I seek refuge in God Almighty. A royal decree was issued on the following: on the following: at this time, according to the request of the petitioner, *malikī* of the *maḥāl* of Varanda we granted to Shāhnaẓar, the son of Malik Ḥusayn, in the same order as it had been with the latter, so that he could be occupied with the duties and matters of the pursuit.

Written on 17 of the sacred month of Zī ḥajja in the year 1155<sup>33</sup>.

The petition of the most humble servant Egan, *zābit* of the Armenian *maḥāl* of Khamsa

[He] brings to the notice of the threshold of the Highest and Holiest palace, reaching the heaven, that since Malik Ḥusayn, the *malik* of Varanda *Mahāl*<sup>34</sup> had been honoured with graces of the blessed Most High [had passed away] and his son Shāhnaẓar deserves the position of a *malik*, the request is to grant a blessed sacred order (*raqam*) in order that he could fill the post of the *malikī* of the mentioned *maḥāl* and be occupied with the affairs of the *divān*. Since it was necessary [I] had the courage to apply. Due to the highest order.

<sup>33</sup> February 12, 1743.

<sup>34</sup> Melik' Huseyn of Melik' Šahnazaryan family was appointed as melik' of Varanda in 1730 by the decree of Shah Tahmāsb II Safavid [27: doc. 87].

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## ԱՅՍՐԿՈՎԿԱՍԻ ՀԱՅ ՄԵԼԻՔՆԵՐՆ ՈՒ ԽՈՋԱՆԵՐԸ ՆԱԴԻՐ ՇԱՀԻ ԻՇԽԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՇՐՋԱՆՈՒՄ

### Քրիստինե Կոստիկյան

**Հիմնաբառեր.** Հայ մելիքներ, խոջա, Նադիր շահ, պարսկական փաստաթղթեր, պաշտոն, իրավունքներ.

### Ամփոփում

Հոդվածում քննվում են 18-րդ դարի հայ հասարակության վերնախավը ներկայացնող մելիքների և խոջաների սոցիալ-տնտեսական ու իրավաքաղաքական պատմության մի շարք հարցեր. սկսած այդ եզրույթների ծագումից մինչև հայկական իրականության մեջ դրանց գործառական նշանակությունը, այդ սոցիալական խմբերի ներկայացուցիչների կապը և փոխհարաբերությունները պարսից իշխանությունների հետ և նրանց սոցիալ-քաղաքական դրության առանձնահատկությունները, դրանցում եղած փոփոխությունները տարածաշրջանում Նադիր շահի իշխանության հաստատումից մինչև անկում:

Հայ մելիքները հիմնականում հանդիսանալով հայ իշխանական տների հետնորդները իրենց կարգավիճակով և սոցիալական-տնտեսական դրությամբ սերտորեն կապված էին իրանական պետականության հետ, ունեին իրենց համարժեք (մելիքական) խավը իրանական հասարակության մեջ, որի մասին փաստերը արձանագրված են արդեն 13-14-րդ դարերի պարսկական պատմագրության մեջ: Որոշ հայ մելիքների առկայությունը նաև Օսմանյան կայսրության տարածքում կապվում է նորից իրանական պետականության հետ, որը Իլխանության շրջանից առկա էր տարածաշրջանում և այնուհետև իր դերը չի կորցնում նաև Կարա Կոյունլու և Ակ Կոյունլու թուրքմենական պետություններում:

Այն հանգամանքը, որ այդ հասարակական խավը բնորոշ էր Օսմանյան կայսրությանը և այդ պետության օրենքներով պաշտպանված էր, ցույց է տալիս, որ Այսրկովկասում Օսմանյան տիրապետությունը չէր համապատասխանում տեղի մելիքների շահերին: Այս հանգամանքը

մղում էր Այսրկովկասի հայ մելիքներին աջակցելու իրանական իշխանություններին տարածաշրջանում Օսմանյան կայսրության դեմ նրանց մղած պայքարում: Ուստի պատահական չէր հայ մելիքների ռազմական համագործակցությունը թե՛ Նադիր շահի և թե՛ ավելի վաղ շահ Աբբաս Ա-ի գլխավորած իրանական զորքերի հետ: Իրանի շահերն էլ համապատասխանաբար հաստատում էին նրանց մելիքական իրավունքները հրովարտակներով և երբեմն խրախուսում նաև որոշ բարձր վարչական պաշտոնների շնորհմամբ: Այս համատեքստում լիովին պատճառաբանված էր հայ մելիքների դիրքերի ամրապնդումը և նրանցից մի քանիսի բարձր դիրքը Նադիր շահի Այսրկովկասում տիրապետության սկզբնական շրջանում. Մելիքջան Մելիք-Շահնազարյանը դառնումը է Երևանի քալանթարը, Մելիք Հակոբջանը՝ դրամահատարանի ղեկավարը (զառաբի), Մելիք Եգանը՝ Խամսայի մահալի ղեկավարը (զաբիթ), որը փաստացի նաև ամրապնդում էր շահական իշխանությունը տարածաշրջանում:

Նադիր շահի անհեռատես տնտեսական քաղաքականությունն ու մշտական պատերազմները, սակայն, կործանարար հետևանքներ են ունենում իր իսկ ստեղծած կայսրության համար: Ծանր հարկային բեռը անընդունելի էր հասարակության բոլոր խավերի համար և դրդում էր անհնազանդության տարբեր դրսևորումների, որը իր հերթին պատժվում էր բռնապետի ողջ խստությամբ և որի զոհն են դառնում անգամ որոշ հայ մելիքներ: Անարդար հավելագանձումների ու դրամաշորթության թիրախում են հայտնվում նաև Ամենայն Հայոց կաթողիկոսությունը, ինչպես նաև թե՛ Նոր Զուղայի, և թե՛ Արևելյան Հայաստանի հայ հարուստ վաճառականները:

Մատենադարանի պարսկերեն որոշ փաստաթղթեր պահպանել են տեղեկություններ Ագուլիսի հայ խոջաներ Հովհաննեսի ու նրա եղբայր Մարտիրոսի գործունեության վերաբերյալ, որոնք ընդգրկում են Նադիր շահի տիրապետության շրջանը և բացահայտում են նրանց դերը տեղի Նախիջևանի որոշ հայկական գյուղերից կատարվող հարկագանձումներում: Այդ պարտականությունը տեղի հայ վերնախավի անդամների վրա դրվել էր Թավրիզում նստող կառավարիչ Իբրահիմի հրամանագրով



և միտված էր պետական գանձարանի օգտին կանոնավոր հարկագանձումները ապահովելուն: Այն միաժամանակ նաև պաշտպանում էր հայ գյուղացիներին՝ հարկերի վճարումը ուշացնելու դեպքում պաշտոնյաների կողմից հնարավոր բռնաճնշումներից ու պատիժներից: Փաստաթղթերի տվյալների համաձայն հայ վաճառականները նրանց փոխարեն վճարում էին բոլոր հարկերը պետական գանձարանին և այնուհետև ըստ պարտամուրհակների ստանում իրենց հասանելիք գումարները պարտապաններից: