

**CHRISTIANITY AND CHRISTIANS IN SHAKĪ AND SHĪRVĀN
FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES UNTIL THE END OF THE
SAFAVID ERA ***

Kristine Kostikyan, Gevorg Stepanyan, Gohar Mkhitaryan

Abstract

The paper examines the religious aspects of the history of Shakī and Shīrvān regions of Eastern Caucasus from the times of the spread of Christianity there until the end of Safavid rule over it. An overview of the history of the Church of Albania (or Aḡuank'), its legal and political aspects conducted in the article are important for a better understanding of its relations with the Armenian Apostolic Church, and identity issues of its subject Christian population.

An empirical and comparative-historical analysis of the data and information contained in historical sources on the situation of Christians in the regions of Shakī and Shīrvān provides a clear view of the realities and situation in each phase of history and the factors stimulating their conversion to Islam. The study shows that during Safavid predominance over the regions included in one administrative unit of Shīrvān bīḡlarbīḡī the cultural and civil methods of assimilation and conversion, combined with economic incentives, prevailed. The gradual weakening of Safavid rule over the regions was accompanied with serious challenges and hardships faced by local Christians during the frequent invasions of North Caucasian tribes. The collapse of Safavid rule in the regions designated the end of religious tolerance and intensification of the use of forced and economic methods of conversion to Islam.

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Introduction

Shīrvān and Shakī are regions of Eastern Caucasus, an area subjected to frequent migrations and military attacks of nomadic tribes and clashes of the empires of the East. The regions formed part of the territory of ancient Albania in Greco-Latin or Aḡuank' in Armenian sources, which is later known also as Arran in Arabic and Persian sources.

Aḡuank' (Albania) had a complicated ethnic structure. From olden times, various ethnic groups and peoples belonging to the Caucasian and Indo-European language families lived there. In his Geography, Strabo mentions that although subject to one king, they spoke twenty-six languages or dialects [47: 229]. Religion played an important role in the ethnic consolidation and self-identification of peoples in Aḡuank'.

The kingdom of Aḡuank' had close ties with the kingdoms of Armenia and Georgia, and also with the empires of ancient Iran. Armenia played a significant role in the spread and adoption of Christianity in Aḡuank' at the beginning of the 4th century AD [16: 806-810].

From the 7th century, the Byzantine Empire made efforts to take the Church of Aḡuank' under its influence and increase the number of its subjects in the territory of Eastern Transcaucasia. However, its attempts met the strong resistance of the Armenian Apostolic Church and had no success [11: 73-88]. The Church of Aḡuank' stayed united with the Armenian Church in spite of the later efforts as well made by the Church of Georgia in the 10th-15th centuries [46: 111-112].

The spread of Islam in the Eastern Caucasus was a long process starting from the times of its Arabic conquest and continued later under the rule of Muslim powers through economic incentives and forced methods, and also

by the influence of Persian culture until the 19th century. The issue of religious change and conversion is important for understanding the ethno-confessional processes and political developments in the region. Yet, it is one of the least considered issues as it is very sensitive in political aspects.

It has been acknowledged that there exists a correlation between religion and ethnicity [41: 13]. In some cases, religion equates to ethnicity, such as Amish, Mormons, Hutterites and Jews, which fall under the category of direct linkage between religion and ethnicity [41: 14].

A similar case may be traced with the ethnic groups in Eastern Caucasus. Religion had a significant impact on their self-consciousness and identity, and its change often resulted in changes in ethnicity.

Christian religion and the Armenian Apostolic Church were the important components of Armenian identity from the earliest times of the adoption of Christianity as state religion in the Armenian kingdom until the 19th century [59: 6-7, 24]. The role of the Armenian Church increased substantially after the collapse of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia and especially after the establishment of the Mother See in Holy Ējmiac‘in. Catholicoses of Ējmiac‘in were the religious leaders of all Armenians, acknowledged by the Muslim powers ruling over Armenian regions, and also served as a link between the Muslim governors and their zimmī (Armenian) subjects. A very peculiar understanding of the role of Armenian Catholicoses by the Muslim rulers may be traced in the title ‘khalīfah’ given to them [34: 122-123]. The title, the same as ‘caliph’, combined the features of a religious and civil leader. The catholicoses had certain independence in regulation of the inner life of their pasture and settlement of not only its religious but also most of the secular matters, like the settlement of disputes and conclusion of certain contracts between Armenians.

The authority of the catholicos over his subjects has been noticed also by Tournefort in the 17th century who states: “he is the most considerable

Prelate in the World, in regard to the Authority he has over his Nation, which tremble at the least Threat of Excommunication from him” [53: 241]. The authority of the catholicos was also stipulated by the protection of his subjects from Muslim powers that he would secure with royal decrees and sometimes by paying the capitation (jizya) instead of the poor, as evidenced by the French traveller [53: 241].

Thus, religious conversion was observed by the Armenian Apostolic Church as an unacceptable commitment, which led to the separation and exclusion of a person not only from the Church but also from the ethnic community. Thus, besides the term ‘davanap‘okhut‘yun’ (դավանափոխութիւն) used for “conversion” in Armenian, there are other equivalents in Armenian with the meaning of “adoption of Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam” denoting the changes in ethnic identity. There are the words “fr‘anganal”, “lehanal”, that is ‘to become ‘a Fr‘ang’ (a French) or “a Leh” (a Pole) [23: 163]. Also the following words are used for the adoption of Islam: “parskanal”, “k‘rdanal”, “tač‘kanal”[†], “t‘rk‘anal”, that is ‘to become a Persian, a Kurd, or a Turk (Turkish)’. These words show that apart from the change of religion, the conversion in a certain ethnic environment resulted also in the change of ethnic identity and final assimilation of the person.

As already noticed by K. Trever, in the medieval period the literary language of the peoples of Albania was much connected with their religious belonging: the monophysites adopted Armenian, the dyophysites adopted

[†] A synonym to ‘become a Muslim’ or ‘t‘rk‘anal’, used mostly among Armenians living in Turkish environment or under the rule of Ottoman Empire. See Margaryan G., “Tajik” and Other Names to Denote Muslims in Armenian Historical Sources as a Reflection of the Cognition of a Different Ethnic-confessional Community, *Historia i Świat (History and the World) Volume 12*, Siedlce, [60: 183-191].

Georgian and Muslims adopted Arabic and later Persian. Thus, in ethnic aspects “the Albanian Church became more Armenian” [54: 310].

Study of the characteristic features of “The story of Vačagan” and “Canons of Ağven”, the sources of the History of Albania by Movses Daskhurantsi and the main canonic documents of the Church of Albania, written at the beginning of the 6th century [4: 159, 183], has allowed Al. Hakobyan to conclude that the union of the religious communities on the right and left banks of Kura River had already taken shape and Armenian became the main official language of the Albanian Church in the period [4: 123].

Apart from Armenian, we have literary evidence also for the Udi language, the language of Christian Udis belonging to the Armenian Apostolic church and living in some villages of Shakī, like Niž and Vart‘aşen. The research on the Albanian palimpsests has brought J. Gippert and W. Schulze to the conclusion that they contained parts of Gospel of John, translated as such into Old Udi by about 670 AD, at a time when the Old Armenian Christian tradition was already present in the regions of Caucasian Albania [21:209]. Old Udi should be the language of the ancient Gargars, as according to Movsēs Kağankatuatsi, “Mesrob Maštots (362-440) created with the help of the bishop Anania and the translator Benjamin an alphabet for the guttural, harsh, barbarous, and rough language of the Gargaratsik” [40: 69]. Udi language has been considered to pertain to the “Lezgian” stock of the East Caucasian language family and it is the successor of the so-called “Caucasian Albanian” language of the Middle Ages [22: 208-209].

In late medieval and early modern periods, already during the rule of Shirvānshāhs and predominance of Şafavid Iran, we trace gradual increase in the influence of Persian culture and spread of Persophonie among the ethnic groups of Eastern Transcaucasia. There were also Armenian

Persophones, who had translated Gospels into Persian [31: 88-89]. Among them were the Armenian Tates, who belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church, had Armenian names and considered themselves Armenians. They spoke a dialect of Persian. However, their origin is debatable. As stated by G. Asatrian, they could be Iranians who had become followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church and, more likely, they were Armenians who had lost their native language and become Persophones [7: 83].

As the ethnonym “Armenian” was used in many of the historical sources as regards all Christians of Eastern Transcaucasia belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church, we will use the ethnonym “Armenian” whenever we cite and rely on these sources.

Christian Aġuank‘ (or Albanya)

As we already mentioned above, the Kingdom of Aġuank‘ adopted Christianity at the beginning of the 4th century AD. The head of the Church of Albania, at first entitled as bishop, had his residence in Kapaġak (Qabala) and in Čoġ (Derbend) [16]; later in the first half of 6th century it moved to Barda [49:60-61]. The head of Albanian Church should have received the title of Archbishop in the second half of the 5th century and already from the beginning of the 6th century the sources give the title of catholicos to the religious head of Aġuank‘ Church [4: 119, 123].

In later period, the catholicoses of Aġuank‘ had their seats also in the fortress Berdakur [40: 297], on the right bank of T‘art‘ar River in Artsakh, in a cave near the fortress of Čarek‘, in the town of Ganja and also in the monasteries of Dasna and Khamši near it [30: 141, 145]. In the 15th century there were parallel catholicoses of Albania in the monasteries of Č‘alet‘ (in Shakī) and Gandzasar (in Artsakh) [11: 124, 148]. Since that period Gandzasar became a permanent place of their residence and the

catholicosate was mainly run by the scions of the noble family of Hasan-
Š alalyans [55: 372].

As we see, since the 6th century the catholicoses had more often their seats in the territory on the right bank of Kura River in the eastern regions of Armenia so they were more connected with Armenian people. The Catholicoses of Aġuank' were ordained by the Catholicoses of All Armenians which supposed a certain dependency of the Church of Aġuank' on the Armenian Church [4: 127]. The way how the Catholicoses of Aġuank' were appointed is well attested in the Persian decrees of the Matenadaran, as their rights were also confirmed by Shāhs of Iran. An elected catholicos had to present a document expressing common consent of the Christian villages of Eastern Transcaucasia on his election, then the Catholicos of All Armenians ordained him and afterwards he represented these documents to the Shāh's government to confirm his rights [32: 249-251].

Christians of Shīrvān and Shakī in the 9th-15th centuries

The processes going on in Eastern Caucasus and the kingdoms formed there in the 9th-10th centuries were much connected with the general decay of 'Abbāsīd Caliphate and the so-called "Iranian intermezzo" on its territory, carried over into the Christian lands on the edges of Iran [56: 8]. So the Iranian culture and stratum proved of great influence over the population of Eastern Caucasus and in ethno-cultural and ethno-religious developments of the region. Iranian culture combined with the Islamic ideology contributed greatly to the spread of Islam in the region.

In the 9th-10th centuries, the process of Islamization was more intensive among Eastern Albanian tribes due to the Muslim dynasties ruling them. Later, in the Seljuk period, the Persian language and culture played an

important role in the dissemination of Islam among the people of North-Eastern Caucasus [35:193].

After the weakening of the caliph's authority, Hāshim b. Surāqa proclaimed his independence at Bāb-al-abwāb (ca. 255/869), and the Yazīdids established themselves in Shīrvān [14]. The territory under the rule of Hašimids was soon occupied by the Shīrvānshāhs, and then by the Saljuqs. Shīrvānshāhs were the various lines of rulers, originally ethnic Arabs but speedily Persianized within their culturally Persian environment, who ruled in the region of Shīrvān from mid-ʿAbbāsīd times until the age of the Safavids [12]. Shīrvānshāhs gradually became Persianized, and from the times of Manušihr b. Yazīd (r. 418-25/ 1028-34), their names became almost entirely Persian rather than Arabic, with favored names from the heroic national Iranian past and with claims made to descent from such figures as Bahrām Gūr [12].

Shīrvānshāhs waged frequent warfare with the infidel peoples of the central Caucasus, such as the Alans, and the people of Sarir (i.e. Daghestan), and with the Christian Georgians and Abkhāz to their west [12], so they would be more consecutive in converting their own subjects. However, the Christian population of Eastern Caucasus received new portions of Armenian immigrants from the regions of Great Armenia devastated during the conquests of Turk-Seljuks and Mongols [45: 47]. Christians of Eastern Caucasus, alongside with local Muslims, suffered from the attacks of Mongol conquerors and at times the territory came within the lands of the Il-Khānids and at others within the lands of the Golden Horde [12]. A colophon of an Armenian manuscript copied in the village of Matrassa in 1403 is a witness of the atrocities committed by Tīmūr [57: 31]. As a result of migrations from the Armenian regions, the migrants combined with local Christians gradually formed a Christian inhabited zone in Shīrvān in the Middle Ages [47: 47].

The history of the Shakī region located to the west and north-west of Shīrvān is more connected with Armenia and Georgia. Movses Daskhurantsi reports that at the time when Ašot I Bagratuni restored the kingdom of Armenia, on the basis of the Armenian principalities of Bagratids of Taron, established earlier in Shakī, the kingdom of the Armenian Bagratids of Shakī was formed under the leadership of Hamam in 887 [40: 221-222]. Nikoğayos Adonts has conducted research on the Armenian Bagratids in Ağuank', and traced their history down to 962 [3:125-134]. Evidence about king Hamam's son Atrnerseh and his Christian subjects forming the majority of the population in Shakī is found in the works of Arab historiographers Ibn Rusta and Muqaddasī [6: 526, 652]. Moreover, the author of "Ḥudūd al-'ālam" (10th century) not only considers Shakī a domain with Muslim and Christian population, and even a region of Armenia [25: 144, 398]. The Armenian and Arabic sources have preserved also the names of the son and grandson of Atrnerseh as Ishkhanak (or Ishkhanik), al-Malik [24: 229-230].

The regions of Shakī and then Qabāla were disputed and annexed by the Georgian kingdom of Bagratids in the 12th-13th centuries [36: 28]. In the 15th century, the rulers of Christian domain in Shakī, having originated from the family of Qara-Kisīsh (Turkish-Pers. black deacon, or deacon in black)[‡], due to the needs of the time, were converted to Islam [28: 136].

Shakī had the famous Armenian monastery of Č'alet' as its religious centre, surrounded with Armenian and Udi villages. Č'alet' was also the seat of the catholicoses of Ağuank' in the period from 1406 to 1516, who ran the post in parallel with the catholicoses of Gandzasar [46: 113, 116]. At

[‡] Armenian clergymen were often called in documents also by the name siyāhkolāh(an)-'black hat wearers' featuring their black outfit with black hood.

the same time the monastery of Č‘alet‘ was a centre of Armenian culture and manuscript writing [57: 425, 58: 281].

Christians in Shīrvān vilāyat of Safavid State

In the period from 1538 until the beginning of the 18th century, a major part of the regions of Eastern Caucasus was included into the Safavid State of Iran [15: 245] and formed parts of its administrative units known as *bīglarbīgīs* (or *vilāyats*) of Shīrvān and Ganja (or Qarabagh).

The region of Shākī and its town Arrash formed part of Shīrvān vilāyat with the trade economic centre in Shamākhī. It was a juncture in Eastern Transcaucasia where the merchants arriving from various places established practical ties with foreign merchants [29: 35-36, 72]. In the second half of the 16th century European traveller A. Jenkinson spoke of Shamākhī as a town with a prevailing Armenian population [5: 205]. According to the European travellers and missionaries of the 16th century, the town was almost deserted during its conquest by the Ottoman troops in 1580 and afterwards it received another hard blow during the campaign of Shāh ‘Abbās in September 1607, who took it by force and killed a significant number of its inhabitants [5:270, 17: 114]. Adam Olearius, having visited the town in 1638, stated that Armenians formed a significant portion of its population and they were a major group in the infantry of the khān [2:526]. Later the population of Shamākhī increased considerably, as French Jesuit Philip Avril, who visited the city in 1686, stated about 50,000-60,000 inhabitants living there, of which 30,000 were Armenians, and the rest “Turkish” (Muslims), Russian, Georgians, Multanis, Circassians and Daghestanis [8:75-76].

A. Ayvazyan supposes that the number of the ‘Armenians’ in the province of Shīrvān at the end of the 17th century should be at about 100,000 and his calculation was based on the number of the soldiers (10,000)

mentioned by Israyil Ori as supposed to be recruited from local Christians with the purpose to free them from Muslim rule with the assistance of the Russian Empire [9: 63].

Conversion to Shiite Islam was much encouraged and stimulated not only among Sunnite Muslims but also among Non-Muslims of Safavid Iran; moreover, the cases of forced adoption of Islam were not rare as well [1:80]. The Christians of ShġrvĀn vilġyat as subjects of Safavid State were also involved in the converting processes. English travellers already in the mid-16th century had noticed the economic methods encouraging conversion to Islam among Christians [5:247].

Much of the treatment with Christians in Safavid state was dictated by its economic and political needs and also by the influence of Muslim high clergymen. Thus, due to some special matters, Shġh ‘Abbġs I and his successors stimulated the conversion of Christians to Islam through economic incentives and sometimes also forced them to adopt Islam [37: 22- 25, 27, 30].

Among the fiscal and other economic incentives facilitating the conversion of the Christians to Islam first of all jizya, the poll-tax (with its addition called tafġvut-i jizya- Pers. ‘the difference of jizya’) levied on non-Muslims should be considered.

The payment of jizya was compulsory for all zimmġs (non-Muslim subjects) of the Safavid State. Very light during Shġh ‘Abbġs I’s rule, jizya increased in the 17th century [39] reaching from about 1600 dġnġr to 2500 dġnġr or 1 misqġl (4.69 grams) in gold paid by each male adult [51:180].

Tafġvut-i jizya levied on zimmġ Armenians was the sum added to jizya after each census of population as a result of money inflation. The size of this tax was counted and recorded in tax registers separately from jizya. These taxes (jizya and tafġvut-i jizya) formed an important portion of the Safavid state’s budget and sometimes the general sum of these taxes formed

the major part of the total sum of taxes levied from some Christian villages [42:234-235]. Thus, the tax *tafāvut-i jizya* levied from the villages Dastakert and Golyazi of Syunik⁴ in 1682 was 39,900 dinars (or 3 tuman, 9900 dinars), which was the 2/3 of the sum of all taxes received from there [32:312].

As witnessed by Esayi Hasan-Žalalyan, the size of *jizya* and also other taxes increased three times at the beginning of the 18th century [18:14]. The tax paid for faith had often been a cause of conversion to Islam, and therefore Armenian Catholicoses sometimes paid the tax instead of their poor subjects. Tavernier, who travelled much in the Armenian regions and also visited the Armenian Catholicos, has kept evidence of it [52:11]. Tournefort in his turn states that in case of inability to pay *jizya* Armenians were enslaved or converted to Islam [53: 301-302].

Another important factor facilitating conversion was the law of *Imām Ja‘far* inherent to Shiite Islam [43]. According to this law, a Muslim could inherit the property of his dead *zimmī* relative no matter how far the kinship was, depriving the closer *zimmī* relatives of this right. This law was put into wide practice by the special order of Shāh ‘Abbās at the end of his rule [17: 288] and was a very effective instrument for conversion to Islam. Catholicos Esayi of Aġuank⁵ states that as a result of this law many Armenians were converted in Iran and Transcaucasia, and also many Armenians were robbed by their greedy converted relatives [18:18].

The conversion of Christians to Islam was frequent especially among local elites, who wished to occupy high offices in state administration and government, since Muslim law did not allow non-Muslims to hold high positions. They adopted Islam to enter the ranges of Ghulāms accepted into military service as well as administrative posts. There were a number of Armenian converts among the outstanding officials of the Safavid army and state administration, such as Qarchiqāy Khān, the Commander in Chief of

Shāh ‘Abbās’s army, amīr shikārbāshīs Yūsif Khān, appointed as governor of Shīrvān [19:532], Allahvirdī Khān [10:13, 71], and so on.

Persian historiographer Fażlī Khuzanī describes an episode where Shāh ‘Abbās I as a sign of special favour for the services of the Armenian melik of Jraberd (Jālbird) recruited the latter’s sons as ghulāms [19:416].

We have a featuring example of this kind referring also to the Khāns of Shakī. According to the history of the khānate of Shakī Ḥājī, Chalabī Khān had been a scion of Jāndār, from the family of Christian Deacon, named Qarākishīsh. Jāndār had adopted Islam and the new name ‘Alī Jān, and his son Qutluq was appointed as khān of Shakī [28:136].

In spite of the economic incentives, in its period of relative strength over the regions of Shakī and Shīrvān, the Safavid government secured enduring conditions for local Christians since it kept control over the Muslim governors preventing violence and religious intolerance against zimmīs. Adam Olearius, having attended the religious holiday of water-blessing conducted by the Armenian clergymen during his visit to Shamākhi in 1637, gives a rather full description of the religious atmosphere and peculiarities there. He states that a great number of Persian soldiers guarded the crowd of Armenians participating in the holiday in order to protect them from the violence of local Muslims in case of need. Moreover, a sum of 1000 thalers was paid by the Armenian Church to the khan for the permission to conduct the ceremony [2:526, 533-534]. This is evidence of a rather deep intolerance existing in the region as regards local Christians, which was the reason to keep them in the local armed forces, as mentioned above by Adam Olearius, and to protect them in case of violence exercised against them.

Another featuring example for the role of the Safavid government in the restriction of local abuses and conflicts can be found in the work of Tahir Vahid, the Persian historiographer of Shāh Abbas II. He relates about the

dismissal of Muḥammad Khān, the bīglarbīg of Shīrvān from the post because of his bad treatment (aṭvār-i nahunjār) and frequent conflicts (munāqīsha) with his subjects (maliks and ra‘īyyats) [50:3115-316]. As stated by Zakaria of Agulis, he was replaced by Najaf Qulī, the former bīglarbīg of Iravan province in 1663 [27: 68-69, 128].

From the beginning of the 18th century, already forming a religious minority in the region, the Christians of the Eastern Caucasus were combined in the eparchy of Shīrvān. Its immediate subordination to the Church of Aḡuank’ (or Gandzasar) was often disputed by the Catholicoses of Ējmiac‘in [38: 13, 16-23]. A Persian document composed at the beginning of the the 18th century contains the names of 48 villages of the regions of Shīrvān and Shakī, the village-elders and clergymen of which gave their consent to the subordination to the Catholicosate of Aḡuank’ [33: 94-104].

The decline of Safavid State, already much perceptible in Shīrvān and Shakī at the beginning of the 18th century, affected the state of the Christians significantly as it was accompanied by frequent invasions of North Caucasian tribes.

In this period, the cases of forced adoption of Islam by Christians in the region became more frequent and were much connected with the pressure of Muslim rulers of the region and their intolerant religious policy. Jezuit clergyman Yohann La Maz wrote about witnessing the hardships of the Armenians of Shamākhī in his letter dated to September 1, 1702. He stated about the unlawful fines put on them and the heavy economic state of the Armenian villagers because of their faith, all of whom would certainly migrate to other, safer places [44:107].

Artemii Volinski, Russian envoy sent in 1715-1716 to the court of Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn, was a witness of the oppressions caused to the Armenians

living in K'arxane village near Shamākhī, while passing through the Eastern Caucasus [13:72].

According to J. Gerber, a member of the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg, who visited the Eastern Caucasus in the first half of the 18th century, there was a significant number of Armenians belonging to the Armenian Church as well as those subject to the Pope (Catholics) in the town of Shamākhī. He speaks of the hard conditions and religious intolerance conducted against Armenians of Shamākhī and a major destruction of the nearby Armenian villages during the rebellions and attacks of the North Caucasian tribes in the last period of the Safavid rule [20:116-117]. This information is confirmed in the work of Esayi Hasan Šalalian, the Catholicos of Aġuank'. The latter states that in 1712, 1716, 1720 and 1721 Lezghi groups led by Surkhāy, Shamkhāl, Ismī and Ḥājī Dāud attacked and robbed many Armenian villages in Shīrvān, killed and enslaved its inhabitants [18: 23-24].

Conclusions:

Christianity and the Christians had their important place in the social-economic and political history of Shakī and Shīrvān regions of the Eastern Caucasus from early medieval times to the end of Safavid rule there. The sources have kept evidence about a great number of Christians subject to the Armenian Apostolic Church living in the regions of Shakī and Shīrvān regions until the 18th century.

The data and information of various historical sources presented and analyzed in the paper allow tracing the political developments in the regions affecting the religious atmosphere there and challenges faced by the Christians in various stages of history because of the political realities of the region, resulting in intensified conversion to Islam among them.

The *zimmī* status given to the Christians living under the rule of Muslim powers, although discriminative in certain aspects, granted them some protection from the forced methods of conversion. However, there were many economic incentives stimulating conversion in the Safavid State, a part of which were the regions of Shakī and Shīrvān from 1538 until the beginning of the 18th century. The weakening of the Safavid State of Iran accompanied by frequent attacks of North Caucasian tribes brought new challenges to the Christians of the regions, increased religious intolerance and intensified conversion to Islam through forced methods.

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Kristine Kostikyan

Matenadaran, Mashtots Institute of Ancient Manuscripts,
Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Sciences,
Republic of Armenia
Yerevan State University,
Russian-Armenian University
kr.kostikyan@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0000-0003-4421-7220

Gevorg Stepanyan

Yerevan State University,
Institute of History, National Academy of Sciences, Republic of
Armenia
sasun-07@mail.ru

Gohar Mkhitarian

Yerevan State University,
Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Sciences, Republic
of Armenia
goharmkhitarian7@gmail.com,
ORCID: 0000-0002-3494-6916

**ՔՐԻՍՏՈՆԵՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆ ՈՒ ՔՐԻՍՏՈՆՅԱՆԵՐԸ ՇԱՔԻՈՒՄ ԵՒ
ՇԻՐՎԱՆՈՒՄ ՎԱՂ ԺԱՄԱՆԱԿՆԵՐԻՑ ՄԻՆՉԵՎ ՍԵՖՅԱՆ
ԴԱՐԱՇՐՋԱՆԻ ԱՎԱՐՏԸ**

Քրիստոնե Կոստիկյան, Գևորգ Ստեփանյան, Գոհար Մխիթարյան

Բանալի բառեր՝ քրիստոնեություն, իսլամ, քրիստոնյաներ, կրոն, դավանափոխություն, Աղվանից եկեղեցի, Հայոց Առաքելական եկեղեցի, Սեֆյան պետություն, հայեր:

Քրիստոնեությունը, տարածված լինելով Աղվանքում Հայոց թագավորության աջակցությամբ 4-րդ դարում և ձևավորելով իր սեփական կրոնական կառույցը հանձին Աղվանից եկեղեցու, վերջինս ենթարկվում էր Ամենայն Հայոց կաթողիկոսին: Հայոց Առաքելական եկեղեցին և նրա դավանանքը վաղ միջնադարից մինչև 19-րդ դարի վերջը վճռորոշ դեր են ունեցել Արևելյան Այսրկովկասի և մասնավորապես նաև Շաքի-Շիրվանի քրիստոնյաների ազգային ինքնագիտակցության, լեզվի, էթնիկ նկարագրի ու ինքնության պահպանության գործում, հակադրվել դավանափոխության գործընթացներին:

Աղվանից եկեղեցին արաբական նվաճումից հետո առճակատվում է իսլամի տարածման իրողությանը, որը ժամանակի ընթացքում խարխլում է քրիստոնեության հիմքերը և նվազեցնում նրա հետևորդների քանակը տեղի քրիստոնյաների շարունակական մահմեդականացման միջոցով: Սույն հոդվածով փորձ է արվում

հետագոտել Շաքիի ու Շիրվանի շրջաններում ապրող քրիստոնյաներին վերաբերող աղբյուրագիտական նյութը՝ լուսաբանելով քրիստոնեության աստիճանական թուլացման հանգամանքները և քրիստոնյաների մահմեդականացման գործընթացը վաղ միջնադարից մինչև Սեֆյան տիրապետության ավարտը:

Քննվում են գործոններ, որոնք նպաստում էին քրիստոնյաների մահմեդականացմանը տարբեր ժամանակահատվածներում: Դրանցից էին՝ մահմեդական իշխանության պայմաններում քրիստոնյաների անհավասար իրավաքաղաքական ու սոցիալ-տնտեսական դրությունը նրանց տրված *զիմմիի* կարգավիճակում, նրանց նկատմամբ իշխանությունների խտրական վերաբերմունքը և Սեֆյան պետության ներսում քրիստոնյաների մահմեդականացումը խրախուսող սոցիալ-տնտեսական զանազան միջոցները, նաև Սեֆյան տիրապետության անկման շրջանում Հյուսիս-Կովկասյան լեռնաբնակ ցեղերի հաճախացած արշավանքների ընթացքում քրիստոնյաների նկատմամբ դրսևորվող կրոնական անհանդուրժողականությունը և բռնությունները: