

ARMENIAN KALĀNTARS OF THE TOWNS OF TRANSCAUCASIA IN THE 17TH-18TH CENTURIES*

Kristine Kostikyan

Abstract

Kalāntars were the high officials of Şafavid, Afshārid and Qājār administration of towns, who managed the affairs referring to handicraft production and trade there. During the predominance of the Iranian states of the period the towns of Transcaucasia had kalāntars, and more often Armenian kalāntars were at the head of the towns, where Armenians formed the majority of the urban population. Armenian kalāntars were usually the representatives of local elite families of eminent melik's and merchants.

The research on the topic has helped reveal the names of a few Armenian kalāntars in Agulis, Zagam, Lori, Erevan, Barda and Tiflis, also trace some peculiarities in the functions of this official in the region. The kalāntars of the mentioned towns usually managed the affairs of not only the town, but also those of the surrounding villages, since handicrafts and trade were among the main occupations of the inhabitants of many Armenian villages. The next peculiarity of office in the regions is the frequent cases of transmission of the post from father to son.

Keywords: Armenian kalāntar, melik', khoja, town, Erevan, Şafavids, Nādir shāh, handicrafts, trade, source.

Kalāntar is a Persian word with the meaning of 'an elder, a mayor, a police-master'. The meaning of 'a mayor' appeared in Şafavid period, as it started to be used as a term for a mayor, the official at the head of town administration. It was used also in a later period, during the rule of Afshārid and Qājār dynasties in Iran.

This official played a key role in the regulation of the affairs in a town. According to "Dastūr al-mulūk", the kalāntar appointed the elders (kadkhudās) of the town blocks and masters (ustāds) of the handicraft guilds [11: 240]. Among the main duties of a kalāntar were the assessment of tolls on merchants, artisans, guilds of handicraft production and other members of town community, as well as collection of taxes. He was also engaged in the settlement of the problems of the community and the protection of its rights, and had several officials at his disposal to help him investigate and clear up the disputes and different matters of the artisans and other inhabitants [11: 240]. The kalāntar was also responsible for the implementation of the orders (arqām va aḥkām) received by the guilds. According to de Thevenot, the kalāntar usually earned much money, since those who had problems gave valuable gifts in order to have his protection [33: 113]. A Şafavid decree, con-

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firming the rights of a kalāntar of Işfahān, states that local judges (qāzis) also were subject to him [28: 270].

Zak'arya of Agulis states about Melik' Šahnazar of Agulis who applied to the shāh with 'mansar'¹ to get the decree for the post of the local kalāntar and received it [36: 85]. The statement shows the way how this official was usually appointed; a kalāntar had to have the consent of the town's elite, the heads of the town blocks and handicraft production, expressed in a document signed and sealed by them and obtain a royal decree based on it.

Whenever the town consisted of significant groups of Christian and Muslim population, like Işfahān, each group had its own kalāntar. The kalāntars of the towns with a predominantly Armenian population were mainly Armenians. Unlike the other high officials in Muslim states, the kalāntar was typically not obliged to adopt Islam. Nevertheless, there were few cases of conversion to Islam as well. Such a case happened in New Julfa with kalāntar Avet, who adopted Islam and changed his name to Muḥammad Ḥusayn in 1691 [21: 30]. Another case happened with Melik Šahnazar of Agulis, who despite having adopted Islam, 'lived a life of a Christian Armenian and was buried as an Armenian' [36: 89].

The historical sources have kept the names of some Armenian kalāntars in the towns of Iran. Eḡya Karnetsi mentions the name of Arut'in as kalāntar of Rasht in his letter dated 1723 [15: 242]. During the rule of Karīm Khān Zand certain Sark'is, an Armenian was appointed as kalāntar in the port-town of Ēnzeli [29: 49].

We have very detailed information about the Armenian kalāntars of New Julfa. The Armenian kalāntars of New Julfa secured a kind of autonomy of the Armenian community in Işfahān. From the beginning of the establishment of the colony, Khoja² Safar and then his brother Khoja Nazar, the representatives of the wealthy merchant family of Khačik from Juḡa (Old Julfa), filled the post. This was the continuation of a family tradition, since the epitaph of Khoja Khačik in Juḡa on the bank of Araxes River contains his title as "k'aḡak'apet" (mayor, town head) [5: 92], which means that latter was the kalāntar of the town. Khoja Nazar, his son, was also highly influential and was able to protect the rights of the Armenian subjects and Armenian Church in some affairs referring to them and even stop the construction of a Catholic Church in Işfahān with the stones of St. Ējmiacin authorized by Shāh 'Abbās [16: 151]. Šušanik Khačikyan has researched and defined a rather full list of the kalāntars of New Julfa [21: 29-30].

Some of the big settlements (gyuḡak'aḡak') and towns of Eastern Armenia had Armenian kalāntars.

The Persian documents of Matenadaran have maintained evidence about the existence of kalāntar in Kapan (of Syunik'), who interfered in the affairs of Tat'ev

¹ Mansar, mahsar (versions used in Armenian sources) - Maḡzars were the documents expressing common consent of the people of a settlement or a region on an issue referred to them [26: 163].

² Khoja (Pers. khvāja) was the title of the wealthy merchants who bought estates and occupied influential posts in government.

monastery [22: 281]. They were the representatives of the family of Burt'ellu, the branch of the princely family of Orbélians of Syunik' [29: 124] who converted to Islam in the 15th century [20: 187]. Syunik' was a region densely populated by Armenians with the number reaching 500,000 [7: 302-303, 315].

We have very limited information about the Armenian kalāntars in the following towns: Juġa (Old Julfa), Agulis, Barda, Lori and Zagam in the 17th-18th centuries.

As mentioned above, we have only the name of Khačik as k'aġak'apet (the Armenian equivalent of kalāntar) of Juġa on the bank of Araxes, mentioned in his epitaph dated 1604. After consideration of the evidence of contemporary sources, Armen Ayvazyan has concluded that before the deportation of its inhabitants the town should have had an entirely Armenian population with the number varying from 15,000 to 25,000 [7:180].

The kalāntars of Erevan (Īravān), Agulis, Juġa, Zagam and Lori also bore the title of 'khoja' and 'melik'. Although mostly being landlords, meliks received a significant portion of their income from trade, a fact reflected also in the royal decrees confirming their rights. In some decrees confirming the rights of the Armenian melik's there was a strict order forbidding any deals performed by his subjects without their awareness [22: 355].

The most featuring is the case with the melik's of Agulis, who were at the head of the town community with a population of about 25-30,000 Armenians [7: 95], and were often confirmed as local kalāntars. There is evidence about Melik' Shāhnazar and after him, Melik Ovanes of Agulis to be confirmed at the post of kalāntar in the late 17th century [36: 80, 85, 139] and the early 18th century [6: 66].

So the functions of a melik of town and kalāntar should be very similar, since, as witnessed by Zak'ariya of Agulis, there was a common will to obtain a royal decree confirming the status of local melik' to a kalāntar [36:139]. The author of the 'History of Davit' Beg' names Mosin Melik', the k'aġak'apet (Armenian equivalent for kalāntar) of the town (12: 141). Ashot Hovhannisian in his research on 'Zak'arya of Agulis and his time' is right to trace a certain combination of the rights of a town's melik' to that of a kalāntar (or k'aġak'apet) [17: 73]. For a later period, there are the decrees of Karīm Khān, Aqā Muḥammad Shāh Qājār and crown-prince 'Abbās Mīrzā issued in 1774, 1797 and 1825 respectively confirming the rights of Melik' Arut'yun and his son Šmavon Bīg of Upper Agulis at the post of kalāntar of the Armenians of Āzādjirān region in Nakhijevan [34: 94, 95, 108, 136, 213].

The equalization of the posts of a melik' of a town and its kalāntar can also be traced to a case referring to Tiflis, where Aġa, the son of Aškhal Bīg is mentioned as melik' and kalāntar during Nādir Shāh's rule by Catholicos Abraham Kretatsi [8: 16, 87]. We should keep in mind that Tiflis was among the towns where Armenians formed the majority of its population in the 17th-18th centuries [7: 388]. Tournefort gives the following description of the population of Tiflis at the beginning of

the 18th century: there were about 14,500 Armenians (including Catholics), 3,000 Muslims and 2,000 Georgians [35: 237].

The name of Qarakhosrov Beg as the kalāntar of Lori has survived in the Armenian documents referring to Sanahin Monastery of the early 1660s [31: 96, 154, 162]. The existence of an Armenian kalāntar there evidenced in the documents containing deals coincides with the observation of A. Ayvazyan on its demography, who considers the population of Lori region to be about 60,000 [7: 38, 46].

In his historiography, Fazli Bīg Işfahāni mentions a certain Melik' Safar appointed as kalāntar of Qarābāq (in Barda) in 1616; he was still at the post in 1618 [10: 22, 731, 782]. Barda and the region around it had a significant number of Armenian inhabitants. At the beginning of the 18th century it was included into the melik'dom of Gyulistan, and its melik' was also called 'melik' of Barda, K'olani, Ganja and Basar' or 'Melik of Barda' [4: 78, 29]. The town Barda' was a trade-economic center of the region and there were Armenian tradesmen there [15: 110].

An Armenian epitaph inscription has likewise kept the name of Tamraz as kalāntar of Zagam (Dzegam) [14: 250]. As witnessed by the English travellers of the 16th century, Zagam was the chief town of the silk-producing region around it, included into the Georgian kingdom, and from there a considerable amount of high-quality nuts was annually transported to Persia on 4,000 loaded camels [3: 255]. The population of Zagam with the people living in surrounding villages should have been about 50,000 in the 17th century and the early 18th century [7: 46].

At present, we have more detailed information about the kalāntars of Erevan only.

Erevan (Ērevan, Iravān) started its rise as a town under the rule of Şafavid shāhs since the 16th century and had a population of about 50,000 [7: 189]. Situated on the main transit trade routes connecting Tabrīz and Işfahān with Aleppo, Trabzon, Tiflis, Izmir and Constantinople, it became the political and economic centre of the boundary region, named vilāyat-i Īravān or Chukhūr Sa'ad. In the sources of the 17th-18th centuries it is mentioned as "the capital" or "the great" town of the country of Ayrarat, Persian Armenia, Armenia [1: 301], and it was inhabited with predominantly Armenian population. Muslims of Iravān, consisting mainly of the local garrison and administration, never formed more than one fourth (a quarter 1/4) of the total population of the town [18, 19]. We have the evidence of Zak'ariya of K'anak'er about two Muslim (or Persian) kalāntars of Īravān, but both had responsibilities referring to the dues and affairs of the Armenian people, its Church and settlements. The first is Ma'sum Ağa who held the post of kalāntar during the bīglarbīgī of Tahmāsb Qūlī Khān [9: 87]. After the short conquest of Īravān in 1635 by Ottoman troops, he left Şafavid state for Ottoman territory [9: 114]. According to the same source, after the reoccupation of Īravān by Şafavid troops of Shāh Şafī in 1636, another Persian named Ğara Ğubad managed to obtain the post of kalāntar through bribery. Zak'ariya of K'anak'er tells about some of his unfair

writs regarding Holy Etchiazin and then about his fall at the beginning of the rule of Shāh ‘Abbās II (1642-1666) [9: 152-153].

Sources have maintained information about several representatives of Melik‘ Šahnazaryan family of Geğark‘uni, running this post at the beginning of 17th century and in the 18th century: Melik‘ Šahnazar, Melik‘ Yavri, Melik‘jan and Melik‘ Manučar.

The evidence about Melik‘ Šahnazar and his son Yavri being appointed at the post after his death, in 1013 (1604/5), has been recorded by the Persian historiographer Fazlī Işfahānī [10: 356]. Melik Yavri, like his father, supported Shāh ‘Abbās I in his war against Ottoman forces and therefore was rewarded with high position not only as a melik‘, but also as kalāntar of Erevan. According to Işfahānī, he also played an important role in freeing the Armenian prisoners in 1605 and in holding negotiations around the submission of Mağasberd to Şafavid Persia [10: 360, 444].

However, Melik‘ Yavri did not hold this post for long, as there is a statement about his death already in a royal decree of 1610, by which his brother K‘yamal was appointed at the post of melik‘ [27].

Later, at the beginning of Nādir Shāh’s rule, another scion of this noble family held the post of the kalāntar of Erevan. He was Melik‘jan Melik‘ Šahnazaryan who accompanied Catholicos Abraham Kretatsi during his visit to Muğan steppe and was present at Nādir’s coronation [8: 29, 59]. Soon (the exact time is not clear) kalāntar Melikjan Melik-Šahnazarian fell as a result of some intrigues by Nādir shāh’s order, and then his son Manuchar was appointed at the same post [26: 341a]. After Nādir shāh’s death Manuchar was also killed by the order of the Khān of Yerevan in June 1747 [26: 341b].

As witnessed by sources, the appointment of the melik’s of Geğark‘uni region to the post was a kind of reward for cooperation and faithful service to the shāhs of Iran in their fights against Ottoman forces in Transcaucasia

The Persian documents of the Matenadaran contain evidence also about Khoja Sahak kalāntar, the son of Grigor, and the grandson of Khoja Set‘ of Iravan, holding the post in the mid-seventeenth century. We have few Persian documents on purchase where the name of this kalāntar of Erevan is mentioned: in one, composed in 1651, he is mentioned as a contemporary kalāntar, who bought a piece of an orchard from his sister Zaman [25]. Then in 1661, already after his removal from the position of kalāntar, he sold his estates consisting of the whole of the village Yayji in Daračičak, 4.5 dangs of the Amiri Village in Darak‘end to Catholicos Hakob Juğayetsi of Holy Etchmiadzin and in 1664 granted his estate (consisting of a piece of an orchard) in Darak‘end to the local monastery of Qizilvank, that is St. Anania monastery [24: 11-13].

The information about the Armenian kalāntars of Transcaucasia allows us to define some peculiarities in their functions. Catholicos Abraham Kretatsi gives a very distinct definition for the position of kalāntar Melik‘jan, as he notes that the Armenian melik’s of Erevan province, which are melik’s Hakobjan and Mkrtum, also those of the 9 maħals of Karpi, Ğirkhbulağ, Şoragal, Ikdir, Gaṛni,

C`aġknadzor, Geġark`uni, Aparan, and Širakavan are obedient to the kalāntar and fear him [8: 103]. This fact referring to the subordination of the melik`s to kalāntar is evident also from the Armenian equivalent title given to Melik` Yavri in his epitaph: as “paronats paron” [13: 341], in which “paron” is a title given to the Armenian noblemen, the melik`s and khojas, and consequently it means “the head of melik`s or khojas”. Thus, the Armenian kalāntars of Erevan had administrative supremacy not only over the town community, but also the eminent merchants and meliks of the regions and villages of Erevan province and their subjects involved in handicraft production and trade.

This was the peculiar feature of the Armenian kalāntars of Eastern Armenia and was stipulated with characteristic features of the Armenian settlements and villages, where villagers were partially cultivators and at the same time had specialization in some particular handicraft production and trade. Astapat, for example, was the place from where the plant roots for the red colour known as “Ronas” (Toron in Armenian), used for colouring the canvas, was exported [2: 509]. The village Šahkert, also named Qazānchī, was well-known for its pottery made of copper from the mines of Kapan. The silkworm breeding was one of the main items of production in many Armenian villages and towns in Transcaucasia in the 17th-18th centuries.

Juġa, Šahkert, Šořot`, Tšġna, Dašt, Dastak, Agulis, Meġri, Kaler, and others, located in the small region between the mountain chain of Syunik` and the left bank of the Araxes River, were the settlements from where the Armenian khojas developed their trade activities, connecting various commercial centres of the world with one another. The merchants of Juġa and Agulis were among the most active merchants involved in international trade in the 16th-18th centuries. The specialization in certain handicrafts was sometimes reflected in the Turkish names given to Armenian settlements, such as Qazānchī (Šahkert), Chulmakchī (Nork`), Chanākhchī (Avetaranots), Qūshchī, etc. [23: 140-144].

Similar is the case with the kalāntars of Upper Agulis, whose post in the decrees of the 18th-19th centuries is mentioned as kalāntars of Āzādjirān (or the region of Goġtn). Āzādjirān or Goġtn was a region including over 27 small and big Armenian settlements, specialized in handicraft production and trade.

Conclusions: The research on the topic allows us to conclude that many of the big settlements and towns having dense Armenian populations had Armenian kalāntars under Persian rule, who were running the affairs connected with trade and handicraft production under that rule.

The Armenian kalāntars of Eastern Armenia were the chosen civil leaders of the Armenian population of not only the towns but also the region around it, as they had administrative supremacy over the Armenian melik`s and their subjects involved in handicraft production and trade of the province. Among Armenians this post often turned into a hereditary office and passed from father to son. Thus, four representatives of the family of Melik` Shahnazaryans of Geġarkuni region held the post in the period of the 17th-18th centuries.

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Kristine Kostikyan

Matenadaran, Institute of Oriental Studies of NAS RA,
Yerevan State University, Russian-Armenian University
kr.kostikyan@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-4421-7220

ԱՅՄՐԿՈՎԿԱՍԻ ՔԱՂԱՔՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՅ ՔԱԼԱՆԹԱՐՆԵՐԸ ԺԷ-ԺԸ ԴԱՐԵՐՈՒՄ

Քրիստինե Կոստիկյան

Քանալի բառեր՝ հայ քալանթար, մելիք, խոջա, քաղաք, Երևան, Սեֆյաններ, Նադիր շահ, արհեստներ, առևտուր, աղբյուր:

ԺԷ-ԺԸ դարերում Իրանի Սեֆյան, Աֆշարական ու Ղաջարական պետությունների տիրապետության տակ գտնվող Այսրկովկասի հայկական գյուղաքաղաքներից ու քաղաքներից շատերի (Երևան, Ագուլիս, Ջազամ, Լոռի, Ջուղա) ղեկավարի՝ քալանթարի պաշտոնը զբաղեցրել են հայ նշանավոր մելիքներ կամ վաճառականներ, որոնց մի մասի անունները պահպանվել են պատմական սկզբնաղբյուրներում: Հետազոտության արդյունքում պարզ դարձավ, որ Երևանի քալանթարի պաշտոնը զբաղեցրել են Գեղարքունիքի Մելիք-Շահնազարյանների տան չորս ներկայացուցիչներ, որոնք իրենց դիրքում հաստատվել են Իրանի տիրակալներ շահ Աբբաս Ա-ին և Նադիր շահին Օսմանյան պետության դեմ պատերազմներում մատուցած ծառայությունների դիմաց:

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում են նաև քալանթարի պաշտոնի գործառույթները, որոնք Այսրկովկասի հայկական շրջաններում ունեին որոշ առանձնահատկություններ: Այդ առանձնահատկություններն են քաղաքի մելիքի դիրքի համարժեքությունն այդ պաշտոնին, նաև արհեստագործական արտադրության ու առևտրի հետ սերտ կապի մեջ գտնվող հարևան գյուղերի բնակչության ու նրանց վերնախավի որոշակի կախվածությունը քաղաքի քալանթարից և նրա ենթակայության տակ գտնվելը: