

ARTSAKH

Nagorno-Krabakh (Armenian name Artsakh) occupies the eastern and southeastern mountainous and foothills regions of the Caucasus Minor, composing the northeastern part of the Armenian plateau. It archly stretches from the mountains, surrounding from the east the basin of Lake Sevan, to the southeast, as far as the river Yeraskh (Araks).

In different periods of the history primary sources called the land various names: Urtekhe-Urtekhini, Orkhistene, Artsakh, Tsavdek, Khachen, Karabakh.

The first evidences of the ancient history of the land dates back to the Acheul period of the early palaeolith (500-100 thousand years ago). These are the ancient tools and osteological materials, found in the caves of Vorvan-Azokh, Tsakhach, Unotand Khoradzor. The maxilla of the Neanderthal man, discovered in Vorvan-Azokh, has a special significance for studying the anthropogenes process.

The excavations of the settlements as well as burial places of the bronze and iron epochs (Stepanakert, Khojaly, Krkjan, Amaras, Madaghis, the valleys of Khachenaget and

Ishkhanaget) evidence that the territory was the part of the so called Kuro-Araks cultural system, 4-3 millennium BC.

For indoeuropeistics the unique for Caucasian region huge barrows (Stepanakert, the valley of Khachenaget), dating back to the 3-rd millennium BC, is of special significance. According to a number of researchers it is these barrows that are the first evidences of the Indo-Europeans' ancient activity.

At the beginning of the first millennium BC Artsakh entered the political-cultural sphere of Assyria and Urartu. In one of the Khodjalu barrows a sardione cornelian, bearing the name of the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari was discovered. The cuneiform inscription of Urartu king Sardur II discovered near the village of Tsovk evidences that his troops reached the country of Urtekhini (Artsakh).

The State Urartu (Bible name is Ararat) and tribes, constituting its part, were of particular importance in formation of the Armenian people. After the Urartu Kingdom fall (in the early 6th century BC) Armenian ethnic groups began to play an active role in the region. Since its existence it had to resist to the supremacy of Midiya. In 550-331's the Armenian Kingdom, including Artsakh, was under the Persia's rule.

The borders of the Armenian State, by the Artashesians' dynasty in the early 2nd century BC, passed along the river Kur. According to the evidence of a number of Greek-Roman primary sources, they were also the northeastern

borders of the spread Armenian ethnic element. Artsakh, constituting a part of the above mentioned state, was ruled by the Aranshahik local kin (the legend about the origin of the Armenians says that the patriarch of this kin Aran is the descendant of the Armenians' forefather Hike).

In the middle of the 1st century BC Armenia became the most powerful state of Asia Front. Armenian king Tigran Mets (Tigran the Great), attaching great importance to Artsakh, built here Artsakh Tigranakert, one of the four towns of those times, bearing his name. Ruins of this town are in the environs of the present Agdam. In the place of the ancient town there remained barrows, stone sculptures, cult erections, hollowed out in the rocks.

In 66-428's AD Artsakh constituted the part of the Arshakouni kingdom; after its fall and passing under the hegemony of Persia Artsakh and Utic were annexed to the Albanian kingdom, situated in the north of the river Kur. In 469 the kingdom was reformed into Persian province retaining the name Albania (Persian Aran). In the early 4th century Christianity spread in Artsakh. At the beginning of the 5th century, thanks to the creation of the Armenian written language by Mesrop Mashtots, an unprecedented rise of culture began both in Armenia and Artsakh.

Mesrop Mashtots founded the first Armenian school at the Artsakh monastery Amaras.

In the 5th century the eastern part of Armenia, including

Artsakh, continued to remain under the Persian rule. In 451 the Armenians in response to the policy of compulsion to the Zoroastrianism on the part of Persia , organize a powerful revolt known as Vartanants Sacred War. Artsakh also took part in this war, particularly distinguished its cavalry.

After the suppression of the revolt the considerable part of the Armenian forces took shelter in the impregnable fortress and thick woods of Artsakh to continue further struggle against the foreign yoke. At the end of the same century Artsakh and neighbouring Utic united under the rule of the Aranshahiks with Vachagan the Devout at the head (487-510's).

Under the latter a considerable rising of culture and science is observed in Artsakh. According to the evidence of the contemporary, in those years in the land there were built as many churches and cloisters as there are days in a year.

On the boundary of the 6-7th centuries the Albanian province in the north is splitted into several small principalities with respect to which the shared name "Albania" or "Albanians" is no longer applied, as they henceforth appear under the name of living there peoples or ruling princely houses.

In the South Artsakh and Utic create a separate Armenian principality of the Aranshahiks. In the 7 th century the Armenian Aranshahiks are replaced by the Mihranians'

dynasty of Persian origin which, becoming related with the Aranshahiks, turns to Christianity and rapidly armenized.

In the second half of the 7th century in the initial period of the Arabian dominion the political and cultural life in Artsakh doesn't cease. In the 7th-8th centuries a distinctive Christian culture was shared. The monasteries Amaras, Katarovank, Horek, Jrvshtik orst. Yeghishe and others acquire pan-Armenian significance.

From the beginning of the 9th century princely houses of Khachen and Dizak became stronger. The prince of Khachen Sahl Smbatian and the prince of Dizak Yesayi Abu Mousse head the struggle against the Arabs. They and later on their heirs succeed in retaining their own dominion borders impregnable.

From the 10th century the Khachen principality becomes of great importance in the land's political and cultural life. During the 11th -12th centuries Artsakh and Khachen are subjected to the seljuk-turk nomad tribes' invasion but they defend their independence. The end of the 12th century and the first half of the 13th century was one of the most favorable periods for the land's flourishing. At that time here are built such valuable architectural ensembles as church and vestibule of Hovhannes Mkrtych in Gandzasar Monastery (1216-1260), the Dadi Monastery Cathedral Church (1214), and Gtchavank Cathedral Church (1214-1248).

All these churches, by right, are considered to be the masterpieces of the Armenian architecture.

In 30-40's of the 13th century the tatar-mongols conquer Transcaucasus. The efforts of the Artsakh-Khachen prince Hasan-Jalal succeeded in partially saving the land from being destroyed.

However, after his death (1261) Khachen also becomes the victim of the tatar-mongols. The situation becomes still more aggravated in the 14 th century in the years of the Turk tribes kara-kojunlu and agh-kojunlu, who have come to replace the tatar-mongols.

During that period many monuments of architecture were destroyed. Since that period the region is called Karabakh. In the 16 th century in Karabakh a number of original administrative-political entities called "melikutjun" (principalities) are formed, and their rulers-"meliks"(Semite word, denoting "crowned head").

Later they were united into 5 big principalities: Varanda, Khachen, Dizak, Djraberd, Gjoulistan, which are known as "principalities of Khamsa" (Arabic word for five).

In the 16-17cc. the princes (meliks) of Artsakh head the liberation struggle of the Armenians against shah Persia and sultan Turkey . Simultaneously with the armed struggle Artsakh meliks send their envoys to Europe and Russia to get help from the Christian West.

In the 50's of the 18 th century, having taken advantage of the civil intestine of the Karabakhian princes and with the assistance of the Varanda prince Shahnasar II, one of the Turk-speaking tribe's leaders Panah succeeded to settle down in the fortress of Shoushi. He proclaimed Karabakh a khanate and himself khan.

The Persian Court supported this step. The rights of the local princes were restricted. In Artsakh began the process of penetration of a foreign and alien ethnic element that later on led to the change of the land ethnic structure.

At the end of the 18 th century and at the beginning of the 19 th century the role of the Russian Empire becomes more active. As a result of the Russian-Persian War of 1804-1813 Persia forever cedes almost the whole Caucasus to Russia including the Karabakh and Gandzak khanates, which was scripted by the Gjulistan treaty, concluded on October 12,1813. With that treaty ends the first Russian-Persian war which gave a start to the process of Russia's establishing in Transcaucasia.

The new Russian-Persian war of 1827-1828 ended in the Turkmenchie treaty on February 10, 1828, according to which the Yerevan and Nakhichevan khanates, as well as the Ordoubad province were assigned to Russia. This completed the annexation of almost all the lands of Eastern Armenia to Russia .

In 1840 Imperial Russia carries out an administrative division of Transcaucasia: the Georgian-Emeret region with

the centre in Tiflis and the Caspian region with the centre in Shemakh are formed. The most part of the eastern Armenia territories is included into the Georgian-Emeret region, the rest of the part, including Karabakh-into the Caspian region.

In the second half of 40's of the 19 th century as a result of a new administrative division, Tiflis, Kutaisi, Shamakh regions are formed as well as the Derbend regions which are partially situated in Transcaucasia. Eastern-Armenian territories with the status of separate provinces are incorporated into the above mentioned first three regions.

According to Imperial Russia's new Charter of December 9, 1867 Transcaucasia is divided into 5 regions: Kutaisi, Tiflis, Yerevan, Yelizavetpol and Baku. The part of eastern Armenia is incorporated into Yerevan region, the other-into Yelizavetpol and Tiflis regions. Nakhichevan province is also incorporated into Yerevan region. Nagorno-Karabakh is basically incorporated into Yelizavetpol region. Such administrative territorial division with small changes was retained till 1918's.