

TIGRANAKERT, OR AGUEN?

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Abstract. The study of the cities and urban culture of Caucasian Albania, the study of Albanian studies, history and archaeology, as well as monuments is very relevant both in terms of archaeology and architecture. From this point of view, the study of ancient and early medieval settlements, and urban and rural archaeological monuments located in the territory of Karabakh have special importance. The monuments of the Albanian period in Karabakh and East Zangazur, the historical lands of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation, are distinguished by their richness. One of them is the Shahbulag settlement located in the Aghdam region. The archaeological monument, one of the unique urban sites of Caucasian Albania, covers an area of about 50 hectares. The geographical location of the settlement and archaeological materials, landscape and topographic structure, and the combination of the area indicated in the written sources with the settlement of Shahbulag give grounds to suggest that it was the city of Aguen in Albania.

Keywords: Caucasian Albania, Vachagan, Aguen, Aghdam, archaeology

Introduction. The research carried out in the liberated Aghdam region of Karabakh since the summer of 2021 (chief of the expedition Arif Mammadov) is of great importance. We carried out preliminary exploratory archeological research in the archeological complex located near Shahbulag fortress (Fig. 1-2). As it is known, during the occupation, Armenians carried out illegal archeological excavations in the area during 2005-2008 with the sponsorship of an organization called Yergir. They fraudulently claim that the settlement in the area is Tigranakert. The forgers, who call Shahbulag Artsakh Tigranakert, try to forget that the territory belongs to Uti, not to Artsakh. There is no such place in Artsakh or Uti. It is illogical to say that the Syunik-Iberian road passes through Uti. In Musa Kalankatli, south of the Tartar River, Trtaket is a fortress near the Tartar River. Because Musa Kalankatli calls the river Tartar Trtu, and the fortress next to it Trtaket. This is a compilation of the names Tartar and Tartargala.

Main part. The town, located near the village of Shahbulag in the Aghdam region, was one of the most important settlements in Albania in the early Middle Ages (Fig. 2-3). During the illegal archaeological excavations carried out during the occupation, the first medieval basilica located in the defensive wall and the central neighborhood of the settlement was discovered (Fig. 4-5). Interestingly, the forgers superficially pass over the discovery of the name of the Albanian ruler Vachaga The Pious III in the city, where no evidence of Tigran's name has been found. On one side of the discus pottery, which is 7.8 cm in diameter and 1 cm thick, there is an image of an Albanian cross with four equal sides, and on the other side: "I / Vach [e] or Vach [agan] Servant of God". gives. When leaving the Aghdam region, the occupiers illegally took all the materials found there. There is no doubt that the inscription belongs unequivocally to Vache II or Vachaga The Pious III. Musa Kalankatli uses the phrase "my pasture in Augen" in the language of Vachaga The Pious III and writes that a church congress was convened there [Kalankatlu, /tr. Bunyadov/ 2006]. Interestingly, this city corresponds to the geography in question, ie to the expression of a large city located in the foothills and plains. Let's pay attention to the work of Musa Kalankatli: "During the reign of the Albanian tsar Vachaga, there were many disputes between the population, bishops, priests, nobles, and subjects. Therefore, the tsar decided to convene a great assembly in Aquinas on the thirteenth of the month of Mareri. I, Tsar Vachagan of Albania and Chief Bishop of Barda Shulhalisho, Bishop of Gabala Manase, Bishop of Hashu Greece, Bishops of Uti Province Anania and Sahag, Priest of Kalankatuk village Joseph, Priest of Barda Toma, Gokchay Priest, Gokchay Priest Abikaz, Ayrmanushay priest Urvat, priests Iovel, Parmuda Yagub and nobles and tribal chiefs of Artsakh province, chief of Kalankatuk tribe Bakur and many others all came to my meeting on the plateau called Aquen" [Kalankatlu, /tr. Bunyadov/ 2006: 120].

Elsewhere, the author writes in the list of high-ranking Albanians during the presentation of the final documents of the Barda Church Congress (705) to the caliph: During the reign of the Albanian Tsar Vachaga, he presided over the congress of the Aquinas Church. He moved to Girdiman) ..." [Kalankatlu /tr. Bunyadov/ 2006: 299].

During the illegal archaeological excavations carried out during the occupation, the central part of the city, the basilica, and part of the defensive walls were discovered (Fig. 4-5). Based on the materials found, the Armenian occupiers can say that the settlement corresponds to the city of Aquinas. However, they did not do so because it contradicted their false ideas, and they began to claim that the area was Avan-Tigranakert, i.e. the plain in Artsakh was Tigranakert. It is alleged that the other Tigranakert is located in the mountainous part of Girdiman, and the seventh-century author Sebeos states that Tigranakert is so named because it is located on a plain on the natural border of Uti and Artsakh to distinguish these Tigranakerts from each other. However, the road from Sünik to Iberia did not pass through the area in question, and the location of the city in that area is more in line with the localization of the city of Aguen. Another reason is the mention of St. David from Kalankatuk and St. Peter from Tkrakert, two Albanian bishops who attended the Barda Congress in 705. It should be noted that these settlements are close to each other, they are Chapargala or Tartargala settlements located in the Tartar river basin in the Tartar region near Aghdara and near the city of Tartar. These villages were directly Albanian and the population was Albanian. The settlement of Shahbulag corresponds exactly to the city of Aguen, located near the Khachinchay. It should be noted that illegal archeological research in the area was conducted by Hamlet J. Petrosyan by the Artsakh archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia. It is shown that the upper layer of the settlement existed until the XIV century. In our opinion, Aguen, which was an important city in the early Middle Ages, was known as Aghdam in the IX-XIV centuries. It is not accidental that for the first time in the sources of the XIV century the word Aghdam refers to this area. The word Aguen and the word Aghdam are the same. The toponym, which means "white earth", is not accidental, but was formed from nearby building materials, mainly white stones. The remains of a building visible in an area of 2,500 m² confirm this idea. The 60-meter section of the citadel in the northern part of the city also tells about the features of local construction. The basilica, which was used in the 5th-10th centuries, was one of the most important places of worship in Aguen and was probably the venue for the church convention of Vachaga The Pious III [Yampolsky, 1960; Kalankatlu /tr. Bunyadov/ 2006].

Caucasian Albania has a special place in the history of Azerbaijani statehood. As it is known, Christianity began to spread in Albania in the early Middle Ages, and at this stage, the mountainous and foothill areas of the country had a great impact on the religious outlook of the population. During the reign of the Albanian Arshakis, Christian temples, monasteries, and basilicas were built in various parts of Caucasian Albania. One of them is located in the western part of the Aghdam region, near the village of Shahbulag. At the foot of the Beshikdag, a spring from a rock is called Shahbulag. Shahbulag fortress also got its name from here. Near the Shahbulag Fortress is one of the most important settlements in Albania. Above the castle, a temple was built on Mount Beshikdag. The temple, also known as Vangasar in some sources, is the Beshikdag Albanian Church. Z.Yampolsky was the first in the scientific literature to study the cradle from a historical point of view, emphasizing that it was an Albanian temple [Yampolsky, 1960: 246-247] (Fig. 6). After that, some Armenian authors tried to forge the monument. However, the construction and architectural features of the monument, and historical and archeological approaches show that the Beshikdag temple was one of the most important churches in Caucasian Albania. The name Vangasar means "place of Vang", "place of the temple". We see the similarity of this name in the Ganjasar Albanian temple located in the village of Vang in the Kalbajar region (Aghdara).

Beshikdag Albanian temple is an Albanian temple of the V-VII centuries (Fig. 6). Most likely, the temple was built during the reign of Vache II, one of the Albanian Arshakis. In general, the construction of churches, temples, and monasteries became widespread in Albania during the reign of Vache II and Vachaga The Pious III. The construction of such Albanian temples was of special importance in the territories of Aghdam and Aghdara (the city of Aquen was located in this area – T.A.). Because Vache II and Vachaga The Pious III attacked their summer residences in the mentioned territories, they lived in that part of Karabakh in hot weather [Kalankatlu /tr. Bunyadov/, 2006: 120]. It should be noted that there is a basilica of Govurgala settlement between Boyahmedli and Sofulu villages (Aghdam region) [Geyushev, et al., 1973: 41-42]. Beshikdag Albanian temple is an Albanian monument directly connected with Shahbulag. It is no coincidence that the word Aquen (Aluen) also means "White Land" or "White Territory" in ancient Albanian. Here the similarity between the toponyms Aghdam and Aghdara is obvious. Research shows that places such as

Aghdam and Aghdara, the ancient lands of Azerbaijan, have historically belonged to the Azerbaijani people, and Karabakh as a whole is the land of ancient Azerbaijan.

The Beshikdag Albanian temple has a cross-dome-shaped plan. Three of the four square-shaped sides of the cross have a semicircular shape inside. Conventionally, the east-west axis is 10 m, and the north-south axis is 9.15 m. There is a high window on the west wall. Except for this wall, there are entrance gates on the other three branches of the cross. Rectangular doorways are anchored to the same height as the wall and are considered part of its pedestal. The whole building is built on a single-step plinth made of hewn limestone. The four pillars that support its dome are attached to the walls. Together with the arches, they form a dome-shaped square in the central part of the model hall. A tile-domed dome rises above this square [Mammadova, 2004: 80]. At first glance, the Albanian temple, built in the shape of a cross-dome in the high rocky area of Beshikdag, attracts attention with its adaptation to the harsh landscape of the environment. The main reason for this impression is the well-defined sizes and shades of color. Despite its small size, the temple has high walls. Its walls are made of carved gray limestone [Mammadov, 2021: 24-25].

The Beshikdag Temple in the Shahbulag village of the Aghdam region is one of the first medieval monuments in the Shahbulag settlement and Govurgala settlement, as well as the Garapirim monument in the Papavand village, which is part of the material heritage of Caucasian Albania (Fig. 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14).



Figure 1. Shahbulag castle



Figure 2. Shahbulag Albanian period settlement



Figure 3. Shahbulag (Aguen) Early medieval basilica



Figure 4. Shahbulag (Aguen) Albanian basilica



Figure 5. Shahbulag (Aguen) settlement wall remains



Figure 6. Beshikdagh (Vangasar) Albanian temple near Shahbulag

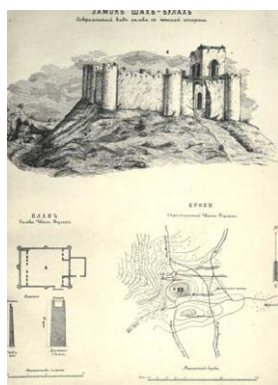


Figure 7. The plan of Shahbulag castle

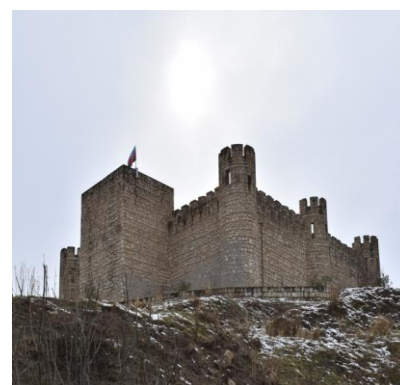


Figure 8. Shahbulag castle



Figure 9. Shahbulag castle



Figure 10. Shahbulah castle



Figure 11. Shahbulag castle



Figure 12. Shahbulah mosque



Figure 13. Early Medieval Stone idol at Aghdam city



Figure 14. Asgaran castle

Conclusion. History of Caucasian Albania The provinces of Artsakh and Uti were an important part of Karabakh, the land of ancient Azerbaijan, in the ancient and early Middle Ages. The settlements located there were among the important settlements of the Albanian rulers. Artsakh province, the birthplace of Vachaga The Pious III, was at the center of attention during his reign, where Albanian temples were built and the city of Aqnen was chosen as a summer residence. According to written sources, the city of Aqnen is a pasture-type city. There is no doubt that a large city will be built in the foothills. The discovery of a pottery disk with the name of Vachaga The Pious III engraved on it from the settlement of Shahbulag and the geographical and relief features of the area give grounds to localize it as the city of Aqnen. In the future, our archeological research will provide more detailed scientific information about the Shahbulag settlement.

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