

Actions and military exploits of the Great Albanian King Javanshir and his contribution to the history of Azerbaijan Statehood

By Prof. Kubra Aliyeva, Ph.D

As its known, Albania was one of the most ancient states on the territory of present-day Azerbaijan. This state was created in the ancient period - in III century BC and existed until the end of the VIII century AD. "In the period of antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the political boundaries of the Albanian state were not changed and it was located on the territory of modern Azerbaijan, the formation of the Albanian ethnic society also took place in that state. It means, that ancient albanians were one of the ancestors of the Azerbaijani people. " (6. page 3)

Caucasian Albania was one of the first countries all over the world which adopted Christianity. Doctor of Historical Sciences, Corresponding Member of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences Farida Mammadova, investigated the "political history and historical geography of Caucasian Albania" and proved that "Christianity in Albania passed through two stages. The first stage was apostolic, Syrophilic one, and the second was Grecophilic stage.

Key words: Javanshir, Musa Kalankatuyulu, Davdack, Varaz-Grigor, Caucasian Albania.

In the first period, the preachings of Christianity were told in the Syriac-**Aramaic** language. This period is connected with the activity of the apostles, their followers, and the activity of the Syrian missionaries. The second period (Grecophile one), when Christianity becomes the state religion, is general for all countries of Transcaucasus. The Grecophile period was short-time, after which the Albanian Church took the path of national, "Albanian development". F. Mammadova quite rightly comes to reasonable conclusion that the Albanian Church was apostolic one, it was the most ancient in the Caucasus and one of the earliest in the entire Christian world.

Farida Mammadova also pointed out, that "the path of its development is somewhat different than in Armenia and Georgia." F. Mammadova also notes that "the origin of the roots of the Albanian Church are directly connected with the Jerusalem Church, the Jerusalem Patriarch. As for Armenian Church, its the origin goes back to the churches of Hellenic Osroena and Hellenic Cappadocia. " "The forming of the early community in Albania is connected with the names of the apostles Thaddaeus, Elisha, Bartholomew." "The official date of adopting of Christianity as the state religion in Albania is 313, i.e. in times of synchronicity for the Christian Mediterranean world. " (1; pp. 242-243) The center of the Catholicos first was the Gabala, and afterwards the city Barda. These cities were the capitals of Albania.

According to the researches of Azerbaijani scientists, the Albanian tribes were autochthons of the central, southeastern regions of Transcaucasus and Kura-Araz interfluvium. But this cannot be said about the Armenians pretending for Karabakh as a "indigenous Armenian land." (4; p. 26)

In the ancient sources of the IV- VII centuries BC, a lot of information about this country, which covered the northern regions of Azerbaijan is presented. According to these sources, Albanian tribes settled in the area from the Araz River in the South to the northeastern foothills of the Greater Caucasus. The Albanian state was ruled by the Arshakids, and afterwards by Mehranids dynasty. The Albanian state existed as an independent and completely sovereign state also in the time of Javanshir.

Except Albanians, in this area the following tribes, such as Uti, Khianan, Anaryak, Savdey, Kher, Gel, Gardman, Lek, Didur, Lpin and others lived. Orois, one of the rulers of the Aranshahi dynasty, fought with Pompey. Zober fought with Roman rulers Pompey and Canidius Crassus. In the I century BC, the power in Albania was ruled by a small branch of the Parthian Arshaks, e.g. Vache I, Urnayr, Vachagan I, Mirkhavan, Satoy, Asay, Arsvagen, Vache II and Momin (Devout) Vachagan III Blessed.

But why we call our ancient state Caucasian Albania? As its known, in soviet period the political history and historical geography of Albania state was studied by many specialists. Taking into consideration the fact, that in the Balkans similarly-named state Albania (the capital-Tirana) exists, many scientists decided that it would be better to name this ancient Azerbaijani state "Caucasian Albania" in order to differentiate these countries.

At the same time, this name (Caucasian Albania) gave many neighboring countries in Caucasus a chance to use this name for self-determination of their own states. E.g. many scientists in Georgia, Armenia and Dagestan, have adopted this name and unfoundedly represented it as their own state. However, Azerbaijani scientists, historians and archaeologists, basing on results of archaeological excavations, are sure that these neighboring states (except Georgia, neighboring with Caucasian Albania on the north-west) were actually on the periphery in that period. I.e. Dagestan did not even have state formation that time, and Derbent was one of the main cities of Albania.

Many respectable scientists of Azerbaijan, including the director of the Institute of History of ANAS, academician Yagub Mahmudov, believe that this opinion was mistaken. E.g. in the "History of Albania" written by the Albanian chronicler Moses of Kalankatui (Musa Kalankatuylu, Azerb), the names of neighboring countries, which now consider Albania as part of their state were never mentioned.

In 2011, by the Decree of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and by Resolution of the Presidium of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS) in the Institute of Architecture and Art the department "Art and Architecture of Caucasian Albania" was established. At this department leading experts in this sphere work, the chief of the department is Kubra Aliyeva .

So, in the article Javanshir, militant ruler from Mehranids dynasty is talked about. In period, when Sasanian Iran and Byzantium, nomadic Huns and Khazars, Arabs tried to conquer Albania and make it their capital, Javanshir the great commander-in-chief thanks to his military talent and flexible policy managed to unite Albania in its initial borders (i.e. from river Araks to Derbend-Chol). So, Javanshir became absolute governor of Albania. Javanshir carried out independent foreign policy and kept autocephaly of Albanian church.

Javanshir had exceptional merits to the history of Azerbaijani statehood. He was a talented statesman and an outstanding military leader of his time. Javanshir was born in 616 in the family of Varaz-Grigor (638-642) from Mehranids dynasty.

It should be noted that Varaz-Grigor had four sons. Javanshir was the second son in the family. Javanshir, was very strong physically, stood out from his age-mates when he was still young. (2; p. 86)

F. Mammadova notes quite rightly that in the conditions of triple political pressure, the mobilizing the Albanian people, the struggle for preserving the independent Albanian state and cultural ideological identity - the historical chronicles of Moses of Kalankatui was of great importance because this work covers not only the events of the glorious ruling of Javanshir, but also the history of the Albanian kingdom from the I century BC. - until the VIII century. (6; pp. 10-11).

Two sources have played an important role in the study of Javanshir's personality. One of them is the works of resident chronicler of Albania Moses of Kalankatui, and the other is the creativity resident poet Davdack. Both of them were loyal to the palace and described the history of Albania, especially during the governing of the of Varaz-Grigor's son Javanshir.

In these sources all the best characteristics of Javanshir as the ruler of Albania are described: his internationalism, military merits, his role in the development of the country economy and culture, as well as the most important thing - his far-sighted political outlook. (We can say with certainty, no many rulers and politicians of XXI century can make boast of such features.)

After the death of Javanshir, during invasion of the Arabs into Albania, all written sources in the Albanian language and with the Albanian alphabet were destroyed, only translations of the sources of the VI-VII centuries into Armenian remained. Armenian researchers took advantage of the fact that the translation of Davdack's "Lamentation on Death of the Grand Duke Javanshir" was saved in the Old Armenian grabar and ranked it among the Armenian heritage. In soviet period, researchers of Armenia translated this source from old Armenian into modern Armenian, and later into Russian, English, French, Spanish, Polish languages.

It should be noted that Azerbaijani historians, including Academician Ziya Bunyatov, Professor Farida Mammadova, as well as Doctor Professor Gafar Jabiyev, investigating the history of state Caucasian Albania, could not help pay attention to the period of Javanshir's rule, his personality and merits to his homeland. In their researches, these scientists used the information from three sources: "History of Albania" by Moses of Kalankatui, "Chronicle of Albania" by Mkhitar Gosh, and also "Lamentation on death of the Grand Duke Javanshir" by Davdack.

As mentioned above, the history of Mehranids began in VI-VII centuries of our era, i.e. in the early middle ages in Albania. The Albanian state was headed by Varaz-Grigor from Mehranid dynasty.

This state, in spite of the fact that it carried out an independent policy, was under the oppression of Sasanian king Yezdegerd III. That time the Sasanids were known for their state independence. New Arab states with a new religious belief- Islam began expansionist campaigns in other countries of the world - up to Africa and Spain. In sphere of their interests the highly developed Sasanian world with great achievements was included also. From this position the luxurious Sasanian palace in the capital Medain, famous as Ctesiphon, must be pointed out especially. That palace was located in the territory of modern Iraq. Arab troops have repeatedly encroached on Ctesiphon.

In 633 the troops of Arab Caliphate began to attack Iraq and Iran. Sasanian ruler in such difficult situation decided to appeal to Albanian ruler Varaz Grigor. Yezdegerd III asked Varaz Grigor to help him to fight against Arabs. Varaz Grigor send to him Javanshir, one of his four sons. This fact is described in book "History of Albania" by Moses of Kalankatui in following way: "Varaz Grigor paid attention on his son Javanshir, who was proud, magnificent, handsome. His beard no sooner began to appear on his face. Javanshir was father's favourite, he was skilled warrior, artful as eagle, he was going to be support for his father. Javanshir succeed in life, he prepared to help his father in worldly life, he was able to come up with greats and to be near kings".

Javanshir, while still at a young age, led the troops of the whole Albanian state. The first meeting of the Caliphate with the Albanians took place in the territory of Iraq in the I century, near Lake Najaf. Javanshir fought so bravely and skillfully that he was able to repulse the foreign invaders back. A few days later, on the birthday of Jesus, well-armed Iranian and allied forces (30,000 cavalry and 20,000 infantry) were ready to attack the Arabs. (5; page 117)

Moses of Kalankatui also wrote: "In the battles near the "dead waters" near Cadizia, Javanshir distinguished himself with special bravery." The Sasanian king praised his bravery and presented him special gifts: the banner, loud horn, two golden darts and two gilded shields, which were always in front of him. Sasanian ruler respected him most of all and presented Javanshir a golden belt, decorated by pearls, and a sword with a golden handle. Besides, Sasanian king put bracelets on Javanshir's hands, put a beautiful crown on his head, also presented headbands with pearls, and hung many strands of pearls on his neck». However, the Arabs were stronger and got ahead of Sasanid army. New battle began, in that battle the troops at the head of Javanshir displayed particularly.

Moses of Kalankatui wrote about it: “The Albanian commander Javanshir and his brave soldiers killed eight of their enemies. Javanshir himself was seriously wounded three times, and his horse was wounded in four points. The enemy drove him with fury till the river Euphrates. His head was in blood, his gun was dirty. When Javanshir saw that all Persian army and nobility were cut alike grass he hurried to the Shah's palace. The Shah gave him cordial welcome here and told about his bravery and hard wounds. Shah ordered to give Javanshir place in his palace and sent doctors to him. In exchange of Javanshir's merits shah of Persia gave Javanshir many rich gifts, including villages and rivers full of fish. But Javanshir continued to fight against Arabs and kept them far from Sassanid for six months.”

In 637 the city Ctesiphon was besieged by the Arabs. In that battle, Albanian army headed by Javanshir demonstrated great courage. Albanian army “attacked the enemies with his troops and pushed them back, then pursued the enemy and forced him to cross Tigris. After that battle, Javanshir did not allow the Arabs to cross the Tigris again for six months. When the forces of the Caliphate joined and attacked again, Javanshir captured the Shah of Iran and brought him to the fortress Medain, placed in northwest of Beklal. The Arabs pursued them. Javanshir's army forced the opposing side to suffer losses. According to Moses Kalankatui's words, the Iranian army was completely defeated in this battle. So, Javanshir fought together with the Persian army against the Arabs for seven years and was seriously wounded 11 times.”

After heavy battles, Javanshir arrived in Atropatene, where the Persian commander met him honorably. As a mark of respect, Persian commander wanted to give his sister in marriage to Javanshir and to create family ties with him. But Javanshir refused, because he did not want to marry a pagan (it means that in VII century paganism still existed in Atropatene) and returned to his homeland.

In Albania Javanshir was acclaimed the “triumphant commander”. When met him, his father cried with joy. After it Javanshir was responsible for all policy of Albania. Javanshir was only 21 years old when he ascended the throne. In spite of young age, he was already famous as wise commander both in Albania and out of country. The coming to power of Javanshir marked the beginning of a new era of Albanian throne governance.

Javanshir felt that the Persian throne had already weakened. In this situation, Albania should carry out the course of an independent state, not a vassal policy. Naturally, this position of the Albanian authorities provoked a sharp reaction from the Persian side.

The Sassanids considered this fact as a Javanshir's rebellion and sent an army against Albania. However, Javanshir appeared in front of Persians with his well-armed army. The Persian contestant suffered heavy losses in that battle. Many members of the enemy forces were killed on the battlefield and some were captured. The Albanian army also captured large number of horses and mules as trophy. (2; page 87)

Moses Kalankatui wrote about it: (5; p. 119-120). "However, help to Sasanians arrived in time, and therefore the Persian army continued to pursue the Albanians. According to Moses Kalankatui, the next battle between the parties took place in one of the mountainous regions of Albania. "Javanshir also won that day and with God's help overcame the enemy." (5; p. 120)

The Persians, which suffered heavy losses in all battles, entered Barda and took as hostage Javanshir's mother and his brothers. Such coward action of Persian party infuriated Javanshir. Albanian historian wrote: "I do not hold back truth and say: that day Javanshir was like a she-bear that lost her bear cubs."

Soon, Javanshir arrived in the province of Kambechan, in his ancestral estate on the other side of the Kura. Here he did not disregard the Persian troops, prepared for the battle with them and placed his forces very correctly."

Persia agreed to the talks and concluded a peace treaty, but attacks soon began again. This time, the Persians decided to kidnap Javanshir's father. Javanshir with his brothers returned to Barda and hid in the forest at night, and early in the morning rushed to the Persian troops. In that battle Javanshir won the victory again. As soon as the war with the Persians ended, Albania was attacked by the Arabs.

Albania, alike other states of ancient Azerbaijan, took interest in neighboring states, and they one after another wanted to invade this country. Albania, which had not yet fully recovered from the war with the Sasanians, was forced to resist the onslaught of the Arab Caliphate, which, at that time, shook all Middle East. Javanshir was not going to obey the Arabs and retreated to the other side of the Kura River. Using such moment, the Sasanians kidnapped Javanshir's father once again.

Having strengthened his position on the bank of Kura, Javanshir “wanted to start a new war with the Arabs in order to extinguish the fire of his heart and to liberate his father. But his father persuaded him not to do this and submitted to the enemy voluntarily.”(5; p. 122) Albanian ruler understood that he could not alone withstand strong opponents, so, he began to look for allies.

For that purpose, Javanshir established diplomatic relations with the Byzantium Emperor Constantine II. Javanshir preferred to accept Byzantium dependence voluntarily, rather than depend on the Arab Caliphate. The fact that Byzantium also preached Christianity also played important role in such position.

According to the chronicler’s notes, when attendants read Javanshir's letter to Emperor Constantine II, “he was sincerely happy and made a great welcome that day. He ordered to write a response letter immediately and to prepare an agreement for mutual alliance. Constantine II sent very expensive gifts to Javanshir. Among the gifts were a silver throne on a golden base, a robe woven from gold thread, and a personal sword with a pearl necklace. Emperor also promoted Javanshir to the rank of the first patriarch. Constantine II also ordered to give 1200 Albanians different titles, such as patriarch, consul, expert, general and elite. Emperor also let Javanshir to divide these titles of his own choosing.

Byzantium Emperor sent a sincere letter to Javanshir along with the rich gifts listed above. In that letter Emperor wrote: “Mercy and blessing from the divine power of the Savior's cross to you, ruler Javanshir, owner of Girdiman and prince of Albania, proto-patriarch and ruler of the East, as well as our greetings and love from our Emperor”. (5; p. 126) As it’s seen, Byzantian Emperor appealed to Javanshir as “Ruler of East”. It proves, among most powerful rulers of world Javanshir had particular influence over Emperor of distant country. In his letter Byzantium Emperor also wrote: “We received your letter, full of love and obedience of God. We are glad, that you and your Eastern country agreed to obey us. We’ll always treat with love and sincere respect both to you and to your afterlivers.

Having received an answer to his letter from Emperor of Byzantium, Javanshir was very pleased. He realized that he had found a strong support for himself. Moses of Kalankatui wrote about this: “Javanshir hid and did not sleep all night, thinking about the happiness of his country. When the morning star rose to the heavens, he sat on the throne in royal robes. The doors opened and armed soldiers entered and stood on his right and left.

After that the nobles came to Javanshir to show respect and reverence. He was a just, rightful ruler and always gave his people a reason to trust to him. He spent the whole day taking care of his country, but not having fun. He also wisely guided those who lived wildly in the Caucasus mountains. Thus, he ruled his country from the borders of Iberia, Derbent and the Araz River as an absolute ruler”.

According historical sources, Emperor Constantine II ruled since 641 till 668. The author of “Albanian history” wrote: “He (Constantine) arrived in Persia in nineteenth year of his ruling with big army, elite prime cavalry and experienced commanders. He sent one of those commanders to Javanshir and invited him to meeting. Javanshir arrived in Emperor’s residence.

Having known about arrival of Albanian ruler, Constantine went to village Kinkivar in order to meet him personally. He greeted Javanshir and ordered him to take off the mantle, which he put on in connection with his wife’s death. On that meeting at the request of Albanian ruler, Constantine II presented Javanshir a piece of the Cross of the Eternal king and gave him a heartfelt blessing: "Let this Cross be a strong support for you and your sons against the enemy."

According to the chronicler, Javanshir was envied by the Armenian nobles and the Arab governor-general Hamza, who was appointed by the Arabs in 656. It should be noted that when Javanshir said goodbye to Emperor Constantine II, the Emperor “said goodbye to him in the presence of the Iranian and Armenian nobility, not as a servant, but as a brother of the same rank.” (5; pp. 126-127) After audience of Byzantium Emperor Javanshir with great victory returned to Albania. Catholicos of Albania Ukhtanes and all church officials came up to him and blessed him loudly. Coming back to Albania Javanshir was looking for a worthy place for the cross of Jesus. So, in his native province in Girdiman he built the "Fortress of God" in honor of the prophet Jesus and decorated it richly. (5; стр.127). It must be pointed out, that Javanshir met with Byzantium Emperor on two occasions. Javanshir, the ruler of Albania was loved and respected not only by Albanian nobles, but also by all his allies.

From the annals of Moses of Kalankatui we know that “In spring of 661, Javanshir visited Constantine who was in Vagarshapate that time. Constantine received him for the second time. Emperor ordered all courts and aristocrats to stand in front of Albanian ruler. Javanshir entered Constantine’s palace grandly alike Emperor. As soon as Constantine saw Javanshir, he embraced him and offered him a seat at the table. Emperor also ordered to spread the table for Javanshir, it surprised his companions.

The Emperor tied Javanshir the royal belt of his grandfather Irakly and great-grandmother Nisetas, put on his shoulder his mantle and represented two banners. Besides, Constantine awarded the title «patriarch» Javanshir's two sons. Emperor presented Javanshir all villages and domains, which belonged first rulers of Albania on condition that they would be passed down through generations and appointed him the ruler of all East.

The Byzantine Emperor Constantine particularly respected Javanshir and his state - Albania. Moses of Kalankatui wrote: "The Emperor did not hide anything from him and was surprised having heard good advice from him." During the meeting of Vagarshapat in 661, he said goodbye to Javanshir: "Partly you are always with me, my heart is with you, be healthy." (5; p. 129)

The meetings with Byzantium Emperor always encouraged Javanshir. When he came back to motherland, the talks about friendly meeting between the two kings spread like wildfire. People came from Syria, Atropatene, Georgia and as chronicler wrote, even Indian ruler expected confidence and friendship from Javanshir and sent him selected horses, servants, warriors as a gift. People came from Syria, Athropatena, Ayrarat, Georgia, even from India to look at Javanshir him and to hear his voice. The talks about Javanshir's heroism were everywhere. Coming back from a meeting with the Byzantian Emperor, Javanshir ordered that "people build, rejoice and live in peace, and the rulers build many palaces." However, in spite of Javanshir's diplomatic efforts, he could not prevent the Arabian aggression and occupancy of Albanian territories by Caliphate army.

Soon, the troops of Salman ibn Rabiya invaded Barda, Beylagan, Uti, Shaki, Kabala, Shamakhi and a peace treaty with the local rulers was made. Caliph Abu Bakr in 632-634 ordered his army not to kill children, old people and women, i.e to touch the people, busy by religious rituals, not to cut down fruit trees, not to kill sheep, cows and camels (except those, which were necessary for food). "Made the treaty with habitants of city, keep your promises and let them live in accordance with laws, we established for them". (1, p.79) At first, the Arabs didn't pick off the acres from the owners, on condition that they pay the land tax. (1, 79) At the same time the Arabs gradually settled in Azerbaijan and even occupied several villages. In villages, where the inhabitant opposed them, Arabs took lands away and gave them Arabian soldieries.

Sasanians and Arabs encroached on Albania and plundered Caspians from South and North. In 627 Caspians destroyed Derbent and occupied Barda (1; p.50-51) The Arabs were not the only problem for the Albanian king. At the beginning of winter the troops of Khazar khaganate (40 000 soldiers) encroached on Albania and stayed here during all winter. Few months later Shad- the son of Khazar khagan also attacked the territory of Albania. The frontier guard of Sasanians Sema Vishtnasi run away in Persia and took along all his property, all things, stolen in Albania. In order to prevent the endless attacks of the Khazars, Javanshir married to daughter of the Khazar Kagan.

In period between 630 and 640, the situation in Albania still continued to degenerate. At that time, all neighboring states attacked Albania. In its turn, Albania also didn't let its neighbors live in security.

In December 664 the Huns attacked Albania. The king of the Huns was afraid of Javanshir and wanted simply to meet with him. So, he sent his brother to Javanshir as delegator. As a result, Albanian ruler and the Hun king signed a peace treaty. Javanshir again demonstrated his bravery and appeared in front of huns. Moses of Kalankatui wrote: "Javanshir came with 17 soldiers to the Huns' camp, took king's daughter, freed 120 sheep, 8,000 horses and oxen, liberated 1,200 captives. By order of the ruler, goods plundered by the enemy were returned to their owners. The news spreads from East to West, from North to South, among bees and not bees."

After these actions, the name of the Albanian ruler Javanshir became even more famous in many parts of the world. Describing him as the ruler of the East and comparing him with the ruler of the South, the ruler of the North (Khazar Kaganate), the ruler of the West (Byzantium), Moses of Kalankatui wrote: "From the day he was born, Javanshir was created for glory, and to this day he earns fame and honors in all his exploits."

That is why we did not see his shortcomings, which were common to all kings. They did not have the respect and dignity that Javanshir had "(5; p. 138). Moses of Kalankatui presents Javanshir as an experienced politician who was able to establish good diplomatic relations with the Caspians, Byzantines and Arabs. Javanshir is remembered as the king, a hero of many wars, he is remembered an outstanding statesman who did a lot of creational activity for his country." As its seen, Albanian governor Javanshir was deeply respected by all his contemporaries and in historical chronicles, all annals Javanshir is mentioned as outstanding political figure and military leader.

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