

Population

Prior to the spread of Christianity, the people of this region worshiped mainly local religious beliefs and fire-worship, and some of them were pagans.

The Kimmers and Saks, who came to the South Caucasus in the 7th century BC, settled down here and played an important role in the formation of the Azerbaijani-Turkish ethnoses along with other tribes.

There are many place names related to Saks and Kimmers in Zangazur. Sisyan, Sheki, Shukar, Pusak, Gomur settlements in Sisyan region, Gomaran settlements in Gafan region have traces of history related to Saks and Kimmers.

The existence of Pichanis, Sofulu, Saralli, Gigi, Suvarli, Yayci, and other settlements in Zangazur, which bear the names of other large Turkic tribes (pecheneg, suvar, yayji, sofulu, saral, gigili) is undeniable historical evidence that the aboriginal population here are the Azerbaijani Turks. Some of the place names in Zangazur are related to Islam and of Arabic-Persian origin: Shikhlar, Mollali, Musallam, Pirdovdan, Sancharli, Shaharjik, Arabkhana, Sham, Shamsiz, Mazra, Maliklar and others.

The territory of Zangazur is the home of the ancient Oghuzs. The Inner Oghuz tribes settled, lived and fought in these mountains. Most of the events in "Kitabi-Dada Gorgud", which is considered a heroic epic poem of all Turkic peoples, took place in these lands and have preserved their echo in the stone memory of history, in the memory of people's blood and genes.

Moisey Kalankatli writes in his book Albanian History that at the beginning of the 5th century, two brothers, Gor and Gazan, came with large army and settled in a Suni village. Gazan is the famous hero Salur Gazan khan of the "Kitabi-Dada Gorgud" epos. The possibility that the village inhabited by Gor's brother Gazan is the present-day city Gorus (Goroz, Goris) is not devoid of solid grounds.

A part of the Albanian tribes converted to Christianity, held a dominant position in the region deriving the material, moral and military support of Byzantium. Tribes that did not convert to Christianity gradually converted to Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries.

The toponym "Zangazur" is associated with the names of the Zangi tribes that have left their mark on history. The Zangi tribes spread to Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Caucasus and Anatolia, and formed different toponyms in accordance with the geographical relief of their territories and the names of tribal associations. There are hundreds of toponyms in Zangazur connected with the names of the Oghuz tribes Bayandur, Kayi, Khalaj, Chapni, especially the Gajar, Baharli, Zangana, Zulgardar, Padar and Choban tribes of the Kayi Turks. The existence of several Baharli villages in Sisyan, Gafan and Gorus regions can be explained by the spreading of the tribe of the same name over this area. The names of Gacharan, Avsharli, Chullu, Khalaj, Chobanli in Gafan region, Bayandur in Gorus region, Baharli, Uz, Murkhuz, Zabazadur villages in Sisyan region are toponyms related to 24 Oghuz tribes.

Traces of old Turkic tribes, especially Gargars, remain everywhere in Zangazur region. The inscriptions on mountain Gargdash near the Nuvedi village of Meghri region tell about the existence of the Turkic tribes in these areas in the 5th and 6th centuries AD.

Almost all the noble families in Zangazur were of Albanian or Turkish origin. In the early 13th century, the Christian Turks, descendants of the Orbelis, inhabited Sunik. According to Stepanos Orbeli, a

member of this family, their ancestors came from the north of the Caspian Sea and settled first in Georgia and then in Sunik. The Orbelians, who were the Kipchak Turks, first converted to Christianity and then gradually became armenianized.

The trade document dated 1400, currently kept at the Matenadaran Institute of Ancient Manuscripts, describes the borders of three villages belonging to the Tatev Monastery in Zangazur. The introductory part of the document states that it was approved, in other words signed by well-known and honest people of Kapanat, Sisajan and Nakhchivan regions of Azerbaijan. This document lists the place names of Turkish origin: Urut, Ayi deresi (Bear valley), Zogalli dere (Cornel valley), Zogalli zami (Cornel field), Hamidgol (Hamid Lake), Beshtapa (Five hills), Dashkhirman (Stone threshing floor), Tepeashan (Climbing over a hill), Kolge kaya (Shadow rock), Yashli bulag (Old spring). Apparently, not a single Armenian toponym is found in the document. If Armenians had lived in these territories at that time, the document should have had their signature under it.

The "Comprehensive Book of Iravan Province" compiled by the Ottoman state in 1590 states that only 4 out of 94 villages registered in Sisyan, Bazarchayi, Zar and Zebil areas of Zangazur are inhabited by non-Muslims. The "Comprehensive Book of Nakhchivan region" compiled in 1727 states that already 18 villages were settled by non-Muslims.

According to the Gulustan agreement signed between Russia and Iran on October 12, 1813, Zangazur was also annexed by Russia. After that, the process of resettlement of Armenians from Iran and Turkey to the South Caucasus, including Zangazur, began. In accordance with the Treaty of Turkmenchay signed on February 10, 1828, 1,300 Armenian families out of 8,249 displaced from Iran were settled in Karabakh and Zangazur.

The historical literature also contains information about the settlement of the Kurds in Zangazur. By the decree of the Ottoman sultan Murad III (1574-1595) dated April 13, 1579, some Kurds were moved to Zangazur. During the reign of the Safavi Shah Sultan Huseyin (1694-1722), in 1717, certain number of Kurds were moved to Zangazur as well. In 1820-1830, Kurdish tribes from South Azerbaijan were settled in Zangazur.

Stepan Zelinski, an Armenian ethnographer and linguist who studied the Zangazur district in the second half of the 19th century, writes that Armenian villages were scattered, and located between the winter camps of the Azerbaijani and Kurdish villages. Zelinski wrote that Armenian villages were divided into two parts - local and displaced villages, local Armenians lived in Zangazur (Gorus) and Megri areas, Ahlatyan, Brnakot and Shinatagh villages of Sisyan, and other Armenians were moved there in 1828-1829 from Garadagh, Garmali, Khoy and Salmas provinces of Iran. The population, which the researcher called "local Armenians", were descendants of armenianized Albanian and ancient Turkic tribes. As a result of the abolition of the Albanian Catholicosate in 1836 and the subordination of the Albanian dioceses to the Armenian Gregorian Church of Echmiadzin, the process of armenianization of the Albanians accelerated, leading to an artificial increase in the number of Armenians in subsequent censuses.

According to the census conducted in 1874, 5 of the 268 state villages in Zangazur province were mixed villages, 208 villages were inhabited by Tatars (Azerbaijanis), 42 by Armenians, 12 by Kurds, and 1 by Russians (Malakans). In general, at the end of the 19th century, only 72 of the 400 settlements in Zangazur were inhabited by Armenians, the vast majority of whom were moved from Iran and Turkey after 1828.

According to the statistics of 1886, Armenians lived in only 81 out of 326 villages of Zangazur province.

According to the results of the First All-Russian census conducted in 1897, 137,871 people lived in Zangazur district, of which 71,206 were Azerbaijanis, 63,622 were Armenians, 1,807 were Kurds and 1,006 were Russians. Out of 5762 nobles, 4863 were Azerbaijanis, 834 were Armenians, 57 were Kurds and 6 were Russians.

As of January 1, 1905, Zangazur province of Yelizavetpol region was inhabited by 151,140 people of which 77,433 were Azerbaijanis, 66,181 were Armenians, 6,655 were Kurds, 785 were Russians and 76 were Europeans.

The book "Armenian-Turkish Clashes in the Caucasus" authored by the Armenian researcher A-Do, whose real name was Hovannes Ter-Martirosyan, published in Iravan in 1907, states that at that time, 314 out of 406 villages in Zangazur province were inhabited by Muslims, and the remaining 92 villages by Armenians.

Out of 5762 nobles in Zangazur district, 4863 (84.3%) were Azerbaijanis, 834 (14%) were Armenians, 57 (1%) were Kurds, and 6 were Russians. Undoubtedly, the majority of the aristocracy in Iravan and Zangazur provinces were Azerbaijanis. This was due to the fact that most of the land was owned by Azerbaijanis, aboriginal inhabitants of the South Caucasus.

The landowners of Zangazur province were mainly Javanshir and Kabirli beys of Karabakh. 64,000 dessiatinas arable lands out of the 68,443 in Zangazur province, were their property. A total of 4,018 dessiatinas of land were kept as state treasury land. These lands of Zangazur were mainly owned by Sultanov, Javanshirov, Behbudov, Rustambeyov, Behbudbeyov and Usmiyev families.

Being in the absolute majority of Azerbaijanis in Zangazur was due to the fact that they were indigenous to the region and it was natural that most of the land belonged to them.

In 1905-1906 and 1918-20, Armenians committed massacres against the Azerbaijani population in Zangazur. The first Armenian enclaves were established as a result of the settlement of Armenians in the destroyed and banished Azerbaijani villages. As a result of the deportation of Azerbaijanis in 1948-1953 and 1988-1991, West Zangazur was completely cleansed of Azerbaijanis. In 1991-1994, East Zangazur was completely occupied by the Armenian armed forces and ethnic cleansing was carried out against the Azerbaijani population, accompanied by massacres. Certain number of Armenian families from Armenia and foreign countries were brought and settled in East Zangazur. In 2020, East Zangazur was liberated from occupation and comprehensive measures have been taken for the return of the Azerbaijani population to their homes.

Note: Information on the statistics of the Azerbaijani population of West Zangazur during the Soviet era is provided in the relevant sections of the project.