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ROBERT  
MOBILI

70

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WE CONSIDER  
OURSELVES  
MEMBERS  
OF ONE FAMILY"

# Welcome!

## Azerbaijan Udi Hearth Historical Ethnographic Park and Museum

Nij settlement, Gabala region, Azerbaijan



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# UDIS: Language, Religion, Folklore and Traditions

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The information about the Udis, presented for the readers, directly correlates with their language, religion, folklore, and customs. The history of the Udis spans over 2,500 years. They are first mentioned by Herodotus, often regarded as the “father of history,” in his description of the Battle of Marathon. Subsequently, references to them can be found in the works of Strabo, Pliny, and several other Roman, Greek, and Arabic authors. Alongside other Albanian tribes, the Udis were among the principal tribes constituting the population of Caucasian Albania. The first Christian church was built here in the 2nd century AD. In 313 AD, King Urnair embraced Christianity as the state religion. The reign of Javanshir was considered a period of flourishing Christianity, during which over 300 churches were constructed. It is particularly noteworthy to mention the invaluable assistance provided by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in the restoration of the Church of Saint Mary “Bulun” and other Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania.



The Udis, whose self-designation is “udi,” are an indigenous people residing in the territory of Azerbaijan and are one of the oldest local ethnic groups in the Caucasus. They speak the Udi language, which belongs to the Nakh-Dagestan group of the Caucasian language family. Additionally, they are fluent in Azerbaijani and Russian and adhere to the Orthodox Christian faith. The total number of Udis exceeds 10,000 people, with the majority of them, around 4,000, living in Azerbaijan (they are densely populated in the village of Nij, as well as scattered across Oguz and Baku). A small group of Udis resides compactly in the village of Oktoberi (Zenobiani) in the Kvareli district of Georgia. The remaining Udis are scattered across major cities in Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Astrakhan, Yekaterinburg, Ivanovo, etc.) as well as in populated areas of the country (Krasnodar, Rostov, Volgograd, Kaluga, Tver regions, etc.). Relatively compact communities are found in the cities of Shakhty and Taganrog in the Rostov region.

A small diaspora of Udis, approximately 800 individuals, resides in Aktau, Kazakhstan. Udis also live scattered across

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Ukraine, the Republic of Belarus, and other CIS countries. Due to various circumstances, they were compelled to leave their previous places of residence. This phenomenon persisted throughout the twentieth century, with the reconstruction period in the USSR intensifying it further. Following the decree by the President of Azerbaijan on the protection and state support of small ethnic groups, the Udi Cultural and Educational Society “Orayin” (“Spring water”) became actively engaged. This marked the first state document of its kind published within the former Soviet republics.

One of the scientific departments within the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan is devoted to establishing the Institute of National Relations, focusing on studying the republic’s minority ethnic groups. Under the presidency of Azerbaijan, a Consultative Council on Minority Affairs was established. Additionally, there exist private religious and social organizations of ethnic communities in the republic, receiving state support and addressing the spiritual, cultural, and educational issues of their respective ethnic groups.

The main task of the Udi Cultural and Educational Society “Orayin” and the Albanian-Udi Christian Community is to preserve the language, spiritual, and material culture of the Udi people as an integral part of Azerbaijan’s history. They promote the history and spiritual culture of the Udi people, prepare literature, and textbooks for publication in the Udi language. Georgy Kechaari, Yasha Udi, A. Udioglu, Mayis Kechaari, Y. Durmushari, and others are preparing their own original stories and collections of Udi folklore. Additionally, the society engages with Udis living outside their historical homeland.

## RELIGION

The Udi Church, as part of the Albanian Church, is considered one of the oldest churches in the entire Christian world, having survived the “Syriac” and “Greek” periods. The spiritual leader of Caucasian Albania is the apostle Bartholomew. The spread of Christianity in the territory of Caucasian Albania coincides with the 2nd century AD. During this time, the first church was built by the apostle Eliseus Gisd (now Kish), considered a disciple of the apostle Thaddeus and appointed as the first patriarch of Jerusalem by the apostle James.

From the work of Musa Kalankatuklu (Movses Kaghankatvatsi), “From the History of the Aluan Country,” it is evident that the Albanian Church was originally an apostolic church. Apostle Eliseus left Jerusalem for Persia, and from there to Albania. He began preaching in Chola (Derbent). Then Moses reports that Eliseus came to the province of Utik (the right bank of the Kur), then to Gis, and founded a church here, bringing into it a pure, bloodless sacrifice. Thus, Kish is one of the ancient capitals, a source of enlightenment. The next two churches were founded in Amaras and in Tsri (Utik) by the Hellenist Gregory the Enlightener and his grandson, St. Gregory the Illuminator, ordained as bishops at the insistence of the Albanian ruler Urnair (it is on this basis that the Armenian Church describes itself as the elder in relation to the Albanians, although Albanian tradition, on the contrary, emphasizes its superiority). From Kish, Eliseus journeyed to Helms. Here, his initial sermon faltered. Pagan tormentors mercilessly tortured Apostle Eliseus, casting his body into a pit. Many years later, following these events, ruler Vachagan III commanded the construction of a chapel near the Helms over the pit where the apostle’s body had been cast.

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Prior to this, the remains of Apostle Eliseus were retrieved from the pit and interred in the earth.

The second, “Greek” period of Christianity’s spread in Caucasian Albania is richly depicted.

During this period, Christianity became the state religion, and the Albanian Church immediately embarked on extensive missionary activities. Churches, prayer houses, and monasteries were erected. Many of these structures have endured to this day, despite the later advent of Islam. They are most commonly found in Sheki-Zagatala. In 1912, at the initiative of the Russian Academy, an attempt was made to restore these edifices, particularly the monastery in Lekit and the temple in the village of Gum. During the “Hellenistic” period, the Albanian Church was less reliant on Byzantium compared to the Georgian and Armenian Churches, maintaining collaboration with the Jerusalem Church. Its establishment also contributed to the strengthening of the church. Hierarchically, the Albanian Church was initially subordinate to the Roman Church, but by

the early 4th century, it received appointments from hierarchs in Jerusalem. It is believed that in 340 AD, the Albanian church became autocephalous. By the late 4th century, the clergy of the Albanian Church began independently selecting their leader. This status was legalized after the Fourth Ecumenical Council (the Council of Chalcedon) in 451 AD, which condemned Arianism and Nestorianism, adopting resolutions from its three previous councils. By the time of the Council of Aguen in 488 AD, convened by the Albanian ruler Vachagan III, the local church already had its archbishop (residing in Partav-Bardy) and eight dioceses.

*The canons of Aguen included four groups:*

- *regarding the clergy and its support, the relationship among church servants, their rights, and obligations;*
- *concerning the demarcation of relations between the clergy and the elite;*
- *regulating relations between the clergy and the peoples of the world;*
- *laws of a legal nature.*

In 551 AD, the Albanian Church, like the Armenian Church, severed ties with Byzantium and its leader came to be known as the Catholicos. In the 4th century, the center of the church was the city of Gabala, but by the 5th century, it shifted to the city of Barda.

In 590 AD, when the Byzantine Emperor Maurice established an alternative Chalcedonian catholicosate for the Armenians within his territory, the Albanian Church broke ties with the schismatic “apostate” Armenian Church. The head of the Albanian Church began to be appointed locally (establishing

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a catholic church). Additionally, Syunik also began to receive ordination from the Albanian Catholicos. With the advent of Islam, the process of deepening Christianization was halted, and eventually ceased altogether. An attempt to adopt Chalcedonianism during the rule of the Albanian Catholicos Bakur (688-704) ended in failure. After his overthrow, the Albanian Church lost its autocephaly. Later, the caliph Abd al-Malik (685-705) partially subjugated the Albanian Church to the Armenian Church. The reason for this was related to a report from the Armenian Catholicos to the caliph. The Catholicos stated: "The current Catholicos of Albania, seated on the throne in Partav, has made a treaty with the Roman Emperor, mentioning his name in his prayers and compelling the country to unite with him in religion and accept his protection." The subordination of the Albanian Church to the Armenian Catholicos marked the beginning of its weakening.

The definitive transition of the western Udi groups to Orthodoxy (Chalcedonianism) began in the 11th-13th centuries. Since the 17th century, the Catholicoses of the Albanian Church have been visiting the Yerits Mankants Temple in Hachen. After the incorporation of the Caucasus into Russia, one of the official policies was the restoration of Orthodoxy (Orthodox missionaries - Udis I. Bezhanov and others). Orthodox priest Peter Silikov built the Apostle Eliseus Monastery near Oguz (Vartashen), and after Emperor Nicholas's decree, the monastery came under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church (now this Orthodox church has been turned into a museum).

Formally, the Albanian Catholicosate (with its residence in Gandzasar (Gyandzhasar)) existed until 1836, but the decree of



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Emperor Nicholas I and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church put an end to the nominal existence of the Albanian Church. Subsequently, the clergy of the church was directly subordinate to the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin. In 1893, the Udi Semen Bezhanov translated the Bible into the Udi language. In 1996, the corresponding member of the Georgian Academy of Sciences, Z.N. Aleksidze, discovered the Georgian-Albanian palimpsest in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (Egypt).

The surviving scrolls of the Albanian palimpsest contain records from the Bible based on the Udi language, including chapters from Matthew, Luke, and John, the epistles of the holy apostles Peter, James, and John, as well as the letters of the holy apostle Paul (I and II Corinthians, to the Ephesians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews).

The decryption of the discovered text became possible only after the Udi language came into play. The Albanian lectionary (written fragments of the sacred book) is very close to the Georgian lectionary “Khanmeti”.

The fact of finding the Albanian dictionary confirms the



existence of translations into the Albanian language of the Books of the Prophets, the Gospels, and the apostolic prayers. Only peoples having the complete text of the Bible in their native language can have a Lectionary.

In connection with the above, at the initiative of the Udi intelligentsia, on April 10, 2003, the Albanian-Udi Christian Community was registered with the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations of Azerbaijan. This registration is the first step towards the restoration of the Albanian Apostolic Autocephalous Church. To date, with the assistance of the Norwegian Humanitarian Organization (NHO) of the Kingdom of Norway, the Church of the Apostle Eliseus (the mother church of the churches in the Caucasus) has been restored in Kish. Restoration work has also been completed on the Udi church “Chotari” in the village of Nij, after which the restoration of one of the Orthodox churches in the Oguz district will begin. In these churches, religious leaders of the Udi community will conduct services in the Albanian (Udi) language.

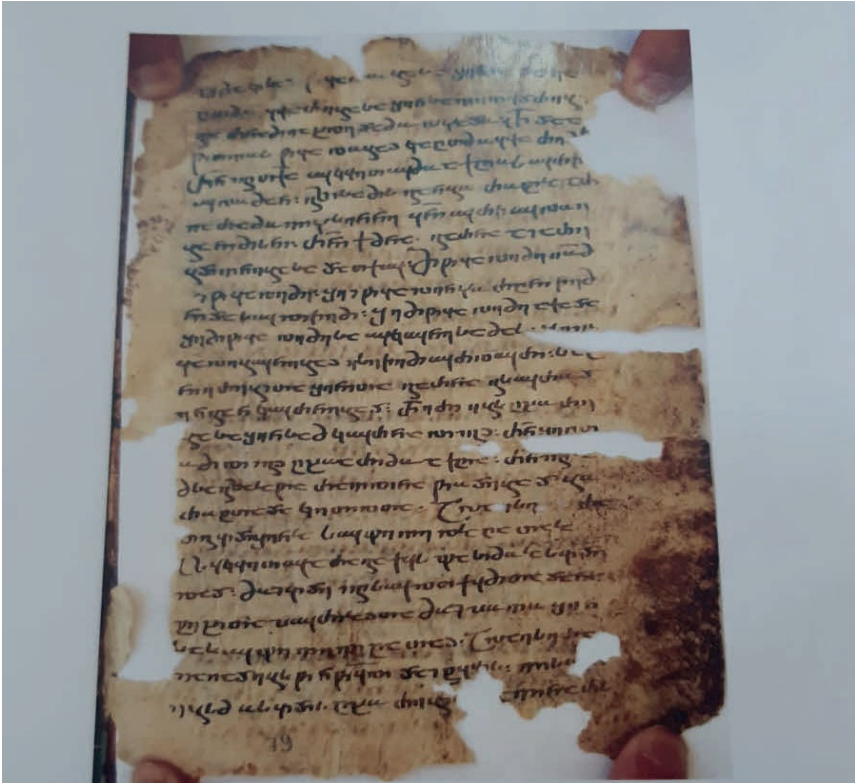
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### LANGUAGE

The Udi language is one of the languages of the Lezgian subgroup within the Nakh-Dagestan language group of the Caucasian language family. It is spoken in the town of Oguz and the village of Nij in the Gabala district of Azerbaijan, as well as in the village of Oktomberi (Zenobiani) in the Kvareli district of Georgia. It has two dialects: Nij and Oguz-Oktomberi. The Udi language is the descendant of the language of the Caucasian Albanian population.

In comparison to other Caucasian languages, it stands out with its simpler consonant system, absence of grammatical classes, presence of solid (attached to roots) class prefixes and suffixes in the grammatical system, as well as the presence of irregular (defective) noun and verb roots in relation to inflection. In the Udi language, a nominal agreement has developed. Personal agreement types of verbs are matched with the syntactic structure of the sentence (nominative-ergative, dative, possessive). There are also archaic plural suffixes, aspect categories, and an active case form. Thanks to the ergative construction, there is a tendency to combine dative and ergative constructions in verbs expressing emotional perception. With the advent of Christianity in Caucasian Albania, the Albanian (Agvan) line was created, which was used by the local Christian church of Caucasian Albania in the 5th-9th centuries. The alphabet consisted of 52 graphemes. The lettering system, special signs for vowels (especially digraphs representing the vowel "u" and its glottal correlate), and the principle of writing from left to right allow it to be considered as a highly modified Greek form of variation of one of the non-Semitic roots of Aramaic writing.

If we delve into historical tradition, we will observe the ex-



istence of a number of significant monuments of Agvan literature in the past and their destruction in the Middle Ages. There are very few known epigraphic monuments of the Albanian line (lapidary inscriptions, graffiti) so far. In the Udi language, words borrowed from Persian, Georgian, Arabic, Greek, Russian, and Syriac languages can be observed, but the main influence on the Udi vocabulary is the Turkish-Azerbaijani language. In the 19th century, the Udins gained the opportunity to embrace the written culture of the new era. In 1854, the first Udi school was opened, followed by the establishment of a rural school with Russian as the language of instruction. From 1931 to 1933, Udis

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received education in their native language. Since 1937, Udis studied in Azerbaijan, initially in Turkish-Azerbaijani, and then in Russian. As for Georgia, Udis were educated in the Georgian language.

Currently, the Udi language, consisting of 53 sounds, uses an alphabet based on Latin script, with additional characters added to the alphabet. Additionally, in the village of Nij, where Udis live compactly, the native language is taught in the primary classes of secondary schools.

## FOLKLORE AND TRADITIONS

Udi folklore is extremely diverse. Some of it has survived to our time, while some is known from recordings of the past century. Embracing Christianity, the Udis, like other Albanian tribes, did not forget their previous traditions and were able to adapt them to the new religion. For example, keeping an eternal flame in the house—a tradition stemming from fire worship. The Udis worshipped Ay (the Moon), considered the main God among Albanians. Even today, Udis who have embraced Christianity often direct their prayers to the Moon. Notably, in the Udi language, it is called Ay Hash. It also symbolizes the Cross Hash. The expression “hashdesun,” meaning “to cross oneself,” is still preserved in the Udi language. Other objects of worship among the Udis include the Sun, fire, sacred stones, trees, rivers, and springs.

Additionally, various beliefs, divination practices, and magical rituals were widespread among the Udis. Healers who cured the evil eye and illnesses had a great reputation. Ancestor worship was also prevalent. Christian Udis, while maintaining their unique individuality, did not escape the significant influence of



**Christmas Holiday. Nij, 07.01.2019**

the Muslim environment. Its influence is reflected in language, everyday life, culture, traditions, clothing, and rituals. Friday was considered a favorable day for both Udis and Muslims.

The version of the Armenization of the indigenous population of Udis in Karabakh is confirmed by some traditions and belief systems that existed between the Udis and the Armenian population of Karabakh. One of them is the tradition of worshipping “Ojag” - holy places associated with the Christian religion, outside the village (the holy garden in the church of St. Eliseus, “Ojag of St. George”, “Kemrat ojagy”, “Chotari ojagy”, “Yalovlityapin ojagy”, “Bulun ojagy”; their connection with fire, besides the etymological name, is manifested in the form of a pile of stones with a candle). In fact, the sacred value of ojag is higher than the value of the church. The Udis use the Julian calendar (the old date system) as the church calendar. The most

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important holidays and dates:

- *Milad ((Christmas)Udis, who are representatives of the Orthodox faith, celebrate on 25.12/7.01, while Gregorian adherents - 06.01/19.01).*

- *Maslenitsa (it is unclear whether the entire Maslenitsa week is celebrated). Great Lent ((Boyuk oruj) etymologically known as "girukh", "gurukh"; lasts for 7 weeks and culminates with Easter).*

- *Palm Sunday. On this day, all girls and women go to church (this is the only day of the year when young people of both genders meet in church).*

- *Easter (Kalaakhsibay, "Great Feast", on Sunday).*

**1st day.** Sacrifice at the church fence (also observed by Orthodox Udis). Egg painting. Great church holiday. The residents of the village of Nij often celebrate Maisun aksibay ("May holiday") as per the solar calendar date on 02.05.

**2nd day.** Day of remembrance at the cemetery (pilaf, fruits, sweets).

**3rd Day** of Easter (Gala-Gergez "Great Church", Patronal feast of the Monastery of St. Eliseus). Everyone kissed the icon upon entering the church, before the feast, and upon returning to the church.

**Vozneseniye** ((Ascension Day) Gokma, etymologically related to Gokkaa "trick, joke, miracle" - 40th day after Easter, Thursday).

**Preobrajениye** (Transfiguration of Jesus) On this evening, girls painted their hands with balsam (specifically for this purpose, grooms sent it to their brides). They gathered around the hearth of St. George.

**Day of remembrance** (falls on a Sunday in mid-September).



**Easter Holiday. Khudavang, 02.05.2021**

The Udis led a sedentary way of life. They were engaged in diverse agricultural activities, including rice cultivation and sericulture, handicrafts, and livestock grazing. Many ceremonies and calendars among the Udis are associated with agriculture. For example, one can celebrate the blessing of the vineyard. Some month names, used in the Udi vocabulary in the distant past and related to their agricultural activities, have survived to this day: “tule/tuen” (grape), “namot/kamot” - raw, “tsile/

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**Christmas Holiday. Nij 07.01.2014**

shile” - sown, grain, “bokavon” - burning, “yekhniya/yekhna” - ripened, “khabniya/khibna” - third.

The Udis have a very rich and diverse cuisine consisting of flour, dairy, meat, and vegetable-based dishes. Here, it is worth mentioning the dish “kharisa.” Kharisa is a traditional food of farmers, which is wheat cooked to a porridge-like consistency, to which pieces of meat or poultry with oil are added. Kharisa has been a traditional food of farmers since ancient times, enjoying great popularity in Asia Minor and among Syrians. The Udis and their namesake neighbors also adopted kharisa. The basis of the Udis’ diet consisted of plant products: beans, rice, nuts, vegetables, greens, fruits, and berries. Wheat flour was used for baking bread in the oven. Various types of pilaf made from rice, beans, raisins, dates, chestnuts, and walnuts constituted the main part of the Udis’ diet. Additionally, rice was eaten

with sour milk. Roasted and boiled chestnuts were popular, and the Udis sold them to buyers from Baku and Tbilisi. A variety of vegetables were prepared, including pumpkin, cabbage, eggplants, and tomatoes. Wild herbs, especially nettles and sorrel, were used to make soups and fillings for khangal (dumplings). Fruits and berries were also included in the Udis' diet. Dairy products (fermented dairy, cream, sour cream, butter, including clarified butter), various types of cream, were an important part of the Udis' diet. Meat dishes (stewed chicken, cabbage rolls, etc.) were prepared for holidays, celebrations, and when guests visited. In addition to all this, dishes were prepared from sturgeon, long-nosed fish, golden trout, crabs, and eels. They also made strawberry and herbal drinks, cherry, grape, plum, apple, pear, cranberry, and mulberry vodka. Honey and honey halva were made for sweets.

As for the traditional clothing of Udi men, they wore a 'chukha' with a wide neckline, a short turban underneath, and an upper 'kurat' shirt with narrow buttons and a high collar. They also wore leather belts with silver buckles and hung daggers over their clothes. They wore sandals and boots on their feet, and sheepskin hats on their heads. Traditional women's outerwear consisted of wide, long tunics, very wide skirts with backings down to the knees, and skirts with long sleeves tied around the waist. Their backs were wrapped with a wide silver belt with a large buckle, while poorer women tied their backs with a fabric belt (kushtuk). They wore woven stockings and boots on their feet, while poor Udi ladies wore 'koshs' (backless leather shoes with high heels).

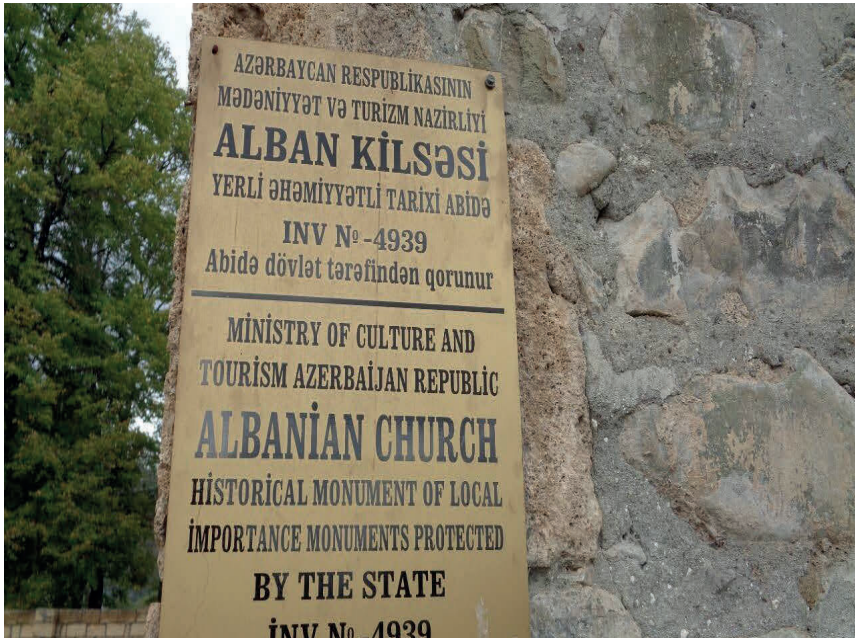
The women's headgear of the Udis is called a "dagtu," which has a unique and intricate design consisting of several elements:

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first, a round cap called “gatar” is worn on the head, and then a “chalabandi” is wrapped over it - a triangle made of two pieces, the ends of which are connected with an elastic band under the chin. This is followed by a triangular white scarf called “yali-gat,” and then a small scarf, the ends of which are tied under the chin. On top of them, a large black scarf is draped.

Married Udi women used to cover the lower part of their faces with a veil, that is, they were covered with a chador. In the 1930s-1950s, traditional clothing disappeared. Traditional clothing of the 20th century disappears. Modern Udis wear urban clothing. Modern Udis wear urban clothing. Udi men and women entered into marriage at a young age: boys married at 16, and girls at 13. Marriages among the Udis were usually arranged within their own circle, but strict prohibitions on marriages with relatives were observed, even with distant and non-blood relatives: for seven generations. In the past, it was characteristic for the Udis to have large families, and the members of these families were closely connected and lived closely in “family” quarters. In each such quarter, there was a leader, usually the head of a large family, who oversaw field and garden work.

In the past, the Udis lived a secluded life: Udi women covered their faces, dined separately from men, were not allowed to converse with non-family members, and a woman could not leave the house without her husband’s permission. The main wedding ceremonies of the Udis began in the morning and lasted for several days in the presence of relatives. During that time, musical instruments such as the tar, kamancha, tambourine, trumpet, and balaban were played. Guests were joyful, singing, and dancing. Among the dances was a long dance, which was



adopted by neighboring peoples. The Yalli dance, traditionally widespread among the local population of Azerbaijan, is also common among the Udis.

Significant efforts are being made in Azerbaijan to preserve the Udis. This people, considered one of the oldest indigenous ethnic groups of Azerbaijan, has managed to preserve itself, as well as its language, religion, folklore, traditions, and material culture, which are integral and irreplaceable components of its distant past.

Based on all of the above, in order to preserve the language, religion, folklore, and national traditions of the Udi ethnic group, as well as considering their traditional way of life, we propose the establishment of a center in the village of Nij. Today, such a practice is used in many developed countries around the world.

A photograph of a large, ancient brick church with a gabled roof. The lower portion of the building is constructed from light-colored stone blocks. There are three arched windows on the upper level, each with a wooden frame and dark glass. A central arched doorway is visible at the base of the stone section. The church is surrounded by green grass and some trees, with a stone wall in the foreground. The sky is overcast.

**The Albanian  
(Caucasian) Church of  
Saint Virgin Mary**



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**T**he Church of the Most Holy Mother of God (“Bulun”) operates within the Albanian-Udis Christian Community of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This historical monument is located in the central part of the village of Nij in the Gabala district. The ancient Albanian monument was restored in 2020 and handed over to the Udis believers, one of the oldest indigenous peoples of Azerbaijan. The restoration of monuments (2002-2022) is a common and significant event for Azerbaijan. This matter, upon closer examination, leads to ancient historical traditions. According to official data and historical facts, the Bulun church was last restored and opened in 1898 with the funds of parishioners (people belonging to the parish) of the village of Nij. However, according to local legend, the Bulun church, considered a rare legacy of the Albanian (Caucasian) Apostolic Church and the Udi ethnic group, was built in the 12th century on the site of an even older temple, the foundation and altar of which have been preserved.





Nij, 27.07.2013

It is unknown when the first chapel was built here. The Church of St. Mary-Mother (“Bulun”) in Nij, restored today, was a basilica, i.e., a rectangular building. The lower part of the walls was made of quaternary travertine from a nearby quarry, and the ceilings were made of red-fired brick. After being used as a grain storehouse and walnut warehouse by the aforementioned church, it gradually fell into disrepair: the dome collapsed, grass and trees grew on the roof, and the walls began to crumble.

After gaining independence, the Church of St. Mary-Mother (“Bulun”) was restored by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation as part of the “Address of Tolerance-Azerbaijan” project. The restoration of the mentioned monument and the courtyard around it began in February 2020.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the Karabakh war, by November of that year, the restoration works of the church were completed. Representatives of different faiths and nation-

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al minorities of Azerbaijan actively participated in humanitarian and restoration works. Currently, an Albanian cross, distinct from symbols of other churches, is installed on the new cone-shaped dome of the monument. On each of its four ends, there are three sharp petals: a torch tongue in the middle and crescent moon horns (sarpa). These patterns are remnants of pagan moon cults and fire worshippers of the Caucasian Albanian peoples. Empty clay pots (gursasli), enhancing the acoustics of the hall and used as resonators, were found on the walls and ceilings. Baptism was performed in the courtyard of the church, where three springs simultaneously emerge from the ground. In the past, baptism was performed at the confluence of the springs. The restored temple was handed over to the Albanian-Udi Christian Religious Community. Despite all the difficult historical events, the Udis, as descendants of the ancient Albanians, managed to preserve their native language, culture, religion, traditions, and way of life.

Today, the Albanian-Udi Christian Religious Community of Azerbaijan is the sole successor of the Christianity of the Albanian Church. Therefore, it can be considered the Albanian-Udi church. The Church of St. Mary-Mother ("Bulun") was chosen by the Udis as a cathedral for services, liturgy, baptisms, and the celebration of all religious holidays according to the canons of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It is worth noting that the "Bulun" church is dedicated to St. Mary. Similar churches have been preserved in Karabakh and other regions of the country.

In recent years, numerous events of both religious and secular nature have taken place within the territory of the church in the village of Nij. At the beginning of the 21st century, a series of



events occurred that helped the Udis fill gaps in their history and laid the foundation for the revival of spiritual life. In 2006, with the support of the Norwegian humanitarian organization, the Church of

St. Eliseus (“Jotari”), a preacher who brought Christianity to these lands in the 1st century AD, was restored in Nij. In 2009, the first major monument of Caucasian-Albanian script - a palimpsest (ancient writing on parchment) - was published in two volumes, found in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. About 120 pages of text in Udi language from the 5th-6th centuries were discovered under the Georgian codex on parchment. The content of the manuscripts (the Gospel of John and a collection of liturgical readings) suggests that this ancient Albanian language was used during worship. Subsequently, international forums, conferences, round tables, and various meetings were held to study the Christian heritage of the Albanian Apostolic Church.

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In particular, in 2013, the “1700th Anniversary of the Acceptance of Christianity as the State Religion in Albania” was commemorated.

The tolerance of the multi-ethnic Azerbaijani people and the historically developed multicultural environment in the country have created excellent conditions for the cultural and spiritual development of all the peoples of the republic, including the Udi people. The village of Nij





is called an exemplar of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been a policy pursued at the state level in Azerbaijan. Today, Udi Christians are considered one of the phenomena preserving this heritage in the model of diversity and variety of different denominations and cultures.





Nij, 15.05.2021

# The Jotari Church in the name of Saint Eliseus

*The Church of Jotari, named after Saint Eliseus, operates within the Albanian-Udi Christian Community of the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to historical facts and testimonies of local residents, the Elisha Church was built in 1723-1726 by the funds of Engibar Chotari, a local patron (a wealthy patron of science and art) and residents of four districts of Nij, as a rare heritage of the Albanian (Caucasian) Apostolic Church and the Udi ethnic group.*



Nij, 15.05.2021

The church is built of local split travertine stone on the site of a sacred and revered place for the Udis and based on a small ancient church. To perpetuate the building, four plane trees (Caucasian sycamores) were planted in the courtyard. Despite all the difficult historical events, the Udis, as descendants of ancient Albanians, have managed to preserve their



Nij, 15.05.2021

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native language, culture, religion, traditions, and way of life.

The Eliseus Church was restored by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan with the financial support of the Norwegian humanitarian organization. The restored temple was officially consecrated on May 19, 2006, and handed over for use by parishioners. It was on this day that the Udis declared it the day of the revival of the Albanian Apostolic Church.

Today, the Albanian-Udi congregation of Azerbaijan (religious people belonging to the church) are the sole legitimate heirs of Christianity of the Albanian Church. That's why it can be considered an Albanian-Udi church. The Church of St. Eliseus Cathedral was chosen by the Udis for services, liturgy, baptism, and the celebration of all religious holidays according to the canons of Eastern Orthodoxy.

It should also be acknowledged that the church is dedicated to St. Eliseus, a purely Albanian saint revered only by the Udis, a preacher of Christianity in Albania, an enlightener of the country, and a disciple of the apostles. Churches dedicated to St. Elise have been preserved in the Sheki, Gabala, Oghuz regions, Karabakh, and other regions.

The tolerance of the multiethnic Azerbaijani people and the historically developed multicultural environment in the country have created excellent conditions for the cultural and spiritual development of all the peoples of the republic, including the Udi people. In recent years, numerous religious and secular events have taken place on the territory of the Elisha Church. In particular, in 2013, the "1700th Anniversary of the Adoption of Christianity as the State Religion in Albania" was celebrated.





Nij, 14.09.2023



Nij, 14.09.2023



Nij, 19.05.2006



# UDI AND THE STATUS –QUO OF THE ALBANIAN CHURCH

Azerbaijan has become not only a hub of intercultural space and confessional discourse, but also of interreligious dialogue. For contemporary Azerbaijan, this achievement serves as the foundation of essential material and spiritual heritage within the framework of the Eastern (Orthodox) model of the revival of the Albanian Church, where common postmodern trends blend with profound internal transformation and a fundamentally new ethnonational formation. The Udis, ancestors of the Caucasian Albanians, have settled in their historical homeland, situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and managed to preserve their language, Christianity, ancient customs, and traditions, which hold immense value for scholarship. The Udi Christian community, small yet spiritually rich, is considered the successor of the Albanian Apostolic Church. The Udis are recognized as a phenomenon of ethnic preservation through various historical aspects, facts, and conditions in the model of language, cultural-religious diversity, and tolerance. In our practical work, we will present an overview of the contemporary historical and religious realities of the Udi community as inheritors of this Christian heritage, as well as the prerequisites and facts for the construction and revival (de facto and de jure) of the status of the Albanian Church in the model of modern society, based on the Albanian Church.

The multiethnic and multiconfessional composition of



**Khudavang, 02.05.2021**

Azerbaijan's population is a reality shaped by objective ethnodemographic and ethnocultural processes. Coexistence of peoples with different cultures and languages within one state has been characteristic of our country throughout its history. Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the Udi language, culture, religion, and ethnography as a result of scholarly discussions about the language, religion, and ethnic origin of this people.

The Udis, who identify themselves as Udi and Uti, are indigenous people of Azerbaijan and one of the oldest local ethnic groups in the Caucasus. However, in the modern era of globalization, integration, and the period of Udi resettlement in other countries, there is an increasing risk of deviation from their historical integrity, that is, from their true identity and homeland. The immaterial and spiritual culture of the Udis, their preserved native language, and the Eastern Christian religious tradition have been and remain the dominant and unifying form for all Udis over the centuries. They remain so today. However, it should also be noted that Udi Christianity and their churches lose their



Nij, 15.05.2021

essence and become inconceivable without their congregation.

The commonly accepted term for the Udi (Uti, Udi) ethnic group, referred to as Caucasian Albania, traces back to the historical region where they settled, through small epigraphs, petroglyphs, palimpsests, and a series of other monuments of intangible cultural heritage. All of these are known from the works of Greek, Roman, Armenian, Arab, and Russian authors. The earliest mentions of them can be found in ancient Greek and Roman sources from the 2nd to the 3rd centuries BCE.

The history of Christianity in Caucasian Albania spans almost two thousand years. The ancient and diverse population of Albania, including the Udis, was subjected to the domination of great empires at various times, and its territory was divided into provinces. Christian communities began to form here shortly after the beginning of the apostolic preaching and the martyrdom of the Apostle Bartholomew. This allows us to imagine how the apostle personally or through his closest assistants first sowed the seeds of the Gospel in the territory of Albania. His presence in Albanopolis (modern-day Baku) is undeniable, just as Saint



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### **Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on awarding R.B. Mobili with the Order of «Glory»**

Based on Article 109, paragraph 23 of the  
Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, I hereby  
decree:

For effective contributions to the public life of the  
Republic of Azerbaijan, Robert Mobili is awarded  
the Order of «Glory».

**Ilham Aliyev**

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
Baku, August 27, 2014.



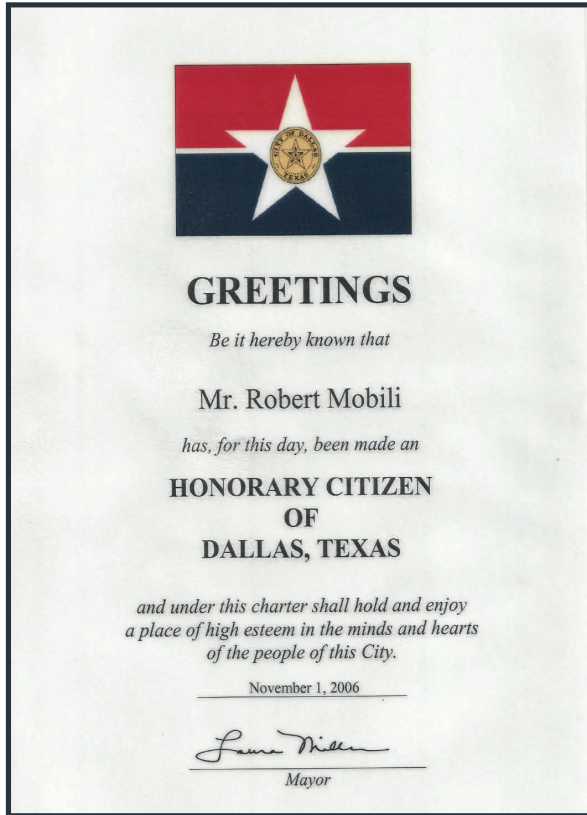
Eliseus began to work with the apostles in Kishe, then in Chola (Darband), and then in the vicinity of Uti (on the right bank of the Kura River). According to ancient legend, the apostle of this region is considered to be Saint Eliseus, one of the 70 apostles. Apostle Bartholomew appointed Eliseus as the first bishop in Ghis (modern-day Sheki). A more vivid proof of the existence of the first Christian community of Udis in Albania is the story of the martyrdom of the equal-to-apostles Saint Eliseus and his disciple Vlas.

During the reign of King Urnayir, who embraced Christianity in 313 AD synchronously with the Roman Empire and recognized it as the state religion of Caucasian Albania, its territory was divided into provinces, and these territories corresponded to dioceses. After the fall of Caucasian Albania,

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some Udis, like other peoples of this country, began to move westward towards the borders of the Roman Empire. When the Udis reached the shores of the Sea of Azov, they split there: some went north, others westward. Significant changes in the composition of the Albanian population occurred in the late 6th century due to migrations and movements of Albanian tribes to the Balkan Peninsula and Scandinavia. At the same time, due to the military-political situation, Albanian cities (Chola, Partav, Kabalaka, etc.) declined, and against this background, many episcopal sees were either transferred



to other cities or completely abolished. The names of early Christian saints-bishops serve as another testimony to the existence of Christians in the territory of Caucasian Albania. Martyrs of the early centuries of Christianity are known: saints Bartholomew, Thaddeus, the equal-to-apostles Eliseus, his disciples, and others. Christian burials, monuments of Christian heritage, as well as ancient archaeological finds in the territory of compact residence of the Udis, are vivid evidence of the existence of a Christian community in the modern Azerbaijani region. Christian basilicas of the 5th-6th centuries have

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**Baku, 19.03.2024**

been discovered and found in various regions of the country. Bishops in Albania are known from the acts of Ecumenical and Local Councils. The full list of Albanian Catholicos has been preserved to this day. There are also many differences in the architecture of temples, the symbolism of the cross, elements of Christianity, the attire of spiritual leaders, and representatives of the Catholic line. The data presented indicate a sufficiently developed organization of church services and, at the same time, the emergence of new bishoprics while preserving the old ones. Moreover, the names of hierarchs who were represented at the Ecumenical Assemblies and whose relics are kept in the same-name monasteries have been preserved.

During the period of Arab rule in Caucasian Albania, the most serious challenge for the church was the mass conversion of Albanians to Islam. The absence of Christian literature in the



native language of the population also led to their Islamization, although parallel missions to strengthen Christianity were operating in these regions. With the fall of the Caliphate, new monasteries were built in many areas. They, in turn, became centers of spiritual enrichment, the struggle against other religions, and centers of education. With the construction of temples and the organization of spiritual schools, the revival of Christianity intensified once again. Among the most important centers were Partav and Chola, a plateau built in rugged mountainous terrain. Their population was relatively homogeneous and similar in religious and social terms. These were Christian merchants and craftsmen. Economic prosperity and urban self-government also determined a high level of cultural life in the cities. The city library and printing house gained great fame. These cities had

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more than 20 churches, directly subordinate to the Archbishop of Albanian, and later to the Metropolitan.

The decline of these cities began after Mongol-Tatar warriors burned them several times amid feudal anarchy. During the Arab, Mongol-Tatar, and Persian invasions, some groups of Christian Udis preferred to become “crypto-Christians” to preserve their faith. Although they had Muslim names and outward Muslim behavior, they managed to maintain Christian traditions in their daily lives. The most typical cases of crypto-Christianity are the foothills and mountainous areas of the Greater Caucasus. This phenomenon intensified from the late 17th century and continued until the mid-19th century. New victims were discovered in the region. At this time, the reorganization of the metropolis and bishopric began, new churches were built, and systematic efforts were made for the spiritual awakening of Eastern Christianity.

In the early 19th century, the colonial policy of Tsarist Russia in the Caucasus led to the division of the territory of historical Udi settlement, that is, its inclusion in the empire. During this time, the process of subordination of the Armenian-Gregorian Church, which was the center of the Albanian Christian population in Etchmiadzin, to the authority of the Eastern confession began. This is evidenced by the decree of March 11, 1836, signed by Tsar Nicholas I, enacting the “Regulation on the Armenian-Gregorian Church.” Starting from the 9th century, the escalating conflict between the Albanian and Armenian Churches resulted in the de facto and legal abolition of the Albanian Church after 1836, and its property was transferred to the Armenian Church. After the abolition of the Albanian Church, the targeted policy of Etchmiadzin, with the assistance of Tsarist Russia, led to the appropriation of the entire Albanian ethnocultural heritage and

the de-ethnicization of the flock (loss of the national uniqueness of the ethnicity in culture, language, and way of life; violation of national forms of public life and hierarchical proportions). From this moment on, all Albanian churches and their possessions were called Armenian. All the Christian heritage of this land, including the Udis themselves, was automatically transferred to the Armenians. Many churches were closed, and in the remaining churches, services were conducted only in Armenian. In addition, studies in seminaries belonging to the Udis were conducted in Armenian. As a result, this policy against the Udis led to the conversion of part of the population to Islam, as well as to the Armenization of part of the population through attending Armenian churches. A small part of the Udis also adopted Russian and Georgian Orthodoxy. After the October Revolution in Russia, power was seized by atheist communists. Immediately after this, political repression and serious persecution of religious people began. Documents were also prepared prohibiting any worship in the country. After a short time, persecution took on a mass character. Hundreds of churches and monasteries were leveled to the ground, and the churches and monasteries that could not be destroyed were turned into workshops, warehouses, etc. Priests were stripped of their priesthood. Many were imprisoned or exiled. There were also many priests who were tortured to death. These repressions and punitive measures were applied against all religious communities, including the Udis. However, despite all these historical upheavals and catastrophes, the Udis managed to survive, preserving their language, traditions, and fidelity to the Christianity of Caucasian Albania. Today, the Udi Church is an integral part of the Albanian Church. And the Udis are the only direct heirs of this Christian heritage.

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Since Azerbaijan gained independence, a new era in the restoration of the status of the Albanian Church began within the framework of democratic reforms in the country. The collapse of the communist regime gave impetus to the process of restoring Udi churches and religious temples in Azerbaijan. The restoration of the Udi Church and the entire religious life of the Udi ethnic group as a whole began. There arose a serious need for the independence of Udi religious communities. Udis living in their historical homeland and the Udi diaspora (community) in the CIS countries played an important role in addressing this issue. They declared their support for autocephaly, that is, the independence of the Albanian Church, based on preserved Christian traditions, culture, and rich confessional heritage. Representatives of the Udi intelligentsia, along with linguists and theologians, translated many church texts and key chapters of the Bible into Udi. Additionally, Udi was introduced into the primary classes of secondary schools and used in worship and liturgy. In the second half of the 19th century, when the bishopric and metropolitanate of the Albanian Church were completely abolished, the Udis were forced to practically rebuild temples, religious institutions, and doctrinal rules of the Church from scratch. In 10 years, four churches were restored as cultural monuments. Three churches were also restored and repaired.

Today, the Udis, living compactly (Oguzes, Nijs) and having a relatively isolated environment, serve as the main stimulus for the preservation of the ethnic group, its revival, and a decisive factor influencing the national identity for all Udis as a whole. For a long time, there was no evidence that the Udis had sacred scriptures or the Bible in their native language. The recent discovery of an Albanian palimpsest with liturgical writings in Sinai proved

that the Udis had their own script and that the Udi-Albanians already had their alphabet and spiritual literature in the 5th-7th centuries. It has also been proven that throughout their existence until the present day, the Udis have undergone a centuries-long path of development in both oral tradition and Christianity. One of the main tasks of the Azerbaijani Albanian-Udi Christian religious community is the preservation and revival of the Albanian Church based on the Udi community. Speakers at various international forums, as well as at the event “Tenth Anniversary of the Revival of the Albanian-Udi Christian Community,” dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of Caucasian Albania in early August 2013, spoke about this. The immediate and long-term cultural and political consequences of this event are extremely valuable.

Today, there is a pressing issue regarding the restoration of the status of the Albanian Church as the sole heir to this rich religious heritage, founded on the Udi congregation. This issue is of great significance in terms of humanitarian criteria for restoring historical justice and repairing disrupted or distorted national-religious relations. The activities of the two Albanian-Udi communities, the complete translation of major chapters of the Bible and the liturgy into the native language, the restoration of churches, and the training of clergy are seen as the first step towards the revival of Albanian autocephaly. Today, Udi Christians are considered one of the phenomena preserving this heritage within the framework of multiculturalism and cooperation among different faiths and cultures. A vivid example of this is the village of Nij, where they live compactly. This provides a real legal basis for the status quo of the Albanian Church in Azerbaijan.

**Robert Mobili**

# Robert Mobili: Saint Eliseus' Narrative Takes Center Stage in Musa Kalankatuklu's 'History of Albania'

The Eliseus narrative is more aligned with the genre of martyrology (biographies of martyrs) rather than hagiography<sup>1</sup>. This differs significantly from hagiography as a genre, where the lives of saints are described in sufficient detail to engage and instruct the listener or reader in the church. The Eliseus narrative is described very briefly yet meaningfully. Referring to the martyrology, we note that Etmekjian<sup>2</sup> included it in the account of Thaddeus. However, this narrative lacks depth in the hagiographical text and offers scant details about the apostle's calling, life, and death. Hence, we concur with the author that these traditions primarily serve to uphold the historical chronology of local churches.

In the following passage, Musa Kalankatuklu (Movses Kaghankatvatsi), author of "The History of the Aluan Country," refers several times to the narrative of Eliseus while discussing

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1. Historical martyrology as a genre dates back to the Middle Ages. In his martyrological works, the reader is presented with brief information about various saints and holidays in their honor in chronological order.

2. Etmekjian, J. History. (1985) p. 169.



Nij, 15.05.2021

the current status of the Albanian (Caucasian) Church, citing excerpts from foreign documents and letters. Before delving deeper into Eliseus's account, it would be fitting to examine the narrative of Thaddeus, as it is directly associated with the establishment of the Caucasian Albanian Church. This connection is frequently highlighted by modern Azerbaijani scholars<sup>3</sup>. It's worth mentioning that Thaddeus and his closest followers are unquestionably referenced in early church literature. This liter-

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3. See the story about Thaddeus in Azerbaijani scientific literature: Goyshov, R., *Christianity*. (1984) p. 35; Mamedova, F., *Political*. (1986) p. 216; Mamedova. G.G., *Worshipping*. (1997) p. 12.

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ature also documents the Christianization of the entire region, stretching from Syria in the west, through Mesopotamia, and extending to the shores of the Caspian Sea in the east<sup>4</sup>. Let's take another look at what Musa Kalankatuklu wrote about Thaddeus:

Christ sent His holy and diligent disciples to spread His message across the world. We, the people of the East, are fortunate that Apostle Thaddeus was martyred by Sanatruk in the province of Artaz.<sup>5</sup>

In Drijvers' view, the historical authenticity of the Apostle Thaddeus is uncertain and cannot be conclusively proven due to conflicting accounts in church history.<sup>6</sup> However, there is no doubt that Musa considered Thaddeus from Kalankatuk as an apostle and one of the disciples of Jesus Christ, and according to the text, he was the one who brought Eliseus to the Caucasus. Furthermore, the alliance between Thaddeus and Eliseus was not random, and this connection in time and space constitutes a pivotal aspect of Eliseus's narrative. In the same vein, Moses

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4. Professor X. Drijvers (H.J.W. Drijvers) wrote one of the most serious and detailed analytical works on the legend of Thaddeus. See Drijvers, H.J.W., «Facts» (1984). The legend of Thaddeus is very important to many churches. Two modern churches, such as the Armenian Church and the Apostolic Cathedral (Sobor) Assyrian Church of the East, consider Saint Thaddeus as their founder. For more on the latter, see O'Dishoo, M., Marganitha. (1988) p. 109.

5. Musa Kalankatuklu, «History of Aluank country», book I, chapter VI.

6. See Drijvers, H.J.W., 'The Agbar'. Drivers explores many different perspectives on Thaddeu's story. From his point of view, the said legend is a fiction that arose in the Syrian Orthodox environment in the 3rd century as opposed to Manichaeism, which seriously threatened the Orthodoxy of the East. Moffett takes a more moderate view. He accepts that there is a real basis for the presence of the apostles in Edessa, see Moffet, S. H., History.(1998). pp. 46-80.

from Kalankatuk doesn't believe that Eliseus received his authority solely from Thaddeus through apostolic succession. Their destinies simply intertwined with what could be dubbed the "grand narrative of the Albanian Church in the Caucasus."

At the time when the "History of the Land of Aluank" was being composed, Thaddeus had already gained renown as a revered apostolic figure and saint within the Caucasian churches. This pertains to the translation of two crucial patristic texts (Christian doctrinal philosophy from the 2nd to the 8th centuries) from Syriac into Classical Grabar. Initially, right after the creation of Albanian script (around 320 AD), there was a translation of Eusebius's<sup>7</sup> "Ecclesiastical History" from its Syriac variant.<sup>8</sup> In this piece, dating back to 325 AD, Moses would have found the account of Apostle Thomas from Calankat sending Christianity's inaugural emissary beyond the eastern fringes of the Roman Empire to Edessa, the capital of the diminutive realm of Osroene. Eusebius records: "Thomas, one of the twelve apostles, moved by divine inspiration, dispatched Thaddeus to Edessa to spread the doctrine of Christ." He also mentions that Thaddeus was among the seventy followers of Christ.<sup>9</sup>

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7. Evgeny Kesariyski lived in 260-339 years. He was the first and most famous historian of antiquity.

8. On the Greek translation of Yevsevi's Church History, see Thomson, R.W., Moses Khorenatsi (1978) p.32 On the Greek translation of Yevsevi's History of the Church, see Thomson, R.W., Moses Khorenatsi (1978) p.32

9. Yevseniy, History of the Church, Volume I, Chapters 12-13 and Book II, Chapter 1. Scholars have debated for over a hundred years how the Teachings of Addai and what is said about Thaddeus in Yevseniy's History relate to each other, they argue. All scholars agree that the legend about ruler Abgar, Jesus and Judas (Thomas) was not known until Eusebius (325). Drijvers believe that it originated in the 3rd century. In The Teachings of Addai, Addai heals Abgar, ruler of Edessa. Eugene added Addai's story to his History of the

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**Baku, 02.10.2016**

The second source played a significant role in shaping the legend of Thaddeus in the Caucasus. The pivotal source is the Syriac manuscript “The Teaching of Addai (Thaddeus),” which Musa Kalankatuklu may have accessed through the Grabar script. According to contemporary records, the discussed work was written<sup>10</sup> in 250 AD and recounts the story of Abgar Ukkama V, the ruler of Osroene, his correspondence with Christ, and the deeds of Addai (Thaddeus) in Edessa, the capital of Osroene.<sup>11</sup> The story of Addai and Abgar was known through Labubna’s translation, which relied on the works of Eusebius, namely Church, but since Jesus Christ did not know any disciples named Addai, he changed his name to Thaddeus. See Drijvers, H.J.W., «Facts» (1984), p. 160

10. Drijvers, H.J.W., «Facts» (1984), p. 160.

11. Howard, G., The Teaching. (1981). p. VII.

“Church History” and “The Teaching of Addai.” However, the mentioned work was completed only in the 5th century.<sup>12</sup> The Armenian translation shows significant deviations from the original text. In this rendition, Addai (Thaddeus) doesn’t meet his end in Edessa; rather, he sets off to the east<sup>13</sup> to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In 470 AD, Favstos Buzand created his work titled “History of Armenia.” It is likely that he was acquainted with Labubna’s translation. According to Favstos, Thaddeus was not only the first Christian missionary in Albania but also the one who was martyred by King Sanatruk.<sup>14</sup>

However, the most significant source of information about Thaddeus from the “History of the Land of Aluank” is considered to be Moses of Khoren. Musa Kalankatuklu referred to him as the “father of history.”<sup>15</sup> Thaddeus’ story is ultimately formalized in the book by Khoren.<sup>16</sup> There are many reasons to believe that later Caucasian historians drew their material from here. In this context, it is worth noting that the oldest chroni-

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12. Thomson, R.W., *Moses Khorenats'i*. (1978) p.39

13. Arzoumanian, F.Z., *The Origins*. (1988) p.123.

14. Pawstos Buzand (III.1).

15. Musa Kalankatuklu, «History of Aluank country», book I, chapter VIII. Previously, the activity of Moisei Khorenli was attributed by scholars to the end of the 6th century. So, the history of his writings has long been the subject of controversy. On these differences of opinion see R. W. Thomson, *History*. (1978) pp. He talks about it in detail in his work called 1-60

16. About the legend of Khoren Elisey: «History of Armenia», volume II, chapters 33-34. In this work, the legend of Faddeus undergoes a fundamental transformation and expansion. Edessa ruler Abgar from Khoren is called the Armenian king, and Edessa is called the capital of Armenia. The Jew Tubia, in turn, is presented as an Armenian princess from the Bagratuni family. It should be noted that according to Yevseviy, Faddey was a guest at Tubia’s house in Edessa. After Addai’s biography, Moisey tells about Bartholomew of Khoren and his apostolic mission in Armenia.

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clers do not confirm the tale of Thaddeus and mention almost nothing about him. For instance, we can mention Koryun (440 AD)<sup>17</sup>, Agathangelos (460 AD)<sup>18</sup>, Eghishe (470 AD?)<sup>19</sup>, and Lazar Parpeci (490 AD)<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, all of these authors (data compilers) offer sufficiently detailed accounts. I will examine the narrative concerning Eliseus, referring to the primary source, the “History of the Land of Aluank.” Then we will compare this information with other relevant primary sources. It is important for us to examine the text in the context of the contemporary landscape as described in the primary sources and other historical documents. We hope that our chosen methodology will help shed light on the emergence, consolidation, and role of the narrative about Elisia.

It’s fascinating yet somewhat unexpected that Eliseus’ name surfaces in the text each time because Moses gleaned information about him from spiritual predecessors within his immediate circle. This aspect adds an intriguing and somewhat surprising dimension to our analysis. When delving into the “History of the Land of Aluank,” the accounts involving Eliseus often fall into a more coherent chronological sequence. This is because Musa Kalankatuklu’s primary goal has consistently been to shed light on various specific situations intertwined with the broader church policies of Caucasian Albania.

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17. Svane, G., *Koriwn Mastoc’s levned. A translation to Swedish by G. Svane* (1992).

18. Agathangelos. *Translation to English by R.W. Thomson* (1976).

19. Eghishe. *Translation to Norwegian by F.O. Lindeman* (1992).

20. Lazar Parpeci. *Translation to English by R.W. Thomson* (1991). 21. Musa Kalankatuklu, «History of the Aluank Country», Book III, Chapter 11

Prior to the next reference to Eliseus' story in the "History of the Land of Aluank," there's a chronological leap of about a hundred years. This time, Musa Kalankatuklu quotes a letter from the Catholicos of Caucasian Albania, Simeon, dated to 704 AD, concerning a significantly dramatic synod in Partav, the capital of the Patriarchate of Caucasian Albania.<sup>21</sup> The historical backdrop of this synod encompasses numerous events that unfolded in Caucasian Albania in the 7th century. Therefore, before delving into the text of Simeon's letter, it's essential to examine the political situation in this region in the pre-synodal years. In the 7th century, the Church of Caucasian Albania became increasingly involved in the political life of the region. This involvement primarily pertained to the heads of the church, Catholicos Viro and Catholicos Nerses. The blending of ecclesiastical and secular institutions in this manner can be attributed to its prevalence in the Eastern Roman Empire, as well as pressure from the Byzantine Emperor on various Caucasian regions. Additionally, in such circumstances, the hierarchs (one of the highest spiritual positions) and secular princes often emphasized the role of the enlightened Gregory, known as the "Apostle of Armenia." It should be noted that we have not found other primary sources of information about Thaddeus' activities in the Caucasus.

In other words, Thaddeus' "journeys" through the Caucasus mountains constitute a regional narrative within the Caucasian-Albanian tradition. Early sources do not associate the figure of Eliseus with the first disciples of Christ from the

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21. Musa Kalankatuklu, «History of the Aluask Country», book III, chapter 11

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circle of apostles known to us from the Bible. It appears that the emergence of this narrative should be explained based on the examination of other fragments of the “History of the Land of Aluank.”

Considering how Eliseus is portrayed in different sections of this text, it becomes evident that the Church of Caucasian Albania sees this as the cornerstone for legitimizing its claims to the status of “apostles” and “councils.” By the time the “History of the Land of Aluank” reached its final form, Eliseus appeared

to have already cemented his position as the principal national saint of Caucasian Albania. This is the perspective presented by Musa Kalankatuklu.

If we understand Musa Kalankatuklu's writings correctly, it seems that during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the church and the state in Caucasian Albania worked in collaboration. However, occasional oppositional religious movements emerged in the country. The first recorded conflict arose during the reign of the influential Catholicos Viro (596-630). It appears he was a Miaphysite, given the unfavorable portrayal by Musa Kalankatuklu. Despite his considerable influence, Viro couldn't prevent doctrinal disagreements within the Church of Caucasian Albania. In 632, Bishop Stephanos of the Gardman diocese broke the unity of the national church by embracing Chalcedonianism. This move, clearly against Viro's wishes, was supported by Varaz-Grigor, the ruler of Caucasian Albania.

If we interpret Musa Kalankatuklu's writings correctly, it appears that during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the church and the state in Caucasian Albania worked hand in hand. However, from time to time, various oppositional religious movements cropped up in the country. The first recorded conflict arose during the reign of the aforementioned influential Catholicos Viro (596-630). It seems he was a Miaphysite, as Musa Kalankatuklu<sup>22</sup> didn't speak highly of him. Despite his significant influence, Viro couldn't prevent doctrinal disagreements within the Church of Caucasian Albania. In 632,

22. *Ibid.*, book II, chapter 14: «Viro, a man of genius and wisdom, expert in philosophy...»

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Bishop Stephanos of the Gardman diocese disrupted the unity of the national church by embracing Chalcedonianism.<sup>23</sup> This move was clearly against Viro's wishes but was supported by Varaz-Grigor, the ruler of Caucasian Albania.

In the 7th century, the Church of Caucasian Albania increasingly began to intervene in the political life of the region. This was mainly attributed to the heads of the church, Catholicos Viro and Catholicos Nerses. The blending of ecclesiastical and secular institutions in such a manner can be explained by its characteristic nature within the Eastern Roman Empire, as well as the pressure exerted by the Byzantine emperor on various Caucasian regions. Additionally, in such circumstances, prelates (one of the highest ecclesiastical positions) and secular princes often allied against imperial authority (although they themselves were sometimes in opposition to each other).

According to the source written by Musa Kalankatuklu, at the beginning of the millennium and during the heyday of Christianity, the Church and the state authority of Caucasian Albania acted together. However, from time to time, various oppositional religious movements emerged in the country. The first known conflict occurred during the reign of the aforementioned powerful Catholicos Viro (596-630). Apparently, he was a Miaphysite, as Musa Kalankatuklu<sup>24</sup> spoke well of him. However, despite his significant influence, Viro could not save the Church of Caucasian Albania from doctrinal disagreements. In 632, Bishop Stephanos of the Gardman diocese broke the

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23. *Ibid.*, book III, para. 23

24. *Ibid.*, book II, chapter 14: «Viro, a man of genius and wisdom, expert in philosophy...»

unity of the national church and adopted Chalcedonianism.<sup>25</sup> This happened against the will of Catholicos Viro but with the support of Varaz-Grigor, the ruler of Caucasian Albania. According to the narrative of Eliseus, the path of Christianity in the Caucasus was different, extending further south and east—through Syria, Edessa, and Adiabene. If so, it is worth noting what occurred in Syria and Mesopotamia. This also better aligns with the general conclusions of research, indicating that the early Christianization of Albania (Caucasus) and the entire region began from its southern borders.



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25. *Ibid.*, book III, chapter 23.

# **Robert Mobili: Despite Armenia's recent defeat, there is a strategic ambition to leverage the Albanian legacy as a means to solidify its foothold in Azerbaijani territories**

The Caucasian Albania constitutes an integral part of Azerbaijan's history. It represents a vast layer of heritage dating back to ancient times, capable of shedding light on the land's rich past. Following the historic victory in the 44-day war, this matter has become particularly pertinent. Azerbaijan gained access to historical Albanian temples and other structures previously under Armenian occupation. Unfortunately, over the thirty years of occupation, much has been destroyed and altered by the occupiers to suit Armenian interests. Recognizing the significance of the Albanian legacy in the regional history, Armenians have undertaken considerable efforts to incorporate it into their own narrative, bolstering their claims to Azerbaijani lands both during and before the occupation. Many artifacts and elements belonging to the heritage of Caucasian Albania and the Albanian Church have been appropriated through falsification efforts. Regrettably, these efforts by Armenians have resulted in their registration as Armenian heritage on the international stage.

Discussing the state of Albanian heritage on the liberated territories, we spoke with the Chairman of the Albanian-Udi Christian Community of Azerbaijan, Robert Mobili. The situation with Albanian churches on the liberated territories is as follows:

The heritage of the Albanian Church on the territories lib-

A middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a grey suit, a blue and white striped shirt, and a red patterned tie, is sitting on a black metal bench. He is leaning forward with his arms resting on the bench. The background features a large, historic stone building with a prominent arched doorway and a tower, surrounded by green grass and trees. The lighting suggests it is late afternoon or early morning.

**Robert Mobili:**  
**“In Azerbaijan, we consider  
ourselves members of one  
family”**

## Historical Personalities



**Khojavand, 17.04.2021**

erated from occupation in Azerbaijan can be divided into two categories.

Firstly, some heritage sites have been “restored,” primarily comprising large religious centers such as the monastic complex of Khudavang, the Agoglan monastery in the Lachin district, temples in Hadrut, and temples in the village of Tugh in the Khojavend district. These Albanian temples have been “restored” following the pattern of Armenian Gregorian churches, with instances of vandalism and the introduction of new elements.

Secondly, there is a vast layer of Albanian heritage comprising ancient Albanian monasteries and churches dating back to earlier times, the 4th and 5th centuries. Unfortunately, many of these sites are in a dire state, having deteriorated over time and repurposed.

At present, the process of cataloging Albanian heritage is underway for both groups. Approximately 70 Albanian heritage sites are registered in the Khojavend district, with around



**Khudavang, 02.05.2021**

50 sites in the Kelbajar district, of which 35 are already registered. Additionally, there are numerous Albanian churches in the Lachin district. Overall, the territories formerly occupied by Armenians house approximately 200 Albanian churches, monasteries, and historical sites associated with the Albanian Christian Church.



The passportization of Albanian churches on the liberated lands is already underway. Not only Albanian churches but also objects of Muslim heritage are being passportized, with only one or two mosques remain-

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ing intact, while the rest lie in ruins, including cemeteries. I have personally visited these places more than twenty times and have seen them with my own eyes.

Many churches are not certified, and most of them are in need of restoration or conservation. Here, it is necessary to clarify the difference. One group of churches requires restoration, which will later be handed over to the Christian Albanian community. Another group comprises ancient churches that should be preserved rather than restored. For example, similar practices exist in European countries like Greece and Italy, where ancient churches are preserved rather than restored. Azerbaijan also has such an example-the Gumbaz Basilica located in the Gakh district. When a historical monument is conserved, it lasts longer than when it is restored.

I personally advocate for the preservation of monuments, primarily



**Salt Lake City, 28.06.2022**



from a scientific standpoint. As a geologist, I have a thorough understanding of construction materials and mortar. Back in those times, mortar was used in construction. Unlike cement, it doesn't deteriorate over time; instead, it hardens. This phenomenon can be observed in many examples, such as in Derbent, Kabala, the ancient capital of Caucasian Albania - now Gabala. Upon closer inspection, the thickness of the mortar is much greater than that of the red brick. Over time, the mortar hardens, causing the bricks to detach.



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**London, 2-4.03.2015**

Furthermore, it's possible to determine when a building was constructed and when it underwent restoration. This will later prove the falsification of our Albanian churches by Armenian "restorers" based on Armenian Gregorian churches.

There's also a toponymy issue at play here. It's well-known how Armenians altered the names of toponyms, hydronyms, and historical sites. The names of most Albanian churches have been changed according to the rules of the Armenian language. To support the further restoration of the Albanian Apostolic Church, a strong scientific foundation is necessary. Without serious academic backing, it will be incredibly challenging for us to restore the former status of the Albanian Church. The Albanian Church was simultaneously apostolic and autocephalous. Historical truth has been so distorted that we'll have to rely on robust scientific expertise, including strong archaeologists, architects, theologians, and specialists proficient in Grabar. Unfortunately, there's also an issue with archival materials, as Armenians have diligently worked on this matter for many years.



London, 2-4.03.2015

Our clue lies in the mixtures. They not only indicate the age of the building but also whether there have been any manipulations. The recipe for the mortar under examination cannot be reproduced in any way. This means that if the existing composition doesn't entirely replicate the ancient one and doesn't match the age of the building, then there have been forgeries. The age and composition of the mortar are crucial carriers of information. Thus, the composition of mortars used in restoration over the past two hundred years differs from the composition used in construction, starting from the foundation.

In my view, an Albanian Studies Institute in Azerbaijan should have been established long ago. Who else would have addressed issues related to our heritage if not for its absence? Everyone except us engages in Albanian studies—Germany, France, Norway, Belgium. An institute must be established. This problem cannot be solved by just two or three scholars.

Armenians have made significant strides in this direction and continue to do so. I remember in 2010 when Armenians raised the issue at UNESCO that khachkars (cross-stones) determine

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### Agoglan

Armenia's borders. In other words, if a cross is found on a stone, it belongs to Armenia's territory. The session took place in Kenya. Azerbaijan protested, and our protest was positively received, leading to my invitation to the session. Not only did we object to Armenia's claims, but we also demonstrated that in the Caucasus, there are not only Armenian but also Albanian crosses. As a result, the question arose: yes, borders are determined by crosses, but within Armenia's own territory. This means that no matter how diligently Armenians work in Karabakh, it will no longer hold significance.

After the fall of Caucasian Albania, Islam became dominant in the region. However, until Imperial Russia annexed the territory, Albanian heritage remained and continues to be preserved within the Islamic environment. The Albanian Church stood against Western Christianity – Catholicism. No one attempted to convert followers of the Albanian Church to Islam. Historically, there existed tolerance in these lands. Despite the presence of various religions in Azerbaijan, all confessions peacefully coexisted. Upon Russia's arrival in the Caucasus, it successfully played the Armenian card by settling



### Gum

a large number of Armenian refugees from Persia in Karabakh. Taking advantage of the tolerant environment in Azerbaijan, Armenians gradually began to occupy and “restore” Albanian churches. As a result, after two hundred years, the world viewed Albanian heritage as Armenian. Gradually, the idea infiltrated the minds of Muslims that the word “Christian” is synonymous with the word “Armenian.” In other words, a Christian cross is an Armenian cross, and to be Christian means to be Armenian. It was very difficult for the Udis to resist all of this. Some of them settled among Armenians. A vivid example of this is Karabakh, Sugovushan, and Talish. Some of them migrated to Georgia and became Georgians, while others, like the Udins-Oghuz, embraced Orthodoxy. Only a small number of Udins managed to preserve their faith and live compactly in the Gabala district to this day.

The Tsar handed over the Albanian Apostolic Church to the Russian Armenian Church. Even today, it remains a bone of contention for the Etchmiadzin.

I believe that although the mass resettlement of Armenians

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**Nij, 08.05.2014**

to the Caucasus occurred with Russia's arrival, the falsification of Albanian heritage began long before that. Armenians were renowned as skilled stonemasons, often invited to restore Albanian churches. During restoration works, various Armenian elements were added to the churches. For instance, the Khudavang Monastery complex from the 7th-8th centuries was restored in the 12th century. It underwent several more restorations afterward. The latest one was funded by some Armenian benefactor in 2011. The same happened during the Soviet era. The restoration of tombs from the 12th-14th centuries was entrusted to Armenian specialists. What do you think is better? Armenians demolished everything and rebuilt using modern construction materials. Armenians fully took advantage of their indifference towards Albanian heritage. They changed toponyms and destroyed what wasn't falsified. Most findings vanished, while others were taken to Etchmiadzin.

It's crucial to understand that today, the issue of Caucasian Albania is not merely a religious or Udin concern but a broader one. There is a strong historical layer of Albanian presence in

Azerbaijan's territory. It's not just about Karabakh but also Zangazur, Balakan, Sheki, Dashkasan, Gedabey, Gazakh, Tovuz, and Zangilan. This is a resilient layer, and we have managed to preserve it. Today, our foremost objective is to ensure the continuity of Azerbaijan's legacy.

Armenia has experienced a setback in the conflict. They understand well that they have lost their Azerbaijani lands and cannot reclaim them. This is precisely why they want to preserve the canonical territory of the Armenian Church in Azerbaijan. Armenians are no longer fighting for land; they are fighting for the Armenianization of Albanians. This will be a time bomb for future generations. That's why the Armenian side is so insistent in UNESCO commissions. They want the Albanian heritage of Karabakh to be recognized as the heritage of the "Armenian Apostolic Church."

It should be emphasized that the Armenian Church has always been Gregorian and has never been apostolic. It only started to be considered Apostolic Church after the collapse of the USSR, in 1991, when the Karabakh conflict was already escalating. By initiating aggression against Azerbaijan, they set themselves new goals.

In essence, our conflict with Armenians is far from over; if anything, it's just beginning. Today, we require the expertise of skilled archaeologists and historians as much as we need advanced weaponry.

Our current mission is the revival of the Albanian Church in Azerbaijan. Although we're not yet an established church but rather a burgeoning community, there's substantial work lying ahead. Taking Turkey as a model, where the term "Constantinople" is reserved solely for the church's name, despite its relatively small congregation of no more than three thousand, it

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commands significant canonical authority. Similarly, the Coptic Church in Muslim Egypt and the Albanian Church in Muslim Albania signify the enduring strength of religious heritage amidst diverse cultural landscapes.

In our churches, not only Udis but also Azerbaijanis gather. It's important to note that the support from the population and our Muslim community gives us a significant boost. A favorable multicultural atmosphere, supported by the state, is essential for the revival of Albanian heritage. In other words, we see broad societal support. Previously, our temples predominantly attracted foreign visitors, but today, a growing number of local residents are showing interest and actively participating in our community gatherings.

Indeed, government support plays a crucial role. Similar to other religious groups in the country, we receive financial aid annually. Following Azerbaijan's regaining of independence and the establishment of freedom of worship in our nation, a historic opportunity arose for the restoration of the Albanian Apostolic Church. In 2003, driven by the Udi intellectual community's initiative, the Albanian-Udi Christian Community was founded and officially recognized by the state. This registration marked the initial stride toward the church's revival. With state backing, significant progress has been made in restoring heritage sites. For instance, the restoration of the Apostolic Eliseus Church in Kish village, Sheki region, known as the oldest church in the Caucasus, has been completed. Moreover, in 2006, the Chotari Alban-Udi Church was inaugurated in Nij village, Gabala region, a hub for Udi inhabitants.

President Ilham Aliyev has consistently emphasized the significance of Albanian heritage. Whenever the head of state visits the liberated territories, he makes a point of visiting



**Nij, 19.05.2006**

Albanian churches, underscoring their importance as our heritage and the necessity of their revival. These are not mere words. Despite the onset of the 44-day war, restoration works continued at the Caucasian Albanian Church of Saint Virgin Mary in the village of Nij in the Gabala region. On November 7, the day before the liberation of Shusha from occupation, the church was reopened, restored with the support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

Furthermore, we witness significant support from the Caucasian Muslims Office, represented by Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade. The Albanian Church is now a member of the Religious Council alongside Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Catholic communities. Isn't this support evident?

Despite the events of the past, today, the Albanian Church is experiencing a revival for the first time in a thousand years. This presents a tremendous opportunity that must not be overlooked. It is a part of Azerbaijan's history and deserves to be restored.

# UDIS

**Rauf Huseynov**

Professor and Doctor of Historical Sciences

The formation and evolution of the Azerbaijani identity have been intricate, unfolding over generations through a rich tapestry of interactions among diverse tribes.

Alongside those who have inhabited Azerbaijan since antiquity, there are others who arrived later and assimilated into the local culture, adopting its language, customs, and way of life. This intricate process has shaped the Azerbaijani people into a cohesive Turkic-speaking community, rooted in the lands where their ancestors settled millennia ago. One significant historical milestone in this journey was the establishment of the Kingdom of Mannai, referenced in the Bible (Book of Jeremiah, 51:27) around three thousand years ago.

Today, Azerbaijan is home to not only its titular ethnic groups but also 20 distinct national minorities, all contributing to the vibrant mosaic of the Azerbaijani nation. Among these groups are the Udis, who refer to themselves as Udi. Their origins and historical trajectory have captured the interest of scholars for close to two centuries. However, it is disheartening to witness the Udis becoming entangled in political and pseudo-scientific narratives aimed at advancing unfounded claims against Azerbaijan's heritage and territorial integrity.

These assumptions stem from the fact that only a small



fraction of Albanians, including the Udis, remained faithful to Christianity after the Arab invasion of the South Caucasus in the early 8th century. At that time, an Armenian Catholicos named Ilya seized the political opportunity and reported to the caliph Abd al-Malik. In his report, the Catholicos alleged that Christian Albanians were planning a rebellion against Muslims and forging an alliance with Byzantium. Upon reading this, the caliph ordered, as punishment, to transfer the Christian Albanians under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church, which operated within the territory of the Arab caliphate. Thus began the process of Armenianization of Christian Albanians. The

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Armenian Church took control of Albanian churches, administration, and even the parish in Jerusalem, which was originally granted to the Albanian Church as apostolic and autocephalous.

The process of Armenianization was completed as early as 1836, under the terms of a decision jointly adopted by the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church. The Albanian Catholicosate was dissolved, and its property was transferred to the Armenian-Gregorian Church. Today, the restored Albanian Church in the Republic of Azerbaijan finds itself in a position where it can demand the return of its compound in Jerusalem and become a member of the World Council of Churches.

They are among the 26 Albanian tribes that established the Albanian state (3rd century BCE - 7th century BCE) and are ancestors of the modern Azerbaijani people. The scholarly

world first began to show interest in them in the early 19th century. Since then, over 150 works have been published on Udi anthropology and language, ethnography and history, origin, and culture. The collected data unequivocally demonstrates that the Udi are the oldest inhabitants of the Caucasus and are known only in the historical and cultural space of Azerbaijan. Their language belongs to the family of Caucasian languages.

The first reliable information about the Udis dates back 2500 years. Herodotus mentioned the Utis, who are ancestors of this tribe, in his work "Histories." Strabo also mentions them when describing the Caspian Sea and Caucasian Albania in his "Geography." As for the ethnonym "Udis," it first appears in the work "Natural History" by the Roman author Pliny the Elder, who lived in the 1st century CE.

In the 2nd century, the Greek writer Ptolemy, in his work "Geography," mentioned various tribes living near the Caspian Sea, including the Udis. The most detailed information about the Udis is found in the work "History of the Albanians" by Musa Utili a local author who lived in the 8th century and, according to his own words, belonged to the Udi tribe. He also mentions Aran, the mythical ancestor of the 26 Albanian tribes: "From his (Aran's) son came the tribes of Uti, Gardman, Tsavdeya, Gargara."

Today, the history of the Albanian state is well known. It was considered one of the most stable states in the Caucasus, existing for 1000 years. The Albanian state encompassed from Northern Azerbaijan and the south of Dagestan to Darband, and the adjacent territories of Georgia – Kakheti/Kartli and Zangezur Karabakh, which is currently part of Armenia. All these lands constituted the 11 historical regions of Albania:

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Chola, Lpinia, Kambisena, Edjeri, Kabala, Sheki, Paytarakan, Gardman, Artsakh, Syunik, and Uti. According to experts, the official language of the Albanian state was the ancient Udi language.

The region of Uti, inhabited by the Udi people, was known to ancient Greek authors as Otena (Otena in Latin sources and Otene in Greek sources). Its territory stretched from the Caspian Sea to the main Caucasus Range, along the left and right banks of the Kura River to the Alazani River.

Albanians and Udis were polytheists until the 4th century. Later, they embraced Christianity following the preaching of Syrian missionaries. These missionaries gifted the newly converted with Bibles written in their native tongue and established schools in the region. In the early following century, based on the old Udi language, alongside the Albanian alphabet and script, translated and original literature began to emerge. This led to the rise of Albanian writers, historians, poets, rhetoricians, jurists, and philosophers. Some of their works have endured to this day: “The Laws of Aghvank” from the 5th century, “On Death of Grand Duke Javanshir” (7th century), “The History of the Albanians” by Musa Utili, “The Albanian Chronicle” by Mkhitar Gosha, and “The Code of Laws” from the 12th century, “The History” by Kirakos Gandzaketsi, and “The Canons” by David Gandzaketsi, who lived in the 13th century, as well as epigraphic monuments from Azerbaijan and Southern Dagestan.

Udis, like other indigenous peoples of Azerbaijan, led a settled way of life and engaged in diverse cultural activities such as agriculture, craftsmanship, animal husbandry, and mining. As far back as the 19th century, they were known for

agriculture, sericulture, and horticulture.

Udis are known for their longevity, often living to be 80-100 years old or more. They are hospitable, always ready to help one another, and respect their elders. In ancient times, large families were characteristic of Udis, with members tightly knit and living closely in ancestral homes. Each such quarter had a leader, usually the head of a large family, who oversaw field and garden work. However, by the 19th century, nuclear families began to domi-



nate. The father acted as the head and judge of the household, and all family members obeyed him without question. Among Udis, the yalli dance is widely practiced, originating from ancient times among the indigenous peoples of Azerbaijan and depicted in rock art at Gobustan near Baku, with a history spanning 10,000 years.

Friday was considered a lucky day for the Udis. They worshipped the Ay (the Moon), which was regarded as the chief deity among the Albanians. Even today, Udis who have

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embraced Christianity often direct their prayers towards the moon. It's not by chance that in the Udi language, it's called "Ay Hash," symbolizing the cross Hash. The expression "khash-desun," meaning "to cross oneself," is still preserved in the Udi lexicon. Alongside the moon, other objects of worship for Udis included the Sun, fire, sacred stones, trees, rivers, and springs. Many Udi ceremonies and calendars, such as the consecration of vineyards, were linked to agriculture. Names of several months, associated with agricultural activities, are still found in the Udi lexicon: "tule/tuen"- with grapes, "namos/kamos" - wet, "sile/shile"-with seeds, "bokavon"-burning, "yekhniya/yekhna"- with harvest, "khabniya/khibna" - third.

In the context of Udi culture, it's essential to delve into the origin and etymology of the toponym "Artsakh," which Udis use in connection with Karabakh. To this day, in the Udi language, it means "to sit." This stems from the adjective "plus," meaning "people leading a sedentary lifestyle," and the verb "artsesun," meaning "to sit."

Considering that "akh" denotes the plural form in languages of the Caucasus family, "Artsakh" can be translated as "a settled place" or "a place of sedentary lifestyle."

Udi folklore is extremely diverse, comprising lyrical and martial songs and dances, tales, legends, myths, and proverbs, all tightly intertwined with daily life and creativity. While some of it has survived to our time, other parts are known from records of the past century. Embracing Christianity, Udis, like other Albanian tribes, didn't forget their previous traditions and managed to adapt them to the new religion. For example, the tradition of keeping an eternal flame in the house originated from ancient fire worship. Udis worshipped the Ay (the moon),



Nij, 19.05.2006

considered the chief deity among the Albanians, and even today, Christian Udis often turn to the moon in their prayers.

After the Arab invasion in the 7th century, the overwhelming majority of the local population, including some Udis, embraced Islam. However, in certain regions untouched by the Arab occupiers, including Nagorno-Karabakh, the population managed to maintain their previous faith.

This enabled the preservation of the Albanian Catholicos and his chancery, the Albanian Apostolic Autocephalous Church. Thanks to this, although Christian Udis were heavily influenced by the Turkish-Muslim environment in language, culture, attire, and cuisine, they managed to retain their identity, native language, material, and spiritual culture to this day.

Until the turn of the 20th century, the Udis resided closely-knit in the villages of Nij, Vartashen, Mirzabayli, Vardanli, Sultan-Nukha, Kirzan, Jurlu, Malikh, and Yenikend. The earliest information about the Udis' population dates back to the last quarter of the 19th century: in 1880, their population was

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10,000 in the Russian Empire, and by the end of the century, it decreased to 8,000, with 5,000 in Nij and 3,000 in Vartashen. By 1910, there were already 5,900 Udis registered. During the general population census, the Udis' population in 1926 was 2,500, in 1939 - 3,700, and in 1979 - 7,000. Such fluctuations in the Udi population over the years are likely not due to the ethnic base of this small people but rather on political grounds, connected to considerations based on distinctive criteria. This includes goals set by the ruling authorities, confessions, or places of settlement, as well as linguistic peculiarities. A similar approach was observed during population censuses in both the Russian Empire and the USSR. According to this style, it was used to denote the title nation's number.

In 1989, the global Udi population reached 8,652 people, with 6,125 residing in Azerbaijan. Additionally, there were 1,102 in Russia, 793 in Georgia, 336 in Kazakhstan, and 109 in Ukraine. Uzbekistan was home to 46 Udis, Turkmenistan to 32,

Tajikistan to 31, Moldova to 16, Belarus to 15, Latvia to 15, Kyrgyzstan to 2, and all of them were originally from Azerbaijan. There are no compact Udi communities anywhere in the world except Azerbaijan.

Currently, 4,465 people live in the village of Nij, and 100 in Oguz. For various reasons, they left other places where they settled in Azerbaijan in the past. This process continued throughout the past century and intensified with the beginning of reconstruction in the USSR. Especially after Armenia's large-scale armed aggression against Azerbaijan in 1988, which was accompanied by active propaganda against the Udi people. To this day, the majority of Udis are peasant farmers. Nij is a vast village, built of sturdy houses, surrounded by plowed land and large gardens planted with fruit trees.

Over the centuries, due to political, confessional, ethnic, and cultural factors, borrowings from Middle Persian, Ancient Greek, Ancient Syriac, Near Eastern, and several other leading languages were observed in the languages of the Caucasian Albanian tribes. Modern Udi contains borrowings from other languages as well. However, the Azerbaijani language has had the most significant influence on the Udi vocabulary, having undergone a certain influence from the Udi language.

Udis speak Azerbaijani, and some of them also know Russian. In Nij's schools, classes are conducted in both languages, including the native one.

In the 19th century, Udis gained the opportunity to be exposed to the written culture of the new era.

In 1854, the first Udi school was opened in Nij, and in Vartashen, there was a rural school with Russian as the language of instruction. Udis were among the teachers. To continue their

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education, Udis went to Moscow, Kozlov (commercial school), Gori (seminary), Tiflis (secondary commercial school). From 1931 to 1933, Udi students were taught in their native language, from 1937 - in Azerbaijani and Russian, and in Georgia - in Georgian.

Education for the Udis was predominantly provided by institutions of higher learning and technical colleges situated in Baku, Tbilisi, and various cities throughout Russia.

During the dawn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Udi intelligentsia began to emerge. These were teachers in schools and colleges who gathered extensive ethnographic and linguistic material at their grassroots level. As a result, doctors and engineers began working in city centers.

Today, Udi scholars have also embarked on studying their language, history, ethnography, and other aspects of their people's life and creativity.

In 1992, the President of Azerbaijan signed a decree "On the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Small Nations, and Ethnic Groups Residing in the Territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the State Support for the Development of Their Language and Culture." This was the first state document of its kind published in post-Soviet republics.

Like other ethnic communities, the Udis have their social organization called "Orayin," which receives state support. This institution addresses issues arising from the aforementioned decree, promoting the preservation and development of the native language and its features, preparing and publishing literature and educational materials in the Udi language, taught in the primary grades of Nij schools at the state's expense. Additionally, the organization publishes collections of Udi folklore

and stories by Udi writer Yasha Udi, who lives in Saratov; it promotes the history and culture of the Udi people as part of Azerbaijan's overall culture; it communicates with Udis beyond their historical homeland, including with the Udi community "Orayin" in Yekaterinburg.

Significant work is being done in the Republic of Azerbaijan to preserve the ethnic identity of the Udis—one of the oldest indigenous ethnic groups of Azerbaijan. The Udis have managed to bring forth into our time one of the ancient local languages, the spiritual and material culture of a distant past. This is important and necessary not only because the Udis are indigenous to the Caucasus but also because they have conveyed to our days the evidence of Azerbaijan's ethnographic past.

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# Shum, sieog and afar

Soon the Assembly of Kazakhs and Peoples of the Mangystau Region will be joined by another ethnic-cultural association. The Udis, who have been living in the region since the 1960s, have decided to join the official diaspora under the auspices of the assembly. But what do we know about this small but ancient people? What is the lifestyle of modern Udis? What can their customs tell us? To find answers to these and other questions, we turned to Igor Garadjov, the chairman of the Udi Ethno-Cultural Union. Together with his wife, Yuliya Valerievna, Igor Yuryevich not only talked about how the diaspora lives in Kazakhstan but also about the traditions upheld by its representatives, including national cuisine

The Udis are one of the oldest peoples of the Eastern Caucasus. The historical homeland of the Udis is modern Azerbaijan, where the village of Nij is located, which has existed since the times of Caucasian Albania.

Currently, Udis inhabit Russia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and other countries. The total number of this people is about 10,000 individuals. Representatives of the ethnic group speak the Udi language.

Sources show us that Udis, like other peoples of the Lezgin group, are close to the peoples of Dagestan both linguistically and ethnoculturally. The ancestors of these peoples historically were part of the multiethnic state union of Caucasian Albania.



They are also called Leks or Albanians.

Recently, the Udi Ethno-Cultural Center “Chinar” was established in Mangystau. Documents are being prepared for the official opening of the center. By the decision of the national community, Igor Garadjov was elected as the chairman of the center, known as the president of the Regional Federation of Thai Boxing of the region.

“Of course, the creation of the ethno-cultural center is aimed not only at acquainting Mangystau residents with our national traditions. Its creation is also about bringing together its representatives, helping children living far from their native village to learn and use their native language, and also not forgetting their traditions,” says Igor Yuryevich.

According to Igor Garadjov, approximately 350 Udis currently reside in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Around 75 families have settled in the Mangystau region, while 2 families have made

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their way to Almaty. The influx of Udis to Mangystau dates back to the 1960s when oil was discovered in Mangyshlak, drawing workers to the area. Today, Udis are predominantly engaged in trade, with women often employed in education and health-care, while men find themselves coaching various sports and Eastern martial arts.

As Igor Yuryevich emphasizes, the sense of community within the Udi diaspora is remarkably strong. Given their familial ties, it's no wonder they come together to mark significant occasions, such as the annual commemoration of departed ancestors from May 1st to 3rd, marked by cemetery visits and shared meals.

Igor Yuryevich and Yuliya Valerievna have been together for 17 years, raising their three children in Mangystau. Both natives of the region, they pursued higher education locally before embarking on their family journey.

“From a young age, Udis instill in their children a deep respect for elders and the importance of hospitality. Girls are



taught the art of cooking traditional Udi dishes, knowledge passed down through the generations. Udi girls are well-versed in the recipes of our national cuisine from an early age. As they mature, future brides in their paternal homes actively develop their culinary skills.

“Our Udi cuisine is wonderfully diverse, featuring a rich array of meat and dairy dishes, alongside vegetables and even foraged wild plants like nettles, thorns, garlic, and parsnips. Beans are enjoyed both in their pods and as mature grains. Furthermore, we’ve adopted several culinary traditions from our neighbors in the Transcaucasus,” adds Yuliya Garajova.

Incidentally, in their ancestral village in Azerbaijan, where all ethnic Udis gather each summer, local women craft cheese, sour cream, cottage cheese known as “shor,” and kefir. Many households tend cows and goats, with homemade dairy products forming an essential part of the morning meal.

In Udi families, the main dish for celebrating holiday is turkey cooked in a tarda (tandir oven). Boiled beef is served

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both at festive tables and at funerals. Pilaf is mainly sweet, but it is also cooked with beans, nuts, or meat. Rice with lamb or beef, called “Sieog,” is considered a traditional main dish and is served portion by portion.

We asked Yuliya Valerievna to give us a glimpse into the preparation of a cherished traditional dish and generously share its recipe with our readers. She enlightened us that, much like in many cultures, bread, known as “Shum” in Udi, holds a sacred place at the table.

Alongside us, women from the Udi community skillfully bake the signature oval-shaped bread in the oven (tandir). To craft this culinary staple, they blend sifted flour with warm water, salt, and yeast, letting the dough rise in a cozy spot for 2-3 hours before dividing it into 250-gram portions. Each piece is then expertly stretched on a specialized bread cushion and secured to the oven walls, forming a bread measuring 20 by 30 centimeters. It’s worth noting that this bread boasts an impressive shelf life.

Yuliya Garadjova explains the importance of using twig charcoal for baking—the distinct flavor it imparts simply cannot be replicated with other types of wood. Tradition dictates that after baking bread, the oven is used to prepare poultry, meat dishes, or delectable sweet pies.

Once the bread emerges golden and fragrant, the women deftly arrange a metal tray in the oven, adorning it with flatbreads topped with sweet flour and luscious walnuts.

From time immemorial, Udis have sustained themselves by tending to family-owned nut plantations, cultivating an array of hazelnuts, walnuts, and chestnuts. To this day, from August to October, locals gather the nuts for sale to neighboring Turkey and Azerbaijan. Additionally, village families supplement their income by selling canned fruits and vegetables, with the coveted white cucumbers grown in these lands always in high demand.

Unsurprisingly, the bounty of nuts has left its mark on Udi cuisine. Among the treasured recipes are afar (a flat root) with walnuts and nettles, rice porridge infused with walnuts and beans (known as chilov), and even dolma, where roasted walnuts stand in for the conventional meat filling.

Savory nut-based sauces elevate dishes with a spicy kick. For instance, the chekun sauce, made from dried alder, adds depth to meals. Meanwhile, the preparation of cabbage bark involves a flavorful fusion of cabbage, fruits, coriander, fennel, and garlic. And let's not forget the cherry wine, crafted from ripe fruits and used to enhance the flavors of hearty dishes.

# Faithful to the Cross under the Crescent Moon: Forgotten Albanian Princes of the Caliphate (704-821)

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## **The Albanian Heritage: A Bright Chapter in Pre-Islamic History of Azerbaijan and the Caucasus**

The Albanian legacy represents a vibrant chapter in the pre-Islamic history of Azerbaijan and the broader Caucasus region, encompassing various facets, including traditions of statehood. Over the past period, both foreign and Azerbaijani historians and orientalists have undertaken significant scholarly work to illuminate and explore the rich political and spiritual heritage of Caucasian Albania. In this regard, the valuable contributions of prominent orientalists and historians such as K.V. Trever, Z.M. Bunyatov, V.F. Minorsky, F. Mamedova, A.K. Aliyev, T.I. Ter-Grigoryan, and others deserve recognition for their invaluable contributions to the advancement of Albanian studies.

Undoubtedly, the works of these esteemed scholars serve as a guide for those whose perspectives and interests are focused on the Albanian past. However, despite these achievements, there remain important scientific goals and tasks in Albanian studies that await resolution. There are still many pages of Albanian his-



tory and culture that are insufficiently illuminated and require more attentive and systematic attention. Among the mentioned crucial questions is the fate of Albanian statehood during the period of Arab rule in Northern Azerbaijan. Most medieval Muslim geographers and historians traditionally refer to Northern Azerbaijan as Arran.

When discussing the portrayal of Albanian statehood during the Arab-Muslim rule in the Caucasus, it is necessary to mention one particular issue. In the works of most Albanian scholars, the aforementioned history begins with the description of political events related to the reign of the great duke one of the prominent statesmen and military figures of pre-Islamic Azerbaijan, Javanshir (642-681), the brightest representative of the ruling dynasty of Mihranids (630-822), and ends with the reign of his successor Varaz-Tiridates (680-699 and 705-709). According to the entrenched viewpoint among historians, the date of the abolition and decline of Albanian statehood is considered to be the year 704-705 when the Arabs took the great prince of Albania,

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Sheroy (Sheroe), as a captive to Syria. Prince Shero seized power in 699 AD, taking advantage of the nearly five-year absence of Varaz-Trdat and the fact that he had been in honorable captivity with the Byzantines during this time.

According to historians, even the return of Varaz-Trdat (Varaz Tiridates) from Byzantine captivity was insufficient to rectify the dire situation of Caucasian Albania. Despite all the desperate efforts of Mihranids, they couldn't even defend their internal sovereignty. Then, starting from 705 AD, Albania, stripped of even the attributes of formal statehood, became one of the numerous outposts of the Caliphate, where Arab governors replaced local rulers. The corresponding results of the work of several well-known researchers of Caucasian Albania prevent me from making baseless statements.

The Grand Principality of "Sheroy Albania" had a short-lived existence. In 704, he was taken to Syria by the Arabs. Varaz-Trdat was released in 705 during the second reign of Justinian II. Upon his return from Constantinople to Albania, Varaz-Trdat embraced full Arab citizenship. Consequently, Albania has remained entirely under Arab control both de facto and legally. Following Varaz-Trdat, Albania came under the rule of Arab emirs. [F. Mamedova. *Caucasian Albania and Albanians*. Baku, 2005, pp. 375-376].

"Similarly, in 705, the Arabs seized control of Albania and transported Sheroy, the last prince of the Mihranids dynasty, to Syria. Subsequently, Albania came under the governance of Arab emirs. The final subjugation of Albania occurred in the 30s of the 8th century when Marwan ibn Muhammad (Marwan II) subjected both Armenia and Albania to such devastation and slaughter that the quest for independence by Armenians and Albanians was halted for many years." [K.V. Trever. *Outline of the History*



and Culture of Caucasian Albania. Moscow-Leningrad, 1959, p. 107].

“Despite the return of Albanian ruler Varaz-Trdat after five years of captivity in 704, the country’s growing dependence led to its disintegration. Escalating internal turmoil, coupled with renewed Arab-Byzantine conflicts, prompted a tightening grip by the Caliphate. Numerous Albanian rulers, deemed suspicious by the Caliph, were apprehended and dispatched to Damascus.

Direct administration of the country fell into the hands of Caliphate governors, stripping the Albanian ruler and catholicos of their autonomy. Consequently, following the loss of political independence in 705, Albania relinquished its vassal status and fell under complete Arab dominion, thereafter designated as the province of Arran.” [Z. M. Bunyatov, N. M. Valikhanli. Political, Socio-Economic and Cultural History of Azerbaijan in the Second Half of the VII-XIII Centuries. // History of Azerbaijan from Ancient Times to the Beginning of the XX Century. Edited by İ. Aliyev. Baku, 1995, p. 194].

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“In that year (704), the Albanian ruler Sheroy was captured and relocated to the region of Taron under Arab command, subsequently transported to Syria along with his freedmen.” [T.I. Ter-Grigoryan. *Azerbaijan in the III-VII Centuries*. National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan Inv. No. 1299, p. 102].

For most Albanian scholars, the history of Albanian statehood continues from the 20s of the 9th century, precisely from the renowned Albanian feudal lord Sahl ibn Sunbat, belonging to the influential Aranshahov dynasty. [F. Mamedova. *Caucasian Albania and Albanians*. Baku, 2005, p.391; V.F. Minorsky. *History of Shirvan and Derbent in the X-XI centuries*, p.30, Z. Bunyadov. *Azerbaijan in the VII-IX centuries*. Baku, 1989, pp.176-181].

Consequently, the interim period of about 120 years between the eclipse of Sheroye and the rise to power of Sahl ibn Sunbat is simply omitted. This occurs when sources, including the Albanian chronicler Musa Kalankatuklu, considered the primary source by Albanian scholars, provide researchers with specific information about the events that took place during that period in his work “History of Albania”. Additionally, they mention the names of some Albanian rulers of that time. For instance, from the sources, we gather that following Varaz-Trdat’s death, the Ar-

abs, prevailing over the Khazars after a two-year bloody war, in 711, enthroned the esteemed ruler Javanshir II from the Mihranid dynasty as the leader of the Albanian Caliphate (711-725).

His throne, in turn, was inherited by Vardan, the son of the late Varaz-Trdat, who, like his father, was under the Byzantine captivity for a long time. Later, the Albanian crown passed to Nerses, the son of Vard, who became infamous for his cruelty among the people. [Source: S.S. Svazyan. History of the Aluan Country (from ancient times to the 8th century). Yerevan, 2008, p. 269].

The Abbasids (750-1258), who succeeded the Umayyads (661-750) in the caliphate, dramatically changed their administrative policy towards the conquered territories in the mid-8th century. By removing representatives of local royal families from power, the Abbasids preferred to implement direct rule on the ground. This policy also affected Albania. As a result, the Mihranids were sidelined from political affairs, a situation that lasted until the beginning of the 9th century. Later, representatives of this dynasty regained their rights to become great rulers of Albania with the consent of the ruling circles of the caliphate. [Same source; pp. 269-270].

The Mihranids remained the ruling Albanian family until 821. In that year, the last representative of the Mihranids, Varaz-Trdat III, was killed in Karabakh, after which the rise of Sahl ibn Sunbat and Aranshahs began. [Source: F. Mamedova. Caucasian Albania and the Albanians., p.391, V.F. Minorsky. History of Shirvan and Derbent in the 10th-11th centuries, p. 30, G. S. Svazyan. History of the Aluan Country (from ancient times to the 8th century), p. 270, G. Gaybullayev. Garabagh (On his ethnic and political history). Baku, 1990, p. 219].

The complete silence about the long period of Albanian statehood may lead those unfamiliar with primary sources and alter-

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native research to the misconception that Varaz-Trdat and Sheroe (Sheroe) were the last local Christian rulers of Caucasian Albania and that the Mihranid dynasty and Albanian statehood together are forever forgotten.

One might suppose that Albanian statehood, having lost its former prestige and significance after the death of Javanshir, never attracted much interest from researchers.

Indeed, during the reign of Javanshir's successor, Varaz-Trdat, Albania, already forced to pay tribute to the Byzantines, Khazars, and Arabs simultaneously, although it did not quickly lose its positions, practically lost control over a significant part of its regions in a short period of time. Notably, the renowned orientalist V.F. Minorsky in his famous work "History of Shirvan and Derbent" critically assesses the state of the country during Varaz-Trdat's rule.

"The fact that Varaz-Trdat from the Mihranid dynasty, which died out in 705, paid annual tribute to the Khazars, Arabs, and Greeks simultaneously, demonstrates how unstable the situation was in the country at the beginning of the 8th century. The power of the Arranian 'tsars' was limited to internal affairs only within the southern coast of the Kura River." [V.F. Minorsky. History of Shirvan and Derbent in the 10th-11th centuries, pp. 29-30].

Certainly, those who consider Shero the last true ruler of Christian Albania are right. It is an indisputable fact that after Shero's violent removal from power, the Albanians were deprived of the right to independently choose their rulers. All Albanian princes ascended the throne with the direct consent of Muslim authorities. It is also undeniable that during the long period of Arab domination, the dimensions of Caucasian Albania diminished to the level of small feudal principalities, and its statehood became merely local.

However, besides all of this, the notion of the complete and

final abolition of Albanian statehood during the Caliphate period does not reflect reality. During the Arab Caliphate era, Albanian statehood, with all its formal attributes, managed to remain on the political stage of Azerbaijan with minor interruptions. Moreover, this period of Albanian history is rich in dramatic events, intrigues, and upheavals, the objective study of which could shed light on many important ethno-political processes that influenced the subsequent course of Azerbaijan's history.

Since relevant studies by local authors are lacking, in our search for information about the events of the period under consideration, we often have to resort to the works of Armenian authors. However, unfortunately, a significant portion of these works is filled with a deep sense of chauvinism, which is considered a catastrophe for the scholarly community. Armenian authors blatantly attempt to distort the rich historical heritage of the Caucasian Albanians.

Among such works are, for example, the monograph by G.S. Svazyan "History of the Country of Aluank" (from ancient times to the 8th century) and a short article by another well-known Armenian historian, S.T. Yeremyan, "Albania during the Arab Dominion." [S.T. Yeremyan. Albania during the Period of Arab Dominion // Essays on the History of the USSR (III-IX centuries). Editor-in-chief: Academician B.A. Rybakov. Moscow, 1958, pp. 530-536].

The ideological and political bias of these authors compels researchers who reference their works to be extremely cautious. When using historical facts presented in these works, they must be cleansed of ideological influence and carefully analyze every decision made by the authors. As previously mentioned, all facts and considerations in these works are tailored to the authors' desire to present Albanian heritage as an integral part of Armenian history. In these works, Albanians, who have a completely differ-

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ent ethnic identity, language, and script sharply distinct from the Armenian language and Apostolic Church, are consistently represented as part of the Armenian nation.

Albania is also referred to as one of the provinces of the once great and united Armenia. Of course, this has nothing to do with scientific facts or common sense. It should be noted that Armenian historiography gradually developed a trend of Armenization of the entire Albanian heritage. This trend emerged as the official position of the Armenian historical school in the late 18th to early 19th centuries and was finally solidified during the Soviet era through the efforts of chauvinistic historians, including the aforementioned S.T. Yeremyan. [For further details, see: I. Aliyev. *On Some Issues of the Ethnic History of the Azerbaijani People (Responses to My Critics)*. Baku, 2002, p. 355].

While the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was escalating, they attempted to deny and appropriate the historical past and cultural heritage of Azerbaijan. Academician Ramiz Mehdiyev writes:

“At times, Armenian historical-scientific knowledge reaches complete absurdity in order to subordinate scientific knowledge to myths and use them for foreign policy purposes. Prior to the start of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenian historians practically did not deny the inclusion of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) in the Caucasian Albania and the existence of Albanian population in this region in the past. However, with the emergence of the ‘Miatsum’ movement, everything changed. The unfortunate Yerevan historians first began to deny the state of Caucasian Albania, and then the existence of Albanians altogether in the ancient and early medieval period. Some even compared it to the mythical Atlantis.

By doing so, they made themselves unpopular in academic circles and became objects of ridicule for serious scholars. The



Oguz, 29.09.2018

ideologists of ‘Miatsum’ decided to get out of the unpleasant situation in an original way: they recognized the undeniable fact of the existence of Caucasian Albania and conducted a certain ‘revision’ of its borders. More precisely, they defined it along the Kura River, that is, exactly in the place dictated by their expansionist appetites.”

Of course, much has been clarified about Albanian identity in the past, and today the most serious and objective researchers do not doubt the existence of a separate Albanian nation and Albanian statehood. Therefore, there is no point in wasting time and energy on interpreting the fabrications of Armenian historians on this matter.

However, despite everything, the ideologues of Armenian chauvinism continue to attempt to assimilate the Christian history and culture of Azerbaijan, both before Islam and during the Arab-Muslim rule. A renowned Azerbaijani historian, one of the leading experts on the ancient East, the late academician Igrar Aliyev (1924-2004), writes that for the determination of the his-

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Nij, 14.04.2024

torical Albanian territory in modern Armenian historiography, special terms such as “Eastern part of Armenia” and “Inner Armenia” were invented. He states:

“The concepts of early medieval Armenian authors about the greatness of ‘Great Armenia’, which supposedly encompasses not only Nagorno-Karabakh but also almost the entire Caucasian Albania, are consciously supported and cultivated by modern Armenian authors, as sad as it may be. In their time, these tales were referred to by the Mkhitarists as ‘Eastern territory of Armenia’, ‘Northeastern territory of Armenia’, ‘Inner Armenia’, ‘Agvan territory’ (Armenian falsifiers ‘award’ what existed for about a thousand years with such epithets), which got stuck as some ruling national-chauvinistic nonsense.”

...The foundation of this viewpoint was laid as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries, but conceptually, it was during the Soviet era that it was “revealed,” for example, not experiencing aversion to “radicals” in the works of Armenian authors like S.T. Ere-

myan, A. Mnatsakanyan, B. Ulubabyan, Sh. Smbatyan, and others. [I. Aliyev. On Certain Issues of the Ethnic History of the Azerbaijani People (Responses to My Critics). pp. 354-355.]

The relentless and aggressive attempts of Armenian chauvinist historians, armed with falsifications and fabrications, cannot and should not leave Azerbaijanis and the global community indifferent, especially the Christian world. Indeed, without any doubt, the descendants and heirs of the Caucasian Albanians are Azerbaijanis. The fate of its spiritual, cultural, and political heritage lies precisely with Azerbaijanis. A significant part of Albania over the past two centuries has been destroyed and appropriated by Armenian nationalists and ideologues with the assistance of tsarism.

The Christian world, in turn, should not forget the fact that the Albanian Apostolic Church is the first spiritual organization in the history of the Caucasus. According to primary sources, the first Christian church in the Caucasus was built by Eliseus, a disciple of the Apostle Thaddeus, in the city of Kish, Albania (Sheki district, Azerbaijan Republic). This church was later called the “mother of all Albanian churches.”

From the perspective of studying the objective history of the Albanian Apostolic Church and understanding the initial conditions of the subsequent de-ethnicization and armenization of the Albanians, the political processes of the 8th-9th centuries are of exceptional importance. An analysis of the works of Armenian authors clearly shows that many manipulations and distortions surrounding the Albanian church and the entire Albanian heritage belong to this understudied and under-illuminated period. For these reasons, issues of Albanian history during the Arab-Muslim rule should be on the agenda of Azerbaijani and foreign historical science.

# Ancient Udi Symbols: Their Meaning and Significance

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In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in interest in the history of the national existence of peoples around the world, in understanding the nature and essence of both large and small ethnic groups, and in the intricacies of the “national question” and interethnic relations. Numerous issues surrounding the existence of nations and ethnic groups, assimilation and acculturation ideas, multiculturalism, preservation of the civilizational and cultural diversity of peoples, ethnic identity, and traditions have become more relevant than ever.

In the context of globalization and the ever-changing daily life, questions of national or ethnic policies of states, human rights, and the rights of peoples to self-determination have come to the forefront of scientific inquiry and public practice. These issues concern hundreds of millions of people and stimulate the minds of intellectuals worldwide. It is imperative to find adequate solutions to these problems. Although modern forms



**Rome, 21.04.2015**

and methods of globalization entail an objective process, they undermine the foundations of traditional societies while also problematizing the livelihoods of nations, small ethnic groups, national minorities, and spiritual development.

As social existence is acquired through various means, the constantly changing nature and social environment, increasing uncertainty, and risks in the modern world have led people to feel a certain dissonance in the system of social communications. They have felt a culturally psychological discomfort and alienation even in their familiar environment. The modern state has the ability and monopolistic right to determine the political and cultural space of citizens, their legal and social norms, and values. Existing paradigms in science interpret human rights and state subjectivity differently. The former is associated with the theory of natural law, which emerged in antiquity and was developed by philosophers of the modern era with a priority on human rights to life, liberty, equality, and property.

Supporters of different positions prefer the theory of state

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omnipotence, advocating for the necessity of strict centralization and verticality of power. Both conceptual approaches are in a state of diffusion and aimed at modernizing society and changing citizens' consciousness. The struggle between representatives of these social theories is reflected both in society and people's lives and in the activities of the state, its legislation, and social policies.

Today, beyond the formally declared human rights, it is pertinent to consider the rights of individuals, especially representatives of ethnic minorities. Multinational states must harmonize the pace of social and cultural changes with the processes of shaping national goals and values.

It is essential to actively harness the entire positive potential of modern society, turning citizens into true bearers of ideas of tolerance, humanism, and high culture—people capable of understanding and accepting those living nearby and belonging to different civilizations. Analyzing the meaning of life for Udis, it is crucial to address several questions: how and to what extent do antiquity and modernity, traditions, and innovation coexist in their lives? What is the role of ancient symbols, artifacts, and archetypes? To what extent do they help adapt to objective and constantly changing realities and integrate into emerging multinational communities while preserving their mentality and uniqueness?

Considering these questions, it's notable that even in today's world, symbols and imagery embodying primitive forms of religion (like the worship of the Sun, Moon, and natural elements such as stones and trees), ancient myths, various material objects, and artifacts continue to play a significant role in the Udi people's lives, contributing to the shaping of a distinct "world-

view.” Undoubtedly, they wield substantial influence on the psyche, serving as enduring fixtures of life and norms of behavior, while evoking emotions and moods rooted in historical traditions and the deep recesses of the mind. Naturally, the mentality is complex and multifaceted, yet it’s rich with myths and legends passed down through generations, recounting tales of the ancestral homeland, the historical legacy of Caucasian Albania, its former glory and cultural richness.

Turning to the unique aspects and trajectory of Udi societal life, it’s worth acknowledging that today, their global population stands at a mere 10 thousand individuals. Dispersed across the former Soviet Union and foreign lands, Udis find compact unity solely within their historical birthplace, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan. There, they freely converse in their native tongue and meticulously uphold their cherished traditions. Within these borders, they feel a deep spiritual connection, a sense of belonging, and a robust ethnic identity. From a contemporary standpoint, it’s imperative to ensure that the mosaic of cultural diversity doesn’t overshadow ethnic identity in the face of burgeoning mass culture, with its primitive values and passions. Also, it is necessary not to form knowledge and worldview based on the understanding of ethnic groups as ‘us’ versus ‘them’, ‘our own’, ‘foreign’. Mosaic culture, inherently irrational, breeds myths, illusions, rumors, and absurdities, which in turn pose obstacles to the advancement of genuine humanism and spiritual enlightenment.

Today, Udis residing in various nations ought to enjoy full citizenship in their adopted countries, while those nations, in turn, must become their true homes. These lands should not serve as mere temporary shelters for Udis. Additionally, it’s vital to rec-

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ognize that any surge in migration ultimately stems from societal malaise, signaling underlying systemic issues. At any juncture in national memory, a latent genetic code is reawakened: if past discrimination based on ancestry existed, it can resurface at any moment. Hence, it's imperative to erect social barriers to safeguard the welfare of ethnic minorities.

Society always remembers instances of state violence, disrespect from official authorities towards the historical and cultural traditions of many peoples, and restrictions on civil rights and public life. Throughout history, from ancient times, multilingualism and exposure to diverse environments allowed the Udis to preserve their language, culture, and mentality. While Udis were once polyglots, the younger generation living in CIS countries, especially in Russia, are quickly forgetting their native language, culture, and traditions in bilingual environments. Despite their ability to adapt to new conditions upon settling in a foreign country or diaspora, they assimilate into alien environments. During this time, they acquire the titles and languages of other eth-

nic groups. Contemporary globalization gives rise to various forms of nationalism and chauvinism. Therefore, migration processes will be extensive, remaining among the most serious planetary issues for a long time. Forms of alienation and distrust between peoples manifest in public life and ethnic self-awareness. This social problem exists in many countries worldwide.



Today, in addition to formally declared human rights, it's crucial to recognize the rights of individuals, especially representatives of ethnic minorities and migrants. Ethnic existence as a factor in social development constitutes a vast historical stratum, the exploration of which holds not only purely scientific but also significant practical value. Historical memory and ethnic identity of a people, along with a sense of justice, conceal many motivations for present and future activities, from policymakers' decisions to everyday interactions. Within this spectrum of relationships lie many useful and valuable lessons about the social life of peoples, and for a profound understanding, it's always necessary to return to new conditions. The solution to

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new problems arising in the sphere of interethnic relations in recent decades can only be based on trust, peace, and harmony, or at the very least, on the compromise of various groups, ethnic elites, and society as a whole.

Today, the needs of public life require various aspects of historical experience, actualization, reflection, and a radical reassessment of the past. During historical breaks, people keenly feel the need to explore history, find their roots, and understand the past. Turning to the past allows the restoration of the lost connection between time and generations, finding answers to many questions of contemporary life. Understanding the peculiarities of the ethnic existence of the Udis as one of the ancient peoples of the world and a new ethnic group in Russia and the CIS sheds light on the origins of many problems of modern multiethnic and polyethnic societies. In the context of the formation of democratic, legal, and social states in our countries, this helps to understand the forms and mechanisms of interaction among representatives of different cultures and civilizations, ethnic groups, and peoples in the name of stable, peaceful, and harmonious development.

Analyzing the role of Christianity and subsequent stages of Udi life throughout the millennia-long history of the statehood of Caucasian Albania, it can be noted that this religion played a consolidating and integrative role. Christianity united the Udis into a single confessional and spiritual community, helping them to survive and find the strength to rise again after the cruel invasions of great empires and numerous invaders. The Udis managed to survive only thanks to the Christian religion and find salvation both on earth and on the path of God. The material and cultural heritage of Caucasian Albania, especially Christianity, churches and temples, the history and destinies of the apostles, letters and books, images and symbols, cults and ritual traditions helped people find spirituality. Moreover, it provided them with spiritual support and enabled them to endure all hardships and remain uplifted. The Albanian Church itself has always been with the people, helping the Udi people not to despair in the most difficult historical periods, endure dramatic and tragic situations. The Albanian Church provided physical and spiritual unity when society and social ties were broken, helping to reunite, live with hope, be faithful, and love life. Thanks to the church and the clergy, they managed to survive, remain in peace, and preserve part of their heritage to this day: history and language, culture, identity, traditions.

Today, in the conditions of a crisis of civilizations and cultures, the complexity of social development, the role of religion as an essential part of culture has immeasurably increased. For me, as a philosopher and scholar, the existing disorientation of public thought today is evident, as well as the search for moral support and moral values by millions of people. For the modern person, religion means a connection with Eternity and Infinity.

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It is also a quest for answers to the “challenges,” to the dramatic questions about the existence of Man in the world and the world in Man. It is the desire of each individual to find their place in life among other people, to determine their purpose, to find the meaning of their existence.

The rich Christian heritage, images, and symbols give the Udis great hope for salvation and immortality, rooting them in humanism, kindness, and peace. Christianity originated over two thousand years ago, during the crisis of the Roman Empire, in an era of cruel slavery, and proclaimed that all people on earth are equal before God, regardless of race, nationality, or creed. It declared all people living on the planet as brothers. Man was recognized as the supreme goal and value, the image and likeness of God on earth. He was given the highest mission: to maintain the harmony of the world, to transform nature according to God’s plan, to improve the world around him, to work diligently, to be just and kind, moral and merciful.

In the contemporary context, it is worth highlighting an event that took place in early August 2013. This gathering commemo-

rated the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Caucasian Albania, alongside marking the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Albanian-Udi Christian community in the village of Nij, situated in the Gabala district of the Republic of Azerbaijan. These and other events show that the interests of the Udis, living in their historical homeland - in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation, or other CIS countries, coincide with the strategic goals and objectives of the multiethnic Azerbaijani people.

**These interests include:**

- *firstly, ensuring the protection of the unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan;*
- *secondly, ensuring the rights and freedoms of man and citizen in accordance with international requirements;*
- *thirdly, the relevance of formalizing a modern civil society with a developed polyethnic and multiconfessional specificity;*
- *fourthly, preserving and strengthening tolerance in the republic - this is not only creating interethnic peace, harmony, and trust but also ensuring the movement from mutual respect to friendship between peoples;*
- *fifthly, the development of the history, language, culture, and traditions of all peoples, small ethnic groups, and national minorities living in the territory of the republic.*

We wish success to the leadership of the republic, all ministries and departments, as well as state and public organizations in the implementation of the aforementioned historical mission and lofty goals.

# Udis Preserving Their Faith

The Udis are an indigenous people of the Eastern Caucasus. The territory where they historically settled is part of modern-day Azerbaijan. The ancient ancestors of the Udis were among the influential tribes of Caucasian Albania, which was founded in the 2nd-1st centuries and is considered a powerful state. Despite Arab and Turkish influences, the people managed to maintain their adherence to the Christian religion. The Udi language is unique and is one of the main languages of ancient Caucasian Albania.

## ORIGIN OF THE NAME

Since ancient times, people have been known by the names “uti” and “udi”. The name of the Utian tribe, which participated in the Battle of Marathon on the side of the Persians, was recorded by the ancient author Herodotus in the 5th century BCE. It is mentioned in the famous work “Histories” from the 5th century BCE. Works from the 1st century BCE (such as those by Strabo, Pliny, Claudius, Ptolemy, Gaius, Pliny, Secundus, and others) discuss the national characteristics of the Udis. In the

5th century CE, the ethnonym gave rise to the name Utik or Uti, which occupied part of the territory of modern Azerbaijan and is considered one of the regions of Caucasian Albania.

### PLACES OF RESIDENCE AND POPULATION

In ancient times, the Udis inhabited the basin of the Kura River in Caucasian Albania, ranging from the Caucasus Mountains to the Caspian Sea. The Arab invasion forced the Udis to leave Nagorno-Karabakh and most of Utik. They relocated to the village of Nij in the modern Gabala district of Azerbaijan. Today, the largest Udi diaspora resides compactly in the mentioned territory.

In 1880, the population numbered around 10,000 people. Inclusion into the Russian Empire, as well as the cessation of activity of the Albanian Catholic Church, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Church, led to the loss of national consciousness and



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self-determination for some Udis. As a result, some Udis resettled in Georgia and founded the settlement of Zinobiani, later named Oktomberi.


















































The advent of the Soviet government with its atheistic ideology and policies of tyranny and collectivization in the 1930s led to a reduction in the Udi population, with some families moving to neighboring regions. These negative factors significantly decreased the number of Udis, with their total population numbering only 2,440 people in 1926. The next significant event in the history of the Udi people was the Karabakh conflict, which resulted in about a third of Udis relocating to Russia and other countries.

Today, the number of Udi people worldwide stands at 10,000 individuals. Of these, 3,800 reside in Azerbaijan (3,697 of them in the village of Nij, Gabala district). According to the 2010 census, 4,267 Udis were registered in Russia:

Rostov region- 1866 people  
Krasnodar - 776 people  
Volgograd region - 327 people  
Stavropol - 300 people

Nij is the only area where Udis live compactly. Some individual families and representatives of the nation live abroad:

Ukraine - 592 people  
Kazakhstan - 247 people  
Georgia - 203 people  
Armenia - 200 people

Udi t'arurxo						
Aa	Bb	Cc	Čč	Çç	Ĉĉ	C'c'
						
Č'č'	Dd	Ee	Éé	Əə	Ėė	Ff
						
Gg	Ğğ	Hh	Xx	İi	İi	İi
						
Jj	Jj	Kk	K'k'	Qq	Q'q'	Ll
						
Mm	Nn	Oo	Öö	Óó	Pp	P'p'
						
Rr	Ss	Šš	S's'	Şş	Šš	Tt
						
T't'	Uu	Üü	Üü	Vv	Yy	Zz
						

## LANGUAGE

The Udi language is considered one of the main languages of Caucasian Albania. Based on it, in the 5th century, a widely used Albanian script was created. Major biblical texts were translated into Albanian, leading to the absence of the Armenian language during church services. Over time, the language fell out of use. However, scholars managed to find a literary monument containing a complete Albanian alphabet of 52 letters.

Over time, the ancient Udi language underwent changes un-

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der the influence of Azerbaijani, Russian, Syrian, Arabic, Georgian, and Greek languages. In the early 19th and 20th centuries, attempts were made to establish national schools in the native language. Today, the Udi language is taught and written in the elementary school of the village of Nij. Additionally, an alphabetical dictionary has been published in the Udi language.

### **APPEARANCE**

The Udis belong to the European, specifically Europoid, Balkan-Caucasian race, and Europoid type. Foreigners have noted their tall stature, good physique, and physical strength. Compared to other peoples of the Caucasus, they are distinguished by the prevalence of chestnut and light hair, of average height. Other characteristic features of their appearance include:

- *Gray or brown eyes, horizontally positioned;*
- *Wide face, forehead, prominent cheekbones, sharply protruding chin;*
- *Thin lips;*
- *Thick and dense hair;*
- *Long nose, widening towards the tip;*
- *High ears, large earlobes.*

### **THE CLOTHING**

As for the traditional clothing of Udi men, they wore a “chukha” with a wide neckline, a shortened turban underneath, and an upper “gurat” shirt with narrow buttons and a high collar. They also wore leather belts with silver buckles and hung daggers over their clothes. They wore sandals and boots on their feet, and sheepskin caps on their heads.

The traditional women’s outerwear consisted of wide, long skirts and a very wide skirt worn over it, with a knee-length back, and skirts with long sleeves tied at the waist. They wrapped their backs with a wide silver belt with a large buckle, while poorer women tied their backs with a cloth belt (kush-tuk). They wore woven stockings and boots on their feet, while poorer Udi ladies wore “kosh” (leather shoes without a back on a high heel). The women’s headwear, called “dakhta,” had a unique complex structure consisting of several elements: first, they wore a round cap called “gatar” argachi, on top of which they wound a “chalebandy” - a triangle made of two parts, the ends of which were connected by a strip under the chin. This was the dakhta, and on top of it, they tied a triangular white scarf called “yaligat,” and then a small bump scarf, the

## Historical Personalities



ends of which were tied under the chin. On top of them was a large black scarf. Married Udi women covered the lower part of their faces with a veil, i.e., they did not wear a chador. In the 1930s-1950s, traditional clothing disappeared.

### **FAMILY RULES**

The head of the Udi family had the final say in social and economic matters. They lived in large and small families. Families usually lived close to each other and formed neighborhoods in settlements, which were passed down from generation to generation. Their way of life also influenced their language: the words “neighbor” and “relative” in Udi have the same root.

Udi women married at a young age: boys got married at 16-17 years old, while girls at 12-14 years old. Girls aged 18-20

were considered “staying at home” because it was extremely difficult to get married at that age. Women became completely dependent on the family. Their duties included household chores, cooking, and childcare. Women were strictly forbidden from participating in general conversations, eating at the same table as men, and leaving the courtyard without their husbands’ permission.

After marriage, a young bride faced a number of restrictions. Until the age of 15, they had to avoid the gaze of their father-in-law and the elder relatives of his wife, cover their faces, and maintain silence in their presence. The face could be uncovered, but the bride often remained silent for the rest of her life.

The birth of a boy was considered a joyful event in the family. The birth of a girl could provoke the anger of her father. Even the bride was often beaten and humiliated for giving birth to an unwanted gender child. If newborn babies frequently died in the family, a ritual to deceive evil forces was performed. Two methods were used for this:

Milk kinship. In other words, to protect the child, it was the woman who had not lost her own children who gave breast milk to the newborn, thus establishing kinship between the families of the nursing mother. Buying and selling (trading ritual). The “buyer” who handed over the money to the child was chosen from among trusted individuals. The “buyer” in turn would utter the words: “Raise this child with my name.” Essentially, the upbringing of the child continued in the biological family, but the transaction that took place protected the child from the influence of evil forces.

Participants in the trading and milk rituals established kinship ties among themselves. Therefore, members of their fam-

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ilies were strictly prohibited from marrying each other in the future.

A woman was considered unclean during pregnancy and the first 40 days after childbirth. Separate dishes were given to her for food, she was forbidden to knead dough, and to visit the spring. In addition to medical assistance, a midwife attended the childbirth and performed a series of rituals. When blood appeared during childbirth, this work was attributed to an evil force. To prevent unpleasant consequences, during childbirth, a dagger, garlic, and skewers were placed under the woman's pillow. If the process was difficult, bread was broken on the woman's head and sprinkled with water, which the child's father used to wash his hands.

On the eighth day, baptisms were performed according to Orthodox laws. The godfather becomes a relative of the family and plays an important role in the life of his godchild until the end of his life. For example, he gives gifts, participates in wedding ceremonies, and is an honorary guest at any event.

The importance of the godfather's role is reflected in the language: "khashba-ba," which means "moon father." This term dates back to the ancient pre-Christian beliefs of the Udis, who worshipped the moon. During the holiday, the godfather promised the parents of the godchild that on one of his birthdays he would sacrifice a sheep. Then, at the specified time, he would call the family of the person whose birthday was being celebrated and slaughter the sheep. The sacrificial meat had to be boiled. In this case, other cooking methods were not allowed.

### **PLACE OF RESIDENCE**

Udi settlements had different layouts. They consisted of one or several centers where the church, squares for gatherings, and various offices were located. Plots and areas around the houses were fenced with stone or wicker. Barns for livestock and ovens for baking bread were located in front of the yard.

The traditional dwelling of the Udis is a single-story house built of river stone or raw brick. Among the distinctive features of the house, one can note the high foundation with a basement. Additionally, a large attic was built under a gable or hip roof. Here, fruits were dried, and silkworms were bred.

Before the widespread use of glass in housing, windows could not be fixed. There was a small open window in the shelves to let in light. During the day, the doors were fully open, and at night, an oil lamp was used. In the middle of the house was an open hearth (later replaced by a fireplace with a chimney). The tradition of keeping an eternal flame in the hearth day and night, dating back to pagan times, was preserved. It was the woman's responsibility to ensure that it did not go out.

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### LIFE

The main activities of the Udis are connected to the land: agriculture, tobacco cultivation, and horticulture. The main crops included wheat, rice, corn, barley, and sorghum. Fruit orchards were located in the courtyards of houses, where pears, plums, cherries, apricots, apples, figs, dates, and dogwood were grown. Plantations of walnuts, hazelnuts, chestnuts, grapes, and mulberry trees occupied large areas. Various crops were grown in gardens: pumpkins, eggplants, tomatoes, mint, coriander, garlic, cucumbers, peppers, watermelons, and nuts.

Livestock farming played a secondary role. Udis raised sheep, pigs, chickens, turkeys, and cattle. Animals were mainly kept in subsidiary farms, primarily used for dairy production. Meat was not used in daily diets, and meat dishes were served only on holidays. Traditional crafts satisfied the needs of the people, and industrial goods were not exported. The most developed spheres among the Udins were considered to be nationalism, wool processing, and wood carving.

### RELIGION

The Albanian Church, to which the Udis belong, is one of the oldest churches in the Christian world. The spread of the new religion in the region began in the 2nd century with the arrival of the apostle Eliseus, appointed as the first Patriarch of Jerusalem. He laid the foundation of the first church in Gis (modern-day village of Kish), which later became a spiritual center and ancient capital.

Initially, the Albanian Church was united with the Apostolic

Church of Armenia. Autonomy was declared due to the occupation of Armenia by Byzantium in the 6th century. However, a century later, independence was lost, and thereafter the Albanian Church became an autonomous Catholicism within the Armenian Church. In the 11th century, the power of Georgia increased, and they attempted to impose their religion on neighboring peoples. This led to the conversion of a significant number of Udis to the Georgian Orthodox Church, where they were fully assimilated into the Georgian environment.

The expansion of the Russian Empire in the region led to the division of the historical residential area of the Udis. The Albanian Catholicosate, which existed in Nagorno-Karabakh until the late 19th century, again became a diocese of the Armenian Church.



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Today, the Udis living in Azerbaijan do not belong to a specific church. Periodically, they interact with the Azerbaijani diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Despite the early adoption of Christianity, remnants of ancient pagan beliefs have been preserved in Udi traditions. A vivid example is the Vardavar holiday, which coincides with the Day of Transfiguration, one of the Christian holidays. A characteristic feature of the holiday is the pouring of water and the display of roses on the streets and at the doors of houses. The roots of this tradition trace back to ancient celebrations in honor of Astchik, the goddess of water power, and Anahit, the mother goddess, the goddess of love and fertility.

## TRADITIONS

The Udis' wedding tradition is considered one of the most complex and rich rituals among the Caucasian peoples. The traditional approach involves organizing a wedding with the payment of kalym (money or property given by the groom's parents to the bride's family upon marriage). Cradle marriages were also practiced. Bride abduction was rare, as it was considered a serious offense to the girl's family.

The wedding ceremony consisted of the following stages:

Marriage and negotiation. The groom's family began to select a bride even before she reached marriageable age. Since young members of the opposite sex were prohibited from socializing freely, "matchmaking" mainly took place during religious holidays. Special attention was paid to the social and economic status of the bride's family, nationality, and religion when choosing a bride. Typically, the groom went to seek the bride's



hand in marriage accompanied by his elder relatives. Later on, external matchmakers started to be involved in this process. On the bride's side, the key figure was the mother's brother.

**Minor Engagement.** When negotiations between the parties were successfully concluded, a small engagement ceremony took place. If the girl had only one suitor, her opinion was not sought. If there were several candidates, each placed an item brought with them on a tray. Then this tray was given to the bride. Whichever item the girl chose, its owner became her groom. As confirmation of the agreement, the bride's uncle gave the groom a silver ring.

**Major Engagement.** About 100 relatives from both sides gathered at the girl's house. Such a number was not considered large, as on the wedding day, there were at least 200-300 guests at the party. A solemn event was organized. The groom brought part of his wedding attire with him, usually a belt or a hat. A significant ritual was the presentation of a gift to the bride's

## Historical Personalities

brother or another close relative. Between the major engagement and the wedding, at least a year had to pass. The maximum break was up to four years. Mostly, such a long period of time was allocated for preparing the kalym and dowry. On every significant religious holiday, the groom gave gifts to the bride's family, hosted feasts, and sent something in addition to the wedding dress. Unlike most peoples, this duty fell on the shoulders of men among the Udis. Interestingly, the bride's parents were forbidden from participating in the celebrations.

Wedding Celebration. The wedding celebration lasted for 3 days. On the first day, separate feasts were held in the families of the newlyweds with the participation of their close relatives. A mandatory ritual was the bathing of the groom in honey water. After this, the mother handed him a red scarf symbolizing wishes of love and prosperity. On the next day, the wedding procession to the bride's house was accompanied by gunfire and shouts. False barriers were set up for the guests in the girl's house. And the guests overwhelmed them with gifts. Then, the wedding ceremony took place in the church, and the bride was taken to the house of her father-in-law. The festivities continued at the father-in-law's house.

Post-wedding ceremonies. The third day was marked by the ritual of washing the feet of the husband's parents. It was only after this ritual that the bride was allowed to leave her room and move around the house. Since the bride's parents were not present at the wedding feast, on the eighth day of the wedding, they were invited to the groom's house for a feast. After the exchange of gifts and the feast, the wedding ceremonies concluded, and the newlyweds returned to their daily activities.

## FOOD

Vegetables and dairy products formed the basis of the Udi diet. Pilaf was widely consumed, consisting of rice, beans, chestnuts, corn, and dried fruits in various variations. Harissa is a traditional Udi dish considered everyday food for farmers. It's worth noting that harissa is wheat boiled to a porridge-like consistency and mixed with pieces of meat or poultry and butter.

Udi cuisine boasted a variety of dishes crafted from fresh vegetables and greens, including eggplants, pumpkin, nettles, sorrel, tomatoes, peppers, and cabbage. Greek nuts played a significant role, often used to produce walnut oil for enhancing sweets, pies, salads, hot dishes, and soups. Additionally, Udi culinary traditions borrowed some delicacies from Armenian and Azerbaijani cuisines, such as dolma, shish kebabs, fried chicken, and more.



# The treasures of the Udi village of Nij



**Galina Polonskaya,  
Euronews. Nij**

In the village of Nij in Azerbaijan, you'll find the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Caucasian Albania. The Udis stand as one of the planet's oldest peoples, passing down their language—a rich tapestry of history—from one generation to the next.

References to their forebears date back to the writings of Herodotus. Today, Udis are not plentiful, scattered across the

globe. However, the majority, numbering over 4,000, call Nij home. Situated just 40 kilometers from Gabala, the ancient capital of Caucasian Albania, Nij holds deep roots in Udi history, with locals believing their lineage traces back to ancient times.

Oleg Danakiri, head of the “Cheshme” Udi Cultural Center, notes: “In the Albanian state, there were 26 tribes, and the Udis were the first. They had their own language, religion, Bible, and writing.”

The Udis are Christians. Despite the destruction of all the temples during Soviet times, the Udis managed to preserve the religion of their ancestors. Their future monk is studying in one of the foreign seminaries.

Robert Mobili, President of the Albanian-Udi Christian Community: “The Udis are a unique people, speaking the Caucasian-Iberian language and practicing Eastern Christianity. We aim to restore the status of the Albanian Church in Azerbaijan.”

The plot suggests that traces of Christian symbols can be found even in the lives of the residents of Nij, who are not accustomed to attending church. Even the theatrical costumes, crafted after this ancient model, bear encrypted markings.

Musician Karlen Shirvari explained the significance of the embroidery on the musicians’ costumes:

“This is the Caucasian Cross, and on its reverse side, there is a sun with eight rays. This signifies that the person has undertaken a pilgrimage and entered the water of the cross in the holy lands. They were called saints. ‘Mug’ in the Udi language means eight.”

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**Nij, 14.05.2014**

The blessing begins with the preparation of one of the most famous Udi dishes - afara. The main ingredient of this dish is nettles. This pungent plant, rich in vitamin C, in the past saved the poor from vitamin deficiency after winter. Soon, a collection of traditional Nij recipes will be published. However, most housewives are convinced that learning to cook afara from a book is impossible.

Rita Danakari: "My mother taught me, and her grandmother taught her. Now I'm teaching my daughter how to cook Afar. This dish has existed since Udi times, and Afar will always be on our table. Udis are proficient in Azerbaijani, but they speak their rare language. In Nij schools, the ancient alphabet was replaced with Latin script, which is more familiar to modern children. Work is underway on an electronic dictionary, which is being translated into Azerbaijani and

English. The native language is the main muse of young poet Grigory Meshari. He began writing poetry as a child when we met him; Grigory was preparing a surprise poem for his mother's birthday."

Grigory Meshari: "My language is my music; it sounds very beautiful. It gives me the opportunity to express the beauty of our world in words." We were fortunate in Nij; a EuroNews film crew was invited to the wedding. Ancient rituals are observed at such events. The hostesses of the new home break bread over the bride's head, and the groom's face is shaved. Gifts are presented to the specially invited hairdresser for this.

Alexander Kankalov: "First, a baby is born, then he grows into a child, and then into a young man. To become a man, he must get married, and he is introduced to society after shaving his face."

Another ritual is performed at Udi weddings. The roots of this ritual date back to the times when men provided food for their families through hunting. The young men of Nij shoot at a target hanging high – it used to be an onion bulb. Whoever can hit it earns the honor of passing the weapon to the groom.

"We're embarking on a journey from Nij to Gobustan, exploring the renowned volcanic mountains of Azerbaijan, affectionately referred to as the mud volcanoes by locals. Join us as we delve into their therapeutic properties in our upcoming program, 'Azerbaijani Life'".

# The revival of the true history of Karabakh

*The challenges of restoring the liberated districts of Karabakh are at the forefront of the entire country's attention, as is the fate of the Christian heritage of the Albanian Apostolic Church. Our guest today is Robert Mobili, Chairman of the Alban-Udi Christian Community of Azerbaijan and Senior Research Fellow at Baku State University.*

**- Could you please clarify the purpose behind the visits of representatives from the Alban-Udi Community to the churches and monasteries of Karabakh?**

- After the victory in 2020, we visited Karabakh over 20 times. Visiting the monastery complexes of Khudavang in the Kelbajar region, Agoglan in the Lachin region, and other Albanian churches in the liberated districts of Karabakh, and conducting services there in Udi language, is both familiar and enlightening. At the same time, these visits symbolize a new stage in the Albanian Christian community's acute struggle for the revival of the independent Albanian Apostolic Church, which is the rightful owner of the temples and churches of Karabakh and the entire Azerbaijan.

Our task is to return the Albanian monasteries founded in Karabakh to the Albanian Church, its rightful owner. The Albanian Church protects the interests of the successors of Caucasian Albania, who created treasures such as the Gandzasar



Cathedral (Gandzasar Monastery), the Khudavang monastery complex, and all the Christian heritage in Karabakh before the beginning of the 19th century. These historical and cultural monuments of the ancient state rightfully belong not to the Armenian-Gregorian Church, but to the illegally disbanded Albanian Apostolic Church.

### **FROM THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN CAUCASIAN ALBANIA**

In early sources from the life of Christians in Caucasian Albania, the names of early Christian saints, bishops, and the first martyrs of Christianity are mentioned. These include saints Bartholomew, Thaddeus, Eliseus, Dadi, and his disciples. All Christian monuments of Caucasian Albania are the heritage of the ancient Albanian Church of the Caucasus. Christian basilicas dating back to the 5th-6th centuries have been found in all regions of Azerbaijan, and the names of Albanian bishops are known from the acts of Ecumenical and Local Councils. There are numerous differences in the architecture of churches, the

## Historical Personalities



ADA,04.11.2011

symbolism of the cross, and other elements of Christianity between the Albanian Church and the Armenian Church. These differences prove the independence of the church organization and liturgy of the Albanian Church. The names of Albanian patriarchs representing the Albanian Church in the Ecumenical Church Council are also known. The remains of patriarchs are preserved in monasteries bearing their names.

As history tells us, the Albanian ruler Urnair swiftly declared Christianity the official faith of the Albanian-Udi people right after the issuance of the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, which greatly accelerated Christianity's spread throughout the Roman Empire. The canonical territory of the Albanian Church was then delineated into provinces aligning with Christian dioceses. However, with time, cities like Chola, Partav, and Kabala in Albania began to witness a decline, leading to the relocation or dissolution of many bishoprics.

Come the 19th century, the canonical territory of the Albanian Church, essentially the historical home of the Udi people, became part of the Russian Empire. Following the treaties of

Gulistan, Turkmenchay, and Kurakchay, a shift began towards subjugating the Armenian-Gregorian Church, which served as the spiritual heart for Albanian Christians in Etchmiadzin, under the authority of the Eastern confession. This transition was formalized through Tsar Nicholas I's decree on March 11, 1836, titled "Regulations on the Armenian-Gregorian Church." Consequently, in the same year, the Albanian Church was dissolved by royal decree, and its assets were transferred to the Armenian Church. The intricate saga of the enduring conflict between these two churches warrants deeper examination by scholars.

**- How did events unfold after our victory in the 44-day war in 2020?**

On November 20, 2020, UNESCO issued a statement urging adherence to the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and initiated the establishment of a commission to investigate monuments in Karabakh allegedly destroyed by our army. Several international institutions and funds spearheaded such initiatives, while the Armenian Church claims ownership of history and property that is not rightfully theirs. Experts have repeatedly proven that the monastery complex of Khudavang, the Gandzasar Cathedral (Gandzasar Monastery), and other Albanian churches and chapels built before 1836 were erected by rulers of Caucasian Albania. This is Albanian history and culture, and Azerbaijan is the successor and heir to Caucasian Albania. By asserting the connection of Karabakh churches, visited by Udi priests, to the history of Caucasian Albania, we also affirm that these temple complexes belong to Azerbaijan, which is deemed their

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BSU, 11.11.2016

lawful owner. There is no need for peacekeepers to protect the mentioned complexes. For the inhabitants of Karabakh, descendants of Albanians, Muslims, and Christians, monuments from the Albanian era represent shared history. They must be safeguarded. The issue of protecting Albanian monuments unites indigenous Karabakh residents. Furthermore, in Azerbaijan, there are enough supporters among Christians of Albanian descent. As a steward of the legacy of Caucasian Albania and the Albanian Church, our pastor is deeply committed to preserving and restoring temples and churches.

### **REGARDING THE RESTORATION OF CHURCHES**

Robert Mobili reports that the Albanian-Udi Christian community is interested in collaborating with the State Committee

for Work with Religious Institutions and the Ministry of Culture in the restoration of Albanian churches built before 1836. Restoration work should restore the original architectural appearance. For example, in the village of Nij, the ancient Albanian Church of St. Eliseus and the Church of St. Mary-Mother were “restored” by Armenian renovators without the consent of the village residents. In 2006 and 2020, the Albanian-Udi community of the village of Nij restored Albanian symbolism in the exterior and interior decoration in an authentic Albanian architectural style. In our country, there are specialists who restore the original appearance of ancient churches destroyed by Armenian pseudo-restorers.

Experts from the Ministry of Culture should study the experience of church restoration in the village of Nij for its application in restoration work to be carried out in Karabakh. The fact is that when we began the process of removing Armenian crosses and other symbols foreign to the Albanian Church in Nij, we discovered many overt and hidden signs. These signs allowed them to claim that these contaminants were Armenians with such “restoration.” Recently, there has been increased pressure in the Armenian press regarding baptism ceremonies, feeding with paste, and questions of ordination.

**- What were the initiatives of the Albanian community today?**

- The time has come to firmly raise the issue of monitoring the protection and restoration process of Albanian churches in Karabakh by representatives of our country. The goal of our community is to restore, in the name of historical justice, the true image and spirit of the Albanian Apostolic Church, which is consid-

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ered the first Christian church in the Caucasus. Control over the restoration of the true appearance of architectural complexes in Karabakh should be carried out by our country, on the advice of religious scholars from our community. To this end, a proposal is made to establish a representation of the Albanian-Udi community in the liberated lands of Karabakh to establish contacts with the indigenous Christian population of Karabakh. Counting on migration to other countries is inappropriate here. The descendants of the Albanian population, who remember their roots, will not leave Karabakh. There are many people who have this idea. They are all ready to cooperate. These people want the restoration of the Albanian Apostolic Church. Some of them have preserved documents confirming their belonging to ancient Albanian surnames and individually-numbered generations. In preserving the true history of Karabakh, invaluable contributions have been made by scholars of Udi origin, such as Doctor of Philology, Professor Voroshil Gukasaari, historian Georgy Kechaari, and others. In addition to establishing a representation in the liberated lands, we have another proposal: to create an exhibition called "Caucasian Albania" in the historical and geographical museums of Karabakh and to present the course of Karabakh's history as part of this ancient state in Azerbaijani and Armenian languages in schools.

### **- What awaits us if we do not participate in the restoration of the temples?**

- The goal of the state and religious institutions of Armenia is to create conditions for the continued feeding of the Karabakh flock by the Armenian Church. Most importantly, Armenia, defeated in the 44-day war, wants to maintain Karabakh as the canonical territory of the Armenian Church. If our country

does not participate in the restoration of churches, Armenia will present this to UNESCO and the EU as recognition that the parish, churches, and canonical territory of Azerbaijan belong to the Armenian Church. This tactic is strong, and we must win it. We won the war, and now we must win in peacetime. This means attracting the Albanian flock to our side and stopping the process of Armenianization of monuments. This makes a big impression in countries where the Karabakh conflict is presented as “saving the outpost of Christianity in the Caucasus.” However, historically, the true outpost was the Albanian Church.

**- What does the restoration of the Albanian Apostolic Church mean in practical terms?**

- It signifies independence, the process of baptism (the ceremony of spiritual advancement within the church), and the transition of all churches in Karabakh under the omophorion of the restored Albanian Church. If this happens, the Armenian Church will lose the right to oversee the Karabakh parish, influence over believers attending Karabakh churches and chapels. It will also create conditions for dialogue with the local Christian population. This will neutralize the influence of the Armenian Church on international organizations seeking to portray any initiative by Azerbaijan in Karabakh negatively. But even without the restoration of the official Albanian Church, our Albanian-Udi community continues to improve normal relations between the Muslim and Christian communities of Karabakh. Additionally, the community preserves historical and cultural monuments of Christian heritage.

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Warsaw, 20.10.2021

### **THE VILLAGE OF NIJ IS AN EXAMPLE OF MULTICULTURALISM**

#### **- Tell us about your flock - the modern Udis.**

- The number of Udis is just over ten thousand. Currently, they reside in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Belarus. Several families have also settled in France, Italy, and the USA. In Azerbaijan, Udis compactly reside only in the village of Nij. 7,500 local residents of the village make up just over half of the population. Udis managed to survive under the occupation of several powerful and large empires: the Sassanian state, the Arab Caliphate, the Ottoman and Russian empires. Udis managed to preserve their language, religion, and culture despite being part of them.

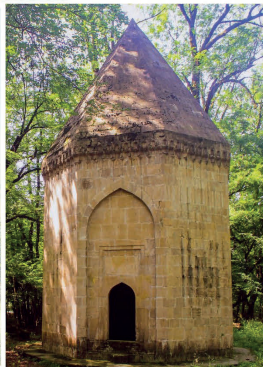
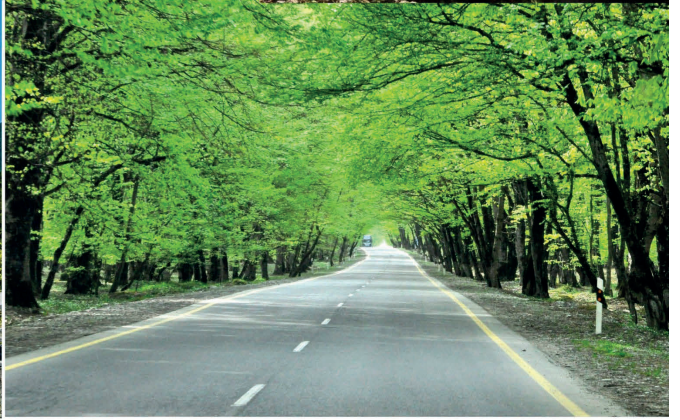
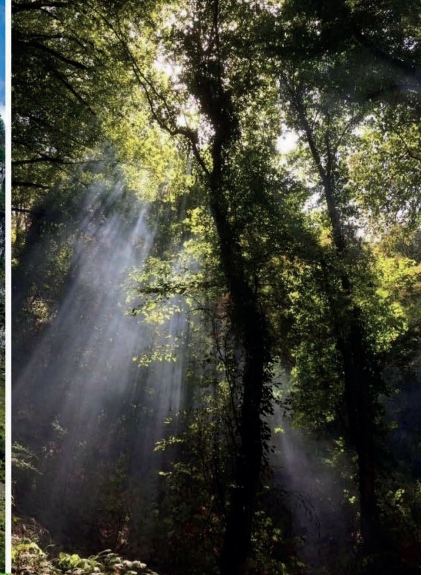
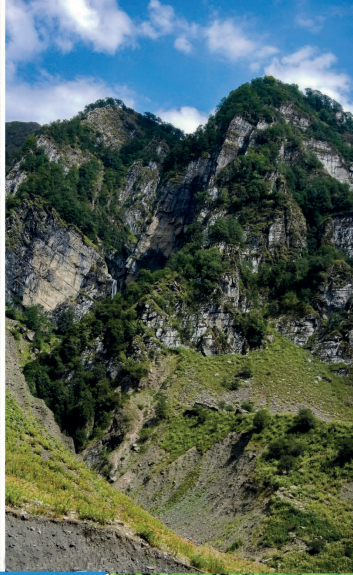
Christian Udis have made a significant contribution to preserving and studying the heritage of the Caucasian Albanians. In turn, Caucasian Albania can be considered a unique model



**Beirut, 16.02.2020**

of Caucasian multiculturalism and cooperation between different denominations and cultures in the Middle Ages. The coexistence of different religious denominations and cultures led to the prosperity of this country.

When Udis celebrate Easter or Christmas, Protestants, Jews, Orthodox, and Muslims sit at the table together. In the village of Nij, there are two mosques. Moreover, two out of three churches in the village have been restored. Three out of five schools are Russian, and two are Azerbaijani. In 2012, Secondary School No. 2 was restored by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. Today, new educational institutions and sports complexes are being built. Udis receive education in Russian, and their native language is taught up to the fifth grade. The main mission of the Albanian-Udi Christian community is to study and promote its history. One important aspect is the restoration of the status of the Albanian Church based on the Udi Christian community as the sole heir to the legacy of this rich confessional heritage.



# GABALA

*Gabala-one of the oldest cities in Azerbaijan, with a history spanning almost two thousand years. Situated in the lower part of the Bazar-Yurt mountain valley and the Tufan mountains, the city is located 15 kilometers northeast of ancient Kabala and 63 kilometers from the railway station of the Leki settlement.*

Gabala was the capital of Caucasian Albania for six hundred years. The city's name is mentioned in the works of ancient historians from the 1st century. Later, in Arab sources, it was called Hazar. Subsequently, the city became part of the Shirvan Shahs' state and the Sheki Khanate. In the 18th century, a small feudal union called the Gutkashen Sultanate emerged in the territory of Gabala. This sultanate soon became part of the Sheki Khanate and was governed by governors appointed by the Sheki khans. After the abolition of the Sheki Khanate, Gutkashen became part of the Sheki district. The Gutkashen district was established in 1930. In March 1991, the name Gutkashe was changed to honor ancient Gabala.

Throughout its long existence, Gabala has been subjected to several destructive invasions. However, despite this, it managed to preserve the material evidence of its cultural past. The ancient ruins of Kabala are located 15 km from the modern city. Discoveries made during excavations of the settlement can be seen in the city museum today. The surroundings of Gabala are rich in

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historical and architectural monuments.

According to data from 2009, the city's population was 18,900 people.

Lake Nohur. The city of Gabala is interesting from a tourism perspective because it is home to many historical monuments, mosques, mausoleums, temples, and towers. In one of the villages, descendants of ancient Albanians live.

The city is also notable for its remarkably beautiful nature. Surrounded by mountains and lush greenery, it offers a serene atmosphere. Visitors can also relax on the shores of Lake Nohur, where all amenities are provided. Additionally, it's fascinating to visit the waterfall located in the recreation area called "Seven Beauties."

Ancient Kabala. Kabala, Gabbala, Kabalaka, Kabalak...These are all variations of the same historical place in Azerbaijan. Ga-



bala was the capital of Caucasian Albania for six centuries (until the 6th century) and a major trade center of Azerbaijan (until the 15th century). The city is first mentioned as Gabalaka in the writings of the second half of the 1st century, more precisely in Pliny the Elder's "Natural History." Information about the city of Habala (Gabala) can also be found in Ptolemy's "Geographical Guide" (2nd century). The trade connections of ancient Gabala were quite extensive. At that time, the city was considered one of the largest centers of Caucasian Albania.

Comprehensive research of the archaeological tomb began in the mid-19th century. As a result, it is now known that the cultural layer of the city is at least 5 meters thick. From the 1st century to the mid-18th century, four cultural layers were formed (ancient, early, advanced, and late Middle Ages). This fact is confirmed by numismatic and some other archaeological materials.

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Fragments of wooden patterns and ceramic vessels from ancient times were first found in Gabala. This gives reason to attribute the ancient culture of Gabala to the beginning of our era.

In 1906, during excavations in the city, an ancient six-line inscription was found. It was believed to be of Aghvan (Albanian) origin. The inscription was taken to St. Petersburg, where it was lost for unknown reasons.

In the cultural layer of the city from the 9th to the 13th

centuries, a large number of hearths, furnaces, pits, and underground water pipelines made of clay pipes were discovered. At that time, the production of glazed ceramics was at its peak. Moreover, craftsmen's marks, indicating the makers of the pottery, were often applied to the bottoms of the pots. Alongside agriculture and horticulture, various crafts such as pottery, jewelry making, glassblowing, silk production, weaving, and others played a significant role in the city's economy. In addition to Arab coins from the 9th to 10th centuries, coins from the era of the Shirvanshahs, rulers of Darband, and Ildegiz were also found in the city of Gabala.

The Khazars frequently raided the city of Gabala and held it under their control for about a century. During this time, Gabala served as their administrative center. Interestingly, the Arabs, who later occupied Gabala, named the city Gabala-Khazar for this reason.

In 981, the city was conquered by Shirvanshah Muhammad Ahmad. In the 16th century, Gabala was destroyed by the Safavids. The ruins of the city are now located east of the village of Chukhur Gabala and southwest of the modern city of Gabala. The ruins of the Gabala fortress cover an area of more than 25 hectares. To the east of the fort lies a temple and hilly terrain covering over 50 hectares.

### **SIGHTS OF GABALA:**

Tomb of Imam Baba (18th century);  
Friday Mosque;  
Museum of History and Local Lore;  
Udi Temple

# 10 Must-Visit Destinations in Gabala: A Native Exploration



*Today, ancient Gabala stands as one of Azerbaijan's renowned tourist attractions. Here, one can encounter stunning natural landscapes, numerous historical landmarks, modern hotels, a ski resort, and the country's largest amusement park. Gabala is a hub for political and economic discussions, festivals, and sporting events.*



### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL CENTER**

The ancient city of Gabala is often compared to famous cities of the past such as Babylon, Troy, Pompeii, and Carthage. This is because in antiquity, the city was a political and commercial hub. As a result of archaeological research conducted by Azerbaijani and foreign scholars, new undiscovered pages of Gabala's history have emerged. Years of archaeological excavations in this ancient city have uncovered the ruins of ancient buildings, fortification walls, and material and cultural artifacts associated with production and crafts. Currently, more detailed information on this can be found at the Gabala Archaeological Center. It is not just a museum but a historical reserve. In the mentioned museum, one can find over 1500 artifacts discovered during excavations.

### **CHURCH OF SAINT ELISEUS**

The village of Nij is located near Gabala, the ancient capital of Caucasian Albania. It is here that the Udi church named the

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Elisha Church of the 1st century is situated, considered a rare architectural monument. The first restoration of the church took place in the late 17th-18th centuries on the site of the ancient Albanian church, once erected by the will of the holy apostle Elisha (Chotari Gerges). During the Soviet period, the church was used as a warehouse. In 2006, it was restored and returned to the devout Udis, the residents of the village of Nij. It is worth getting acquainted with the Udi people themselves during a visit to the village of Nij. They are considered a special ethnic group, descendants of ancient Albanians, capable of preserving their traditions, language, material, and spiritual culture to this day.

### **LAKE NOHUR**

Nokhur is an artificial lake, known for its breathtaking surroundings. Surrounded by wooded hills, the lake boasts crys-



tal-clear water and is lined with hotels and restaurants. Visitors eager to explore the lake can rent boats and catamarans. Additionally, horseback riding is available along the picturesque lake shore. The only prohibition in this area is swimming in the lake. However, fishing is permitted, and visitors can enjoy a barbecue on the beach afterward. The cleanliness around the lake is strictly monitored, and serious fines are imposed on those who litter.

### **VANDAM VILLAGE**

One of the colorful villages of Gabala is Vandam. Local residents are big jokers and claim that the famous actor Jean-Claude Van Damme is actually one of them. In turn, the actor visited his “homeland,” and locals jokingly told him that the village was named after him several years ago. In reality, Vandam is one of the ancient villages of Gabala. An octagonal dome has been pre-

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served in the ancient cemetery. Above the entrance door of each church, there are Arabic inscriptions. One of the inscriptions even mentions the date - the 590th lunar year of the Hijra.

### **SEVEN BEAUTIES WATERFALL**

Located near Gabala, at a distance from the village of Vandam, is the magnificent Seven Beauties Waterfall, considered a natural wonder of this area. It earned its name due to the seven cascades tumbling into the valley of the river. Visitors can climb up to the upper tiers via a steep stone staircase, but there are always long queues here. The waterfall is a tourist hotspot drawing visitors from all over the world, and navigating through the crowd of admirers can be quite challenging. It's worth noting that tourists are only allowed to ascend to the fifth tier. Only the brave dare to risk climbing to the final tier.



### **GABALA THERMAL WATERS**

French scientist Henri Chenot owns Europe's finest medical centers, frequented by members of the royal family and business elite. You can also indulge in the elite relaxation offered by Henri Chenot at the luxurious Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel in Gabala. The new project by the Chenot Group is the perfect place for relaxation, detoxification, and restoring the body's natural balance. Henri Chenot's method combines energy point and meridian massages, spa treatments, Sharco showers, and serene contemplative relaxation on the shores of the picturesque Lake Nohur surrounded by ancient forests. It's worth mentioning that thermal relaxation in Gabala is not only for millionaires. There are also several budget-friendly hotels where you can enjoy healing mineral baths.

### **TUFANDAG SKI RESORT**

The Tufandag Ski Resort has the status of a winter-summer destination, allowing tourists to engage in various extreme sports, with each season offering its own unique charm. In win-

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ter, thrill-seekers can ski and snowboard down its steep slopes, while in summer, they can ascend the mountains via cable cars or ride quad bikes. Local excursions include hikes to the beautiful lakes near Mount Tufan. According to legend, one of these lakes holds a genuine fragment of Noah’s Ark. Moreover, each slope of the resort features restaurants with mountain views, but the most stunning vista is from the eponymous five-star hotel. During the summer months, Tufandag hosts various parties, spectacular performances by renowned DJs, and competitions.

### **“GABALAND” ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX**

Gabala has many other advantages. For children, there’s the huge entertainment complex called “Gabaland,” which is number one in all of Azerbaijan. “Gabaland” features amazing attractions designed for both children and adults alike. The park is open from dawn till dusk. Admission is free for children under 6 years old,



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tickets for children aged 6 to 12 cost 1 AZN, and for children over 12 years old and adults, it's 3 AZN. The mini-train, Crazy Clown, inflatable cushions, and other attractions will provide children with unforgettable moments. Adults can enjoy a bike safari, ride quad bikes, and compete in the karting zone. Since the park area is quite large, visitors can get around by train. At the heart of the park is a pool with slides and attractions for children. Another notable spot in Gabala is the ice palace. Spending time in this palace during hot weather is a special pleasure.

### **SHOOTING CLUB**

The Gabala Shooting Club is a sports and entertainment club that meets all international standards. It is equipped with all the necessary technical equipment used during Olympic competitions, so various international competitions are often held here. It is also worth noting that the mentioned club is not only intended for professionals. Anyone who enjoys shooting a pistol

or releasing an arrow from a bow can come to the club's territory and choose suitable entertainment. The club's territory is very large. There are 5 fields for 3 types of skeet shooting, eight fields for sports activities, 3 shooting ranges (open and closed), and an archery field. Additionally, you can enjoy delicious food at the club's restaurant, play paintball, or have tea on the lawn in the picturesque oak forest.

### **MARKET: WHITE CUCUMBER AND JAM**

When you visit Gabala, be sure to check out the local market. Here, in addition to vegetables, fruits, and berries, you can buy various pickles and, of course, exotic jams that Gabala is famous for. Jams are made from walnuts, rose petals, paradise apples, watermelon rind, and even mint. One of the famous markets is located on the road from Ismayilli to Gabala. Here, the most remarkable is the pickles made from white cucumbers, grown only in Gabala. Pickles made from apples, cranberries, grapes, eggplants, quinces, etc., are also in demand. For the road, you can buy green feijoa, red cherries, and yellow "lavashana".

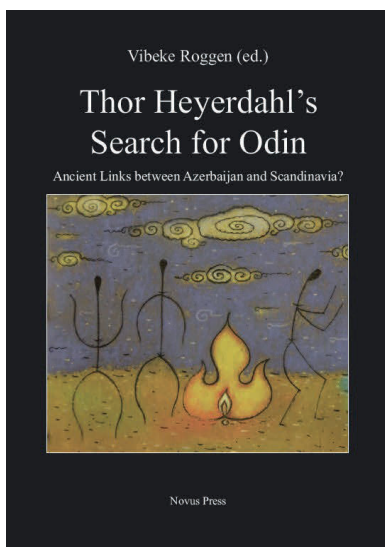


# Thor Heyerdahl and the Udi people

**T**his article reviews the interpretation and research of the prominent Norwegian traveller and world-renowned scholar, Thor Heyerdahl, and his visit to the village of Nij in Gabala District, a place mainly inhabited by Udi, one of the autochthonous peoples of Azerbaijan. According to Thor Heyerdahl's theory, Odin, who in Scandinavian mythology was chieftain of the Asi tribe, came from the Caucasus. He also gave a hypothetical interpretation of, and scientific credence to, the modern-day Udi being the remnants and ancestors of Norwegians. While meeting the Udi, Thor Heyerdahl learnt about their cuisine, ethnography, customs and national traditions.

In the attempt to maintain identity and culture against the backdrop of world events some ethnicities have clearly disappeared from the face of the earth, while others, some relatively small in number like the Udi, have struggled for their independence, historical past and integrity and withstood the difficult trials that have befallen them. The surge of interest of Norwegians in Azerbaijan and of Azerbaijanis (including Udi) in Norway began with the work of the great Norwegian traveller, ethnographer, archaeologist and scientist, Thor Heyerdahl. The huge interest of Thor Heyerdahl led him to Azerbaijan at the end of the 20th century and only then to the lower reaches of the Don in Azov.

The differentiation of the ethnogenesis of the Udi people constitutes a lengthy process which took place on the basis of contacts of various cultures of east and west. The Udis, whose origins



and history have for nearly 200 years been attracting the attention of the academic world, are indigenous peoples of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan (as the historical Motherland). Since the early 19th century more than 300 works have appeared on the Udis' anthropology<sup>1</sup> and language,<sup>2</sup> religion,<sup>3</sup> history of the language,<sup>4</sup> ethnography<sup>5</sup> and history,<sup>6</sup> origins<sup>7</sup> and culture,<sup>8</sup> traditions and customs.<sup>9</sup> The accumulated data give clear witness that the Udi are very ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus and known only in the historical-cultural space of Azerbaijan.

Thor Heyerdahl visited Azerbaijan several times where he amazed everyone with the sensational results of his research and, specifically, his scientific interpretations of rock drawings and migration of peoples.

From his study of the rock drawings at Gobustan, he came to the conclusion that the Norwegians and Azerbaijanis have close, even kindred, ties and described Gobustan as an open-air museum. The Udi have a special place in both this interest and his trav-

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*Thor Heyerdahl in dialogue with Udi representatives. Sitting, from left to right, George Kechaari, head of the office of cultural affairs for the Udi people, two school directors and Mais Kechaari. Standing behind the latter is Sergey Antonov. Heyerdahl visiting them and taking interest in their culture meant a lot for the preservation of their language and its development as a written language.*

els. According to the legend, the first Scandinavian king, odin, led his people from a land called Azer. He also asserted that the Udi, an aboriginal ethnos in Azerbaijan,<sup>10</sup> were direct relatives of the Scandinavians. The juxtaposition of odin with the ethnonym 'Udi', 'Uti'; the search for the Asi in Azerbaijan, whose name comes from Atropat,<sup>11</sup> a satrap of Darius III; the representation of Urartu as 'Hittite civilization'; the Albanians who migrated from the Caucasus to the Balkans – all this and much else besides is grounded in placenames and is a scientific interpretation of the settling of the area to the north. It's unlikely that there is another popular concept on which such a range and variety of information about the ancient connections between the peoples of our country could be set out with such ease, love and knowledge of the matter in hand. It was Thor Heyerdahl's dedication and interest that brought him to Azerbaijan and the village of Nij in particular, a place of compact

settlement of the Udi.

In the history of Scandinavian mythology compiled by 13th century Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, the main figure in all the traditions and legends is odin (Udi) – a religious figure who embodies the qualities of deity, priest-king and hero chieftain, defender of military honour. odin is presented as a real, historical figure who was subsequently deified by his descendants. Not local in origin, the chieftain of the Asi (Azi) tribe came to Scandinavia from a distant country, bringing with him a very limited number of his people. The harsh polemics surrounding the theory about odin were largely typical of relations between Heyerdahl the scholar and academic circles. His theories rarely received scientific recognition, while Heyerdahl the traveller himself rejected scientific criticism and concentrated on publishing his theories in popular, accessible literature, and in the case of "The search for odin: on the trail of our past" – a book targeted at a mass readership.<sup>12</sup>

The great ocean sailor searched long and hard for the traces of his ancestors in the Caucasus too. His attention was caught by people living an isolated life on a plateau near the foothills who call themselves Udi – a name which Thor Heyerdahl associated with 'odin', and which aroused his interest in our people. Thor Heyerdahl's theory posited that one of the branches of the Azi did not go north with odin but south, which makes it even more timely and intriguing to look for the geographic and ethnic centre of localization of the Udi and their migration. A second, more mobile branch of the tribe which split in Azov went west, to the Balkans, where they dispersed. This is confirmed in many place-names (Nij in Macedonia, Udine in Italy, etc.). Thor Heyerdahl put forward the theory that the Udi, an ethnic minority in Azerbaijan, were ancestors of the Scandinavians. In the last 20 years of his life, he travelled to Azerbaijan several times and visited the Albanian churches in Kish, Nij, oghuz and elsewhere.



er, traveller and scholar walked round the historical and cultural focal points of the village with his wife Jacqueline Beer like an ordinary citizen, and even the presence of interpreters, other guests and representatives of the local authorities could not spoil this impression of approachability and humbleness.

Everyone who came into contact with Heyerdahl was immediately charmed by him. He was not at all arrogant and had no 'celebrity complex'. At his advanced age (he was then 85!) he maintained his curiosity and enormous interest in the new and unknown and his unquenchable thirst for discoveries and the comprehension of mystery. He was always smiling, benevolent and convinced of the benevolence of everyone on the planet. Before Thor Heyerdahl no-one had posited a possible link between the Udi and the semi-mythical, legendary Odin and his fellow tribesmen, the heroes of Scandinavian legend. A banquet was given in honour of the important guest. More than 60 people took part in the celebration – Norwegian intellectuals, representatives of the local authorities, teachers in Udi schools, the local intelligentsia and others. During the lunch Thor Heyerdahl acquainted himself with the cuisine, ethnography, customs and national traditions of the Udi people. He was amazed by the variety of dishes, the preservation of dining traditions, hospitality and recipes for the preparation of different Udi dishes. Above all he was surprised by the appearance and shape of an ordinary, village axe, which the Udians still use today in their gardens; it was an exact copy of a tool used by the Vikings.<sup>13</sup>

Thor Heyerdahl's official visit to the 'land of Odin' was soon shrouded in modern myths and legends. For example, it is said that sensing that his end was near, he wanted to spend his last days in Nij and even to acquire a small house and garden here. This question was never resolved, however. Now we, the modern-day Udi – scholars who are not indifferent to their history and ordinary people – are interested in something else. Will anyone be

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found in the foreseeable future to compare in scope, influence and importance with Thor Heyerdahl, who was so hardworking and energetic and at the same time such a romantic dreamer?

The great Thor Heyerdahl did not consider his last trip to be his final one. He was engrossed by something more important than the difference between the right answer and the wrong. He thought and acted like the austere knights of Odin once did: the aim of the epic journeys was not personal success but honour and truth. 'I don't have to prove that I'm right and that before Oslo there was Azov and before Azov there was Nij,' he said during a meeting with the Udi, 'I just want to find the truth about what the world was like several thousand years ago, where the peoples came from and where they went.' Finding the truth is the worthiest of tasks, and the adventures will definitely be continued, because the great seeker is a perfect projection of the militant ethic of the Azi and Vikings and will in the future be a shining example of scientific research for the scholars amongst our descendants.

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