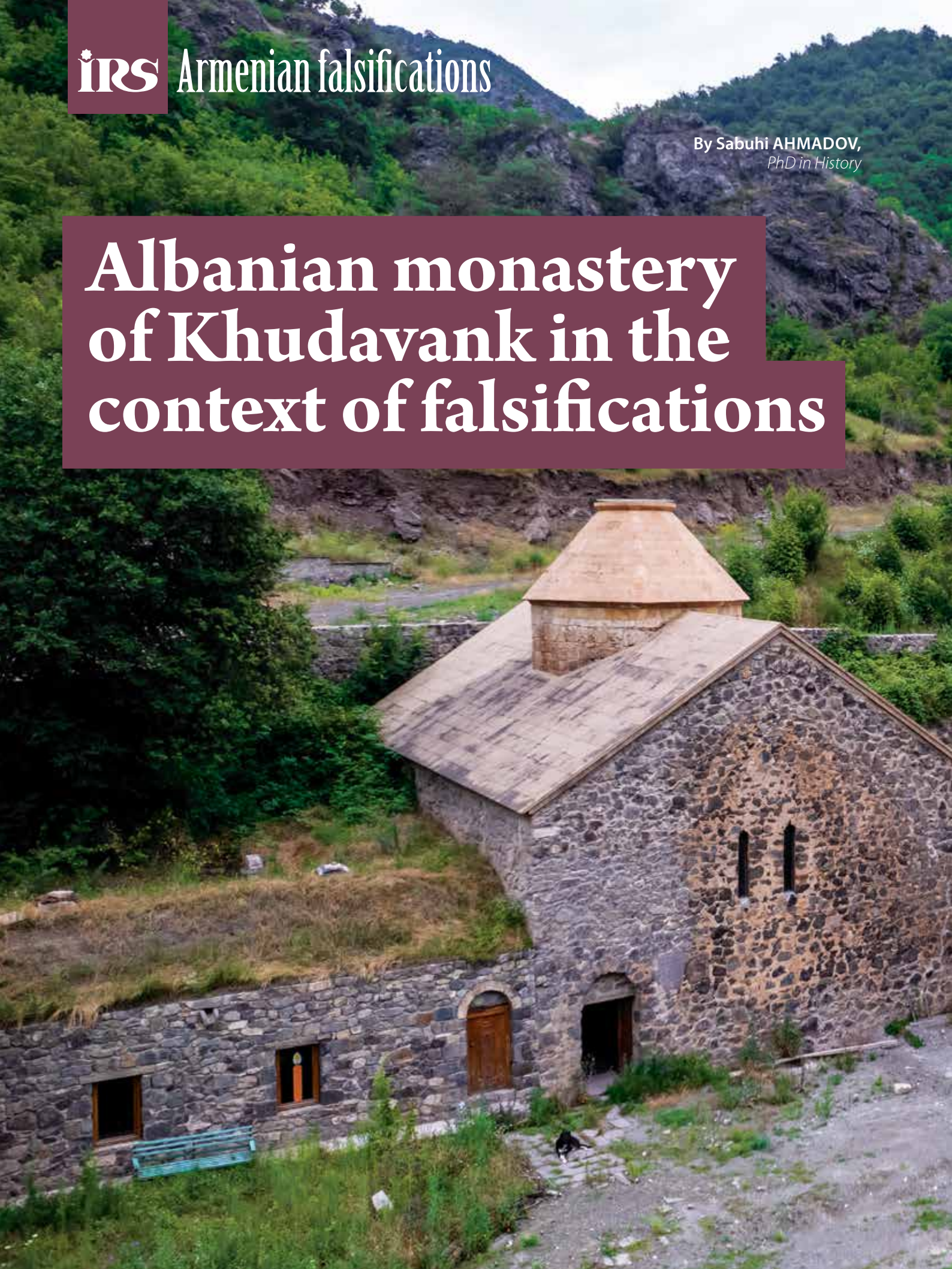


Albanian monastery of Khudavank in the context of falsifications





The counter-offensive operation launched by the Azerbaijani army on September 27, 2020 in response to Armenia's provocation put an end not only to the occupation of Azerbaijani lands, but also to a number of Armenian myths. Among them is the thesis that Armenians are the oldest inhabitants of the Caucasus, the first Christians in history, and in addition, the people who brought civilization to the Caucasus. The Armenians widely practiced the falsification of historical monuments to substantiate this thesis.

Well-known Georgian poet, publisher and public figure Ilya Chavchavadze, in his book "Armenian scholars and blatant stones", wrote: "Armenian scholars swear by word and pen to the whole world that from time immemorial there was the so-called Armenia on the other side of the Caucasus Range extending all the way to the Tigris and Euphrates, almost from the Black and Caspian Seas", "that Armenians they are allegedly called by God and history to revitalize and make happy not only the Middle East, but also the distant, wild and ignorant Asia with the banner of culture in their hands". The author further points out: "We have many examples of Armenians trying to erase and destroy traces of Georgian origin on Georgian temples and monasteries, scrape or de-



lete Georgian inscriptions from stones, remove stones from buildings and replace them with other stones with Armenian inscriptions, which was even written about in Russian and Georgian newspapers". In his journalistic works, he consistently denounced Armenian scientists "stealing history and thus pushing their people to the abyss" (1).

The Khudavank monastery complex in Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan, located on the left bank of the Tartar river, is another vivid example of such falsifications. This Albanian monastery is the largest architectural monument of Christian heritage in Azerbaijan, dating back to the 6-7th centuries. This dating is confirmed by samples of ceramics found during archaeological excavations, although there are assumptions that the first buildings of the complex were erected in the times of the Mithra cult and deification of the Moon (2, p. 225).

The oldest part of the complex that has survived to this day is a basilica dating back to the 8-9th centuries. According to legend, it was erected over the tomb of a missionary named Dede, a disciple of St. Thaddeus, who was sent to these places to preach Christianity. St.



Thaddeus himself, brother of Apostle Thomas, was sent among 72 apostles to preach in pagan countries (3, p. 221). During this period, the territory of Karabakh was part of Caucasian Albania, an Azerbaijani state that existed in late antiquity and the Middle Ages and officially adopted Christianity in the 4th century.

According to historians, the one-nave basilica, the oldest surviving structure of the monastery, is definitely dated to the 6th century (4, p. 60). In the 13th century, the monastery was restored and supplemented with new buildings at the expense of members of the dynasty of rulers of the Upper Khachen Albanian principality. In subsequent periods, the monastery was repeatedly repaired, expanded with new structures and, finally, during the reign of the Khachen prince and prominent statesman Hasan Jalal (1215-1261) the complex was reconstructed. The main church of the complex was built on the initiative and at the expense of Princess Arzu-Khatun. According to the Azerbaijani author G. Mammadova, it is the constructions of the Arzu-Khatun era of the early 13th century that allow us to refer Khudavank "to the most outstanding monuments of Albanian architecture" (5, p. 119).

The Khudavank monastery complex includes nine buildings: 1) the oldest church; 2) one-nave basilica of St. Mary; 3) the Arzu-Khatun church; 4) the church of Hasan Jalal; 5) the church of St. Grigor; 6) the hall adjacent to the church of Arzu-Khatun; 7) the bell tower; 8) the school; 9) the gallery. Local black basalt, burnt brick and lime were used in the construction. The roofs are covered with tiles and neatly hewn stones. Wooden materials were used in buildings with domes. Window openings of the temple buildings are made in the form of a horseshoe at the top. On the walls of all the buildings, there are numerous drawings and inscriptions executed with oil paints. As is the case with other Albanian monasteries, the territory of the complex is surrounded by strong walls.

The monumental Arzu-Khatun Cathedral Church was built by the wife of Albanian Prince Vakhtang, Arzu-Khatun, in 1214 in memory of her husband and two sons. There are small rooms on the sides of the doors of the rectangular church. The façade is finished with hewn stone, the surface of which is covered with carved ornament. On the eastern side of the façade, there is an image of Vakhtang, on the western façade there are



images of Arzu-Khatun and two sons. G. Mammadova, with reference to T. Ter-Grigoryan (T. Ter-Grigoryan, Armenian inscriptions on monuments of Azerbaijan // Scientific Archive of the Institute of History of ANAS. Inventory No. 976.3, p. 16), provides the full text of Arzu-Khatun's inscription of 19 lines on the southern wall of the church erected of purely hewn stone: "By the grace of Almighty God, the Father and His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, and by the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, I, the humble servant of Christ Arzu-Khatun, daughter of the Grand Prince of Princes Kurd and spouse of Vakhtang, prince, sovereign of Aterk and all Upper Khachen, have built this cathedral church on the place of repose of my spouse and my sons with great hope..."

The buildings of the Khudavank monastery complex demonstrate the peculiarities of Christian architecture of medieval Azerbaijan. On their walls, there are many inscriptions designating customers and builders, among which there are quite a few Turkic names: Arzu-Khatun, Tursun, Altun, Agbug, Garagoz and others. The carved stone ornaments of the complex trace a direct link with Azerbaijani Islamic architecture. The name of the complex in Persian means "the abode of God" ("khuda" and "god").

From 1511, the Khudavank Monastery served as the center of the Albanian Christian Dyophysites until the Albanian autocephalous church was abolished in 1836 by a decree of the Russian Synod.

In April 1993, Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan was occupied by Armenian armed forces. This was when the process of Armenization of the Khudavank monastery began. It started with the name: the word Khudavank was gradually removed from the everyday life and literature, and the name of "Khotavenk" ("monastery on the hill") was planted instead, but due to the blatant nature of falsification the name "Dadivank", transformed from Azerbaijani "Dede-venk", was largely used. The falsifiers could not connect the history of this monument with Armenians until the 13th century, and then they announced that allegedly "all monastery buildings were razed to the ground by the Seljuks" (6). Nearby Azerbaijani villages with many medieval houses, as well as medieval Azerbaijani graves, were attributed to a later period – the Azerbaijanis were allegedly resettled here in the late 18th century by the ruler of the Karabakh khanate Ibrahimkhalil, and it was claimed that they were not actually Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis, but Kurds and Assyrians.



Subsequent falsifications were even more “fundamental” in nature. The crosses and inscriptions belonging to the Albanian church were intentionally substituted with crosses and inscriptions of the Armenian-Gregorian church. Hasan Jalal, Arzu-Khatun and other historical figures, widely known since Soviet times, were difficult to falsify, and therefore they were declared “Armenian rulers” without bothering with arguments. Hasan Jalal, whose titles include “the prince of the country of Aghvank” (i.e. Albania), was declared “Armenian prince”. In fact, one of the former directors of the State Hermitage, I. Orbeli, pointed out that this is “a relic, a title that has lost its real significance” (7, p. 347). Moreover, even the name of the Albanian dynasty of Arranshahs (i.e. rulers of Arran, as Azerbaijan used to be called) was falsified and transformed into the “Armenian Aranshahik dynasty”.

The Armenian Apostolic Church allocated funds for the repair and restoration, whereas the falsification of the Khudavank monastery was assigned to the “Art-sakh diocese” in 1994 and headed by a certain Father

Hovhannes, Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, an active participant of the first Karabakh war of the early 1990s. He became infamous for his atrocities against the peaceful Azerbaijani population (8). When the fighting started in late September of that year, this “minister of religion” with an automatic rifle in his hands began to call for the killing of Azerbaijanis.

Starting from 2004, restoration work in the Khudavank Monastery was carried out with the active financial support of Adele Hovnanian, an American businesswoman of Armenian origin, and Tehran-based Armenian Edik Abrahamian (9). Along with this, in order to attract the attention of the Western public, the Armenian authorities started archaeological excavations at the site and in 2007 announced the discovery of the alleged relics of St. Dadi. It is noteworthy that these were discovered in the very place the clerics pointed their fingers to the archaeologists. Local media published an article entitled “Relics of one of the disciples of Jesus Christ have been discovered in an ancient monastery in Nagorno-Karabakh,” which quoted an interview with the







head of the “Artsakh Diocese” of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Archbishop Pargev Srbazan. He said, “The big stele in front of the altar of the church became a sign for us – if Dadi’s relics have been preserved, they must be under this stele. The relics did indeed end up here. We excavated them on July 21 - according to the church calendar, it is the day of St. Thaddeus the Apostle”. In this way, the Armenian occupying authorities started a campaign to include the Khudavank Monastery in the list of significant monuments of the Christian world in order to develop religious tourism in the region.

According to the terms of the joint statement of the President of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Russia signed on November 10, 2020, Armenian troops vacated the territory of Kalbajar district on November 25. Before that, the Armenian clergy, so often dressed in the toga of “Christian martyrs”, announced that the inscriptions and other epigraphic elements of the Khudavank Monastery would be removed and taken to Armenia. Reports in the Russian media noted that “civilian Armenians leaving the area break the stones of the monastery and take them to Armenia as a memento”. Barbaric looting and destruction of the most valuable historical, cultural and reli-

gious monument actually unfolded before the eyes of the whole world. However, there is still no reaction from international organizations. ✿

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