UOT 94(479.24)

LALA ALIYEVA
Associate Professor of History Faculty, Baku State University
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4831-6915
lalaaliyeva@bsu.edu.az

ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL AZERBAIJAN: ON THE BASIS OF THE PRIMARY SOURCES

DOI: https://doi.org/10.36719/2708-065X/109/10-13

This research paper examines the evolution of ethno-religious identities in early Medieval Azerbaijan. The primary objective of this investigation is to determine religion's pivotal role in transforming ethnic identity across this geographical and political expanse.

The study begins by analyzing the ethno-religious composition of pre-Islamic Azerbaijan through Armenian and Georgian chronicles, Moses of Kalankatuyk's "History of Alban," and Sassanian inscriptions. These sources reveal a distinctly multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic society characterized by diverse religious practices, including various forms of idolatry, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism.

The Arab conquest and subsequent introduction of Islam fundamentally altered the religious landscape of the region, precipitating profound changes in collective identity. Sources ranging from early medieval Arab authors to Persian historical literature and European textual sources illuminate the gradual nature of this transformation process.

Furthermore, this research investigates the adaptation of religious practices within new ethnocultural environments and identifies the defining characteristics of emergent ethno-religious identities - products of complex historical processes. In essence, the paper traces the dynamic interplay between religious transformation and ethnic identity through a comprehensive historical perspective.

Keywords: Early Medieval Azerbaijan, Turkic tribes, Islamisation, Ethnic identity, religious transformation.

Introduction. Examining the ethnic and religious processes in historical Azerbaijan, it is obvious that the Islamisation of the country was a turning point in its historical fate. A new religion, Islam, brought a new concept of socio-cultural, political, and even economic life. Aiming to scrutinize these processes in a certain historical time, namely the early medieval period (V-X centuries), this study is based on the diffusion theory. Developed by Everett Rogers in 1962, it provides a framework for understanding how, why, and at what rate new ideas spread through a social system or ethnic system. Diffusion theory offers a powerful lens for analyzing religious transformation by framing it as the spread of an innovation through a social system. While challenges emotional factors or historical data gaps exist, the theory's structured approach can yield valuable insights into why and how religious transformations succeeded.

Wide range of historical textual sources, as well as archeological findings were considered for investigation of the issue. Among them "The History of The Caucasian Albanians" by Moses of Kalankatyuk [6], "Futuh Al-Buldan" by Baladhuri [4], Michael the Syrian's chronicle [5], works of Ibn Rustah and Yaqubi [7], "Kitāb Masālik wa-Mamālik*"* by Ibn Haukal [8], "Murūj aḏ-Ḏahab wa-Maʿādin al-Jawhar" [9], The History of Theophylact Simocatta [11] and other sources. These sources make it possible to trace ethno-linguistic processes before and after the Islamization of Azerbaijan. In addition to the textual sources of the time, some archaeological data were studied that provided material evidence for the research. [12, 66-72].

Ethno-linguistic and Religious Map of Pre-Islamic Azerbaijan. Textual sources show that the territory of Azerbaijan had religious diversity in the pre-Islamic period. Although our main source on Caucasian Albania, "History of Albania" by Moses Kalankatuysky, proves that Christianity was the official religion, but polytheistic and Zoroastrian religious views were preserved. This is evidenced

by burial monuments. These monuments of the pre-Islamic period are important in determining the religious and cultural worldview of the population of this period. The material and cultural remains that found in the burials assist even to identify their ethnicity or origin. As a result of archaeological research conducted in Azerbaijan, several different burial patterns were discovered. This also indicates that polytheistic religious worldviews and various burial rites associated with them existed in Azerbaijan from ancient times [12, 66-72]. In the south of the Araz River, Zoroastrianism had a dominant position.

The study of the ethno-linguistic composition of the population of pre-Islamic Azerbaijan is of great importance. The works of Greek and Roman authors prove the contacts of the Huns with Azerbaijan. The Greek historian Agathias (536-582) mentions one of the Hunnic tribes in the Caucasus, the Onoguris. The Onogur Huns were an influential group in the Caucasus region throughout the 5th and 6th centuries [3, 21]. According to Agathias, Persians maintained a garrison at Onoguris fortress, strategically positioned in the Archaeopolis district as an opposition base against Roman forces. In his war accounts, Agathias frequently references the Onoguris fortress and clarifies its etymology: the location retained its historical name "Onoguris," which likely originated from a past military engagement between the Onoguri Huns and the Colchians, where the Colchians emerged victorious and subsequently named the location to commemorate their triumph [1, Book III, 6].

We will not examine in detail the entire picture of the ethnic composition of the population of this period. However, one important point should be noted that religious diversity prevented the formation of a single ethno-linguistic and cultural entity.

Ethno-religious Identities After Islamisation. The spread of Islam in Azerbaijan, associated with the Arab conquest of the country, was a gradual process. The political dominance of the Arabs was fully established by the beginning of the 8th century, when the local power of the Mehranid dynasty was eliminated by Caliph Abd al-Malik.

Although the upper crust of the population accepted Islam in order to maintain their positions, the broad masses retained their previous beliefs. It is no coincidence that the Caliphate resettled Arab tribes to Azerbaijan to create an ethnic support base for itself. First of all, this was due to the fact that they could not find such support among the masses of the local population. By the 9th century, Islam had already become the dominant religion in the country, but Christianity still retained its position in some regions. In accordance to the Arab author al-Masudi (896-956) in the Shaki region the majority of population were still Christians in his time. After the Kingdom of the Sanariye, there exists the Kingdom of Shakin. The inhabitants of this kingdom are predominantly Christian, though there is also a Muslim community consisting of merchants and people of various other occupations. According to the author's book, the ruler of this kingdom at that time was someone called Azer Ibn Nabih Ibn Muhajir [9, 156]. It is interesting that this local nobleman, being a Christian, had a name of Zoroastrian origin.

In his work "Kitab al-Alaq al-Nafisa," Ahmad Ibn Rust (X century's author) describes Sarir, a Christian state in the Northern Caucasus, and then discusses a neighboring country and its leader, Adarnerse/Azernerse. According to Ibn Rusta, this ruler practices an unusual form of religious pluralism. He observes Muslim prayers on Fridays, participates in Jewish worship on Saturdays, and joins Christian services on Sundays, effectively engaging with all three major monotheistic faiths [7, 147-148]. This is an obvious example of the process of transformation from one religion to another. It is evident that although Islam became the dominant religion in the 9th century, the process of fully establishing a single religious and cultural identity still required time.

As for ethno-linguistic identity, in his research, dedicated to the ethnic composition of Azerbaijan during the Arab Caliphate, Ramil Agayev indicates that Turkic tribes have been the indigenous population of Azerbaijan since ancient times [2]. At present, this concept is the main one in Azerbaijani historiography. At the same time, the author emphasizes the presence of Caucasian-speaking and Iranian-speaking tribes on the territory of Azerbaijan, along with the Turks [2, 4].

The results of the study show that the adaptation of religious practices in new ethno-cultural environments and the emergence of defining characteristics of ethno-religious identities are the pro-

duct of complex historical processes. The dynamic interaction between religious transformation and ethnic identity is traced.

Conclusion. Attempting to examine the issue from the lens of diffusion theory, this proves that after Islamisation there was a radical change in the ethno-religious identity of the population of Azerbaijan. Religion as a factor influencing social consciousness was able to unite the ethnic core of the people around a single identity. This process begins with the spread of Islam and continues even after collapse of the Caliphate. Instead of religious diversity, a single religious and cultural space of the population was formed, which contributed to the unification of the Turkic factor with the non-Turkic population of the country. The Islamisation of Turkic tribes was often gradual, involving trade, intermarriage, and Sufi missionary activity. Thus, this process continued after the Seljuk penetration of Azerbaijan.

REFERENCES

1. Agathias. The Histories. Joseph D. Frendo (trans.) Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, vol. 2A, Series Berolinensis. Berlin, Walter De Gruyter, 1975.
2. Ağayev, Ramil. Ərəb xilafəti dövründə Azərbaycan əhalisinin etnik və sosial tərkibi (VII –IX əsrlər). Elmlər doktoru elmi dərəcəsi almaq üçün təqdim olunmuş dissertasiyanın avtoreferati. Bakı, 2023, 46 s.
3. Aliyeva, Lala. Pre-Islamic Early Turks And Azerbaijan In The Byzantine Source. Sosial elmlər, 2024, №2, pp. 19- 25 https://doi.org/10.59849/2710-0820.2024.2.19
4. Baladhuri (1987). *Futuh Al-Buldan*, in Arabic. Tahqiq: Abdullah Anis al-Tabaa. Beirut, Muassisat al-Maarif, 768 p.
5. *Chronicle of Michael the Great, Patriarch of the Syrians* (2013). Sources of the Armenian Tradition. Long Branch, N.J., 378 p.
6. Dowsett C. J. F. (1961) The History of The Caucasian Albanians by Movses Dasxurançi. Translated by C. J. F. Dowsett. London, Oxford University Press. New York Toronto, 1961, 252 p.
7. Goeje de M. J. (1892). *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*. In Arabic. Kitab Al-Alaq Al-Nafisa by Ibn Rosteh and Kitab al-Buldan by Al-Yaqubi. Leiden, Brill, 392 p.
8. Ibn Haukal (1800). *Kitāb Masālik wa-Mamālik*. Prepared for Publication by Sir William Ouseley. London: Oriental Press, 373 p.
9. Masudi (2005). *Murūj aḏ-Ḏahab wa-Maʿādin al-Jawhar*. In Arabic. Volume I, Prepared for Publication by Kamal Hassan Marayi. Beirut, Al-Maktab ul-Asriyya, 296 p.
10. Rogers, Everett M. Diffusion of innovations. Rev. ed. of: Communication of innovations. 2nd ed. 1971. 236 p.
11. Theophylact Simocatta. *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*. Translated from Greek by Michael and Mary Whitby. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.
12. Велиев, Эльнур. Следы зороастризма в погребальных памятниках Азербайджана. Sosial elmlər, 2022, №2, c. 66-72.

LALƏ ƏLIYEVA
Bakı Dövlət Universiteti Tarix fakultəsinin dosenti

ERKƏN ORTA ƏSRLƏR AZƏRBAYCANDA ETNO-DİNİ KİMLİKLƏR: İLKİN QAYNAQLAR ƏSASINDA

Təqdim olunan araşdırma erkən orta əsr Azərbaycanında etnik-dini kimliklərin təkamülünü araşdırır. Tədqiqatın əsas məqsədi bu coğrafi və siyasi məkanda dinin etnik kimliyin transformasiyasındakı həlledici rolunu müəyyən etməkdir.

Tədqiqat İslamaqədərki Azərbaycanın etnik-dini tərkibini erməni və gürcü salnamələri, Musa Kalankatlının "Alban Tarixi" və Sasani kitabələri vasitəsilə analiz etməklə başlayır. Bu mənbələr

bütpərəstliyin müxtəlif formaları, xristianlıq və zərdüştlük də daxil olmaqla, müxtəlif dini təcrübələrlə xarakterizə olunan açıq şəkildə rəgarəng etno-linqvistik bir cəmiyyəti aşkarlayır.

Ərəb işğalları və islam dininin yayılması ölkənin dini mənzərəsini köklü şəkildə dəyişərək, kollektiv kimlikdə dərin dəyişikliklərə səbəb olmuşdur. Erkən orta əsr ərəb müəlliflərindən farsdilli tarixi ədəbiyyata və Avropa fillərində tarixi mətnlərə qədər müxtəlif mənbələr bu transformasiya prosesinin tədricən baş verməsini işıqlandırır.

Bundan əlavə, tədqiqat yeni dini ənənələrim yeni etno-mədəni mühitə uyğunlaşmasını araşdırır və mürəkkəb tarixi proseslərin məhsulu olan yeni etno-konfessional kimliklərin başlıca xüsusiyyətlərini müəyyənləşdirir. Mahiyyət etibarilə, məqalə dini transformasiya ilə etnik kimlik arasındakı dinamik qarşılıqlı əlaqəni hərtərəfli tarixi perspektivdən izləyir.

Açar sözlər: Erkən Orta əsr Azərbaycanı, türk boyları, islamlaşma, etnik kimlik, dini transformasiya.

ЛАЛА АЛИЕВА
Доцент исторического факультета
Бакинского государственного университета

ЭТНО-РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В РАННЕМ СРЕДНЕВЕКОВОМ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНЕ: НА ОСНОВЕ ПЕРВИЧНЫХ ИСТОЧНИКОВ

Данное исследование рассматривает эволюцию этно-религиозных идентичностей в раннесредневековом Азербайджане. Основная цель данного исследования - определить ключевую роль религии в трансформации этнической идентичности на всём этом географическом и политическом пространстве.

Исследование начинается с анализа этно-религиозного состава доисламского Азербайджана на основе армянских и грузинских хроник, “Истории Албании” Моисея Каланкатуйского и Сасанидских надписей. Эти источники раскрывают отчётливо многоэтничное и многоязычное общество, характеризующееся разнообразными религиозными практиками, включая различные формы идолопоклонства, христианство и зороастризм.

Арабское завоевание и последующее введение ислама коренным образом изменили религиозный ландшафт региона, вызвав глубокие перемены в коллективной идентичности. Источники, начиная от раннесредневековых арабских авторов до персидской исторической литературы, а также европейские текстовые источники освещают постепенный характер этого процесса трансформации.

Кроме того, данное исследование изучает адаптацию религиозных практик в новых этнокультурных средах и выявляет определяющие характеристики возникающих этно-религиозных идентичностей — продуктов сложных исторических процессов. По сути, работа прослеживает динамическое взаимодействие между религиозной трансформацией и этнической идентичностью через всестороннюю историческую перспективу.

Ключевые слова: Ранний Средневековый Азербайджан, тюркские племена, исламизация, этническая идентичность, религиозная трансформация.

Məqalənin redaksiyaya daxil olduğu tarix: 08 may 2025-ci il.
Məqalənin çapa qəbul olunma tarixi: 15 may 2025-ci il.
Rəyçilər: t.ü.f.d. Bəymirzə Şabiyev, t.e.d. Qabil Əliyev.