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HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ALANIA BEFORE 932

The article is dedicated to the history of Christian Alania in the 10th century, including its Christianization in 914 and creation of the archbishopric. Narrative, sigillographic, epigraphic and archaeological sources are used. As result the history of Christian Alania in the 1st half of the 10th century is reconstructed.

Keywords: Alania, Caucasus, Byzantium, Abkhazia, Christianity, Khazars, church architecture

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The history of Christian Alania and of Alania in general is not well known to non-Russian speaking reader². So in the beginning of the book we give a relatively lengthy essay on the history of Christianity among the Alans, going into the details of their political history so far as it is necessary for the primary purpose of our work.

At the beginning, we need to define what we mean by the term Alania in the 10–14th centuries. The fact of existence of such a state (“the kingdom of the Alans” in the Arab geographers) is undeniable, but its borders are not clearly determined. Moreover, it is unknown even if it is homogeneous in its ethnic composition: special difficulties provokes the relationship between the ethnonyms Alans and Ases/Ovses. The subject of perennial debate this issue has been investigated in recent times by C. Zuckermann³, who, in contrast to other researchers arguing the identity of these ethnonyms, asserts the existence of two related ethnic groups: the Alans in the West and the Ases in the East. The main source for this hypothesis was his interpretation of a passage in the treatise “De ceremoniis” by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, written between 945 and 959: “to the archons of Azia, where the Caspian gates are.”⁴ C. Zuckermann follows the assumption of V. Minorsky⁵, based only on the consonance, according to which Azia is a country of Ases, and the Caspian gates, respectively, are not Derbent, as usual, but Darial. However, this view has been subjected to convincing critics by B. Martin-Hisard⁶ who identifies this mysterious Azia with the territory of the modern Southern Dagestan and Northern Azerbaijan. We can add that the interpretation of Azia as an independent state in the area of Darial completely contradicts the reliable information of al-Masudi (died in 956), which writes in the same years as Constantine about Darial as a border of Alania: “Between *the Kingdom of the Alans* and the Caucasus, there is the so-called Castle of the Gates of the Alans [i.e., the Daryal fortress].”⁷

Thus, under Alania we understand the area of the Alan culture (primarily, archaeological) on the territory of modern Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Northern Ossetia and partially of Ingushetia, Krasnodar and Stavropol districts⁸. The main monuments of early Alan Christianity, as well as the spiritual and political centre of this nation were in the upper reaches of the Kuban river and its tributaries — this region (roughly corresponding to modern Karachay-

² On history of Alan Christianity see Vailhé S. Alania // DHGÉ, I, 1912. P. 1335–1338 (outdated); Tordarson F. Notes on the Religious Vocabulary of the Alans // Annual of Medieval Studies at Central European University Budapest, 6, 2000. P. 213–225 (very short and lacunar); Ivanov S. Religious missions // The Cambridge history of the Byzantine Empire, Cambridge, 2008. P. 320–322, 329–330 (detailed only for the 10th and 13th centuries); Arzhantseva I. The Christianization of North Caucasus (religious dualism among the Alans) // Die Christianisierung des Kaukasus. The Christianization of Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Albania) / ed. W. Seibt, Vienna, 2002. P. 17–36 (contains useful archaeological information, but is insufficient regarding the written sources); Preiser-Kapeller J. Der Episkopat im späten Byzanz. Ein Verzeichnis der Metropolen und Bischöfe des Patriarchats von Konstantinopel in der Zeit von 1204 bis 1453, Saarbrücken, 2008. P. 16–21 (mainly for 13–15th centuries; extensive use of written sources, but with no knowledge of archaeology and Russian literature). On history of Alania in general see Martin-Hisard B. Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien dans le Livre des cérémonies, II, 48 // T&M, 13, 2000. P. 466–479 (only until the mid-10th century); Savvides A. Oi Alanoi tou Kaukasou kai oi metanasteuseis tous sten ystere archaioteta kai sto mesaiona. Athens, 2005 (in Greek; without any use of the Caucasian sources); Arzhantseva I. The Alans: neighbours of the Khazars in the Caucasus // The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives / ed. P. B. Golden et al. (HdO 8.17), Leiden, 2007. P. 59–73 (the early history and archaeology). In Russian still actual is Кузнецов В. А. Христианство на Северном Кавказе до XV в. (Christianity in the North Caucasus until the 15th century), Vladikavkaz, 2002 (contains useful archaeological information, but is non-critical regarding the written sources); outdated are two dissertations: Догузов К. Г. Византийско-аланские отношения (Byzantine-Alan relationships), Тбилиси, 1987; Назаров С. В. Северный Кавказ во внешней политике Византии в VIII–XII вв., Армавир, 1999 (both use almost all the literature in Russian). For more Russian literature see our Russian book Белецкий Д. В., Виноградов А. Ю. Нижний Архыз и Сенты — древнейшие храмы России. Проблемы христианского искусства Алании и Северо-Западного Кавказа (Nizhny Arkhyz and Senty – earliest churches in Russia. The problems of Christian art of Alania and North-western Caucasus), Moscow, 2011.

³ Zuckermann C. À propos du livre des cérémonies, II, 48. II. Le problème d’Azia/Asia, le pays des Ases // T&M, 13, 2000. P. 539–562.

⁴ εἰς τοὺς ἄρχοντας Ἀζίας, ἐν ᾗ εἰσὶν αἱ Κασπεῖαι πόλεις (Constantinus Porphyrogenitus. De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae libri duo. Vol. 1 / ed. by J. J. Reiske (Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae, 10). Bonn, 1829. P. 688).

⁵ Minorsky V. Hudud al-Alam (The regions of the world), a Persian geography. Oxford, 1937. P. 445. N. 1.

⁶ Martin-Hisard B. Op. cit. P. 509–517.

⁷ Cited after: Alemany A. Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation. Leiden, 2000. P. 264. Here and below we cite most sources on the Alans according to Alemany’s sourcebook.

⁸ See Исторический атлас Осетии / Отв. ред. П.С. Бзаров. Владикавказ, 2002. P. 20–21.

Cherkessia and the South-West of Krasnodar region) we will designate as Western Alania, in opposition to Eastern Alania, which occupied the upper stream of the Terek river and its tributaries (modern Kabardino-Balkaria, Northern Ossetia and some parts of Ingushetia and Stavropol district).

1.1 Christianity among the Alans before the 10th century

A legendary witness of the first contact of the Alans with Christianity is the visit of this country by Apostle Andrew, going back to the *Vita Andreae*, compiled by Epiphanius the Monk soon after 815⁹. Through Alania, the Apostle passes during his third missionary journey, covering the entire Western Caucasus: “After Pentecost, Andrew, Simon the Canaanite, Matthias and Thaddeus together with other disciples went to Edessa. Thaddeus remained there by Abgar, and the other, passing through the cities, teaching and performing miracles, went to Iberia and to Phasis, and after a few days to Su<s>ania. Men of this nation were ruled then by women, and because women's nature is easy to convince, they quickly obeyed. Then they came to the fortress Chemarin, where today is the resting place of Maxim, who suffered long. In these countries Matthias remained with his disciples, performing many miracles. And Simon and Andrew went to Alania and to the city Phousta. And having performed many miracles and instructed many people, they went to Abasgia. Coming to Sebastopolis the Great, they taught the word of God, and many people accepted it. And Andrew left Simon there with the disciples and rose to Zekchia. Cruel are these people, barbarians and still half unbelievers: they even wanted to kill Andrew [and would have killed him], if they had not seen his poorness, gentleness and austerity. Finally, leaving them, he went to the upper Sougdaoi. These people, obedient and meek, gladly received his word. From there he came to Bosporos.”¹⁰

As we can see, Alanya and Phousta stand in the way of the Apostle from Svaneti and Chemarin to Abasgia/Abkhazia. Epiphanius the Monk who collected information about Apostle Andrew on the shores of the Black sea, has often built the route of the Apostle according to his own itinerary¹¹. In Chemarin Epiphanius, a great admirer of various relics, was personally, what is confirmed by the words “the fortress Chemarin, where today is the resting place of Maxim.” Later in Alania there was a cult of the Apostle: W. Seibt¹² published a seal of Rosmikes, an Alan exousiokrator of the late 12th century, with the image of St. Andrew on the obverse, which was, according to S. N. Malakhov¹³, saint patron of this ruler. This inclusion of Alania in the route of the first-called Apostle may be not without reason and indicate some traces of Christianity there in 815–820ies, when Epiphanius passed the Caucasus¹⁴.

It may have been traces of the previous contacts of the Alans with different Christian cultures. One of their evidences, but, obviously, also legendary is a passage from the Arabic version of the Armenian historian Agathangelos (5th century) about the baptism of an Alan Prince by the St. Gregory the Illuminator¹⁵. More plausible seems the martyrdom of the baptized

⁹ On him see Kahl G. Die geographischen Angaben des Andreasbios (BHG 95b und 102). Diss. Stuttgart, 1989; Mango C. A Journey Around the Coast of the Black Sea in the Ninth Century // *Palaeoslavica*. Vol. X.1 (2002). P. 255–264; Греческие предания о св. ап. Андрее. Т. 1. Жития / Изд. А. Виноградов. СПб. 2005. P. 40-41 [Библиотека «Христианского Востока», 3].

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 313.

¹¹ Ibid. P. 39.

¹² Seibt W. Die byzantinische Bleisiegel in Österreich. 1. Teil. Kaiserhof. Bd. II, 1. Wien, 1978. S. 311-312. Nr. 170; Idem. Metropolen und Herrscher der Alanen auf byzantinischen Siegeln des 10.-12. Jahrhunderts // *Сфрагистика и история культуры*. СПб. 2004. P. 50-59.

¹³ Малахов С.Н. Алано-византийские заметки (часть I) // *Аланы: история и культура*, 3. Владикавказ, 1995. P. 378.

¹⁴ Non-critical analysis of Andrew's legend see in Туаллагов А. А. Алания (Осетия) и миссионерская деятельность св. Андрея // *Аланы: история и культура*. Аланика III / ed. Владикавказ, 1995. P. 59–64; Arzhantseva I. The Christianization... P. 18.

¹⁵ Габриэлян Р.А. Армяно-аланские отношения (I-X вв.). Ереван, 1989. P. 50-54. Contrary to the realities is the suggestion of Yu. S. Gagloiti who identifies the Albanians and Mazkuts with the Alans and, respectively, attributed to them the predication of Gregory, grandson of St. Gregory the Illuminator (Гаглойти Ю.С. Алано-Георгика. Владикавказ, 2007. P. 171-183. Прим. 75).

Alans by their compatriots, known from the *Martyrdom of Voskyans* and *Martyrdom of Sukiasians* (5th century)¹⁶. Indeed, some of the Alans, leaving their native land, were baptized (as, for example, three Alan slaves in Baghdad in the mid-9th century, according to *Vita Theodori Edessensis*¹⁷), but it had little impact on the commitment of the Alans to their traditional religion.

Also does not contain any information about Christianity in Alania the hagiographic dossier of St. Maximus Confessor (660ies)¹⁸: such hypotheses¹⁹ are based on an error in the the Latin translation of the *Commemoratio Theodori Spoudaei*, where the Alans stand instead of the Lazians of the Greek original²⁰. In favour of the original Greek version says also the fact that the residence of Gregory, the ruler of the Lazians (in the Latin translation – of the Alans) was in Lazika, and the fact that he has the Byzantine title of patrikios and behaves as a Christian.

A fiction is also the passage in only one manuscript of the Georgian *Life of Vakhtang Gorgasali* about Ossetia as one of the lands under the jurisdiction of Mtskheta Catholicos at the sixth Ecumenical Council in 680²¹.

In addition, there are a number of archaeological finds of 7–9th centuries, in one or another way connected with Christianity²². All these early testimonies should be the subject of a special study.

1.2 Christianization of the Alans in the early 10th century

A real spread of Christianity in Alania began only from the 10th century²³, and almost all of the information about it contain the letters of the Patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas I Mystikos (901–907, 912–925)²⁴. The chronology of this epistolary corpus permeated by internal links was carefully studied by its publishers, R. Jenkins and L. Westerink²⁵ (see tab. 1). It was here that we find the earliest dated reference on wide Christianization of the Alans in 912. The reference to the recent return of Nicholas on the Patriarchal throne secures dates by this year letter 79, which is addressed to anonymous monks-missionaries in some distant country: “... but do you (my beloved), who share in the toils and thus in the comfort of the divine Apostles, who have run the blessed course, whose feet are beautiful as of those who bring joyful tidings of peace—do you perform your proper task with yet greater zeal, driving the darkness of impiety out of the souls possessed by it, and bringing unto them the dawning light of salvation, so that when through you the faith has been strengthened in that place, God may be glorified in them, and you too may be glorified in this life, and in the life to come with the divine and imperishable glory. I know that there are many things to afflict you and to obstruct your holy life, when I myself reflect, as I naturally do, on the desolate nature of the place and the kind of men you live with, and the strangeness of their manners, and am informed of these very matters by your own messenger. Nonetheless, the things of the present time are unworthy to be noticed by comparison with the future glory, looking toward which, and disregarding toil and obstruction, you must

¹⁶ Абуладзе И. Грузино-армянские литературные связи в IX-X вв. Исследование и тексты. Тбилиси, 1944. P. 12-13, 16-17.

¹⁷ Малахов С.Н. Малоизвестное свидетельство об аланах в Житии Феодора Эдесского // Аланы: Западная Европа и Византия / ed. Отв. ред. В.Х. Тменов. Владикавказ, 1992. P. 135-148.

¹⁸ Scripta saeculi VII, vitam Maximi Confessoris illustrantia, una cum latina interpretatione Anastasii Bibliothecarii iuxta posita / ed. P. Allen et B. Neil (Corpus christianorum. Series graeca, 39). Turnhout-Leuven, 1999; Maximus the Confessor and his Companions / ed. and transl. by P. Allen et B. Neil. Oxford, 2002.

¹⁹ See Кузнецов В.А. Ук. соч. С. 29-32.

²⁰ Maximus... P. 154; Cf. PG 90, 195.

²¹ Алемань А. Аланы в древних и средневековых письменных источниках. М. 2003. P. 415.

²² Кузнецов В.А. Ук. соч. С. 32-39.

²³ Novoseltsev's assumption about early Christianization of the Alans and the baptism of their ruler in the 2nd half of the 8 – 9th century (Новосельцев А.П. Хазарское государство и его роль в истории Восточной Европы и Кавказа. М. 1990. P. 106) is based only on al-Masudi's general dating “under the Abbasids” and finds no other evidence.

²⁴ Al-Masudi dates the Christianization of Alania simply to the time before 932 (see below). On Ibn Ruste, see also below.

²⁵ Nicolaus Mysticus. Epistulae / ed. R.J.H. Jenkins and L.G. Westerink (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 6), Washington (D.C.), 1973.

fulfill your blessed task, and by all means contrive the confirmation of the faith among those in whom it has lately been fixed. And when you hand them over to those who will, in your stead, by their doctrine guide them to the sure path and lay hold on their salvation, then, when that time comes with the Divine Approval, return to my Humility, to increase with your own words the joy which I feel over those who are being led through Baptism to Christ our God, and yourselves to participate in that delight of the Church which our Saviour and God, yielding to His own admonition, has granted unto those who hope in Him.”²⁶

Two circumstances allow associating this mission with Alania²⁷. Firstly, the latter corresponds very well to the description of the harsh conditions of the area and population, and we do not know other precisely localizable Byzantine missions in the early 10th century²⁸. Secondly, a change of the missionaries promised in the letter actually took place in Alania and is mentioned in the letter 135 (see below). About the monk Euthymios, which was sent later to help the Archbishop Peter (see below), we read there that “he was your predecessor as herald of piety to that nation, and sowed the seed of doctrine.”²⁹ With the same words Nicholas Mystikos describes him also in the letter to the Bulgarian Tsar Symeon: “Let the bearer of this letter be kindly treated; partly for the virtue that is in him: for the man is an abbot of the hermits of Olympus and moreover, in the power of the Holy Spirit, has sown the Word of the Faith among the Alans, and has been assigned by God a ministry equal with that of the Holy Apostles.”³⁰ We learn a lot about Euphemios: he was not a simple monk, but Abbot of a monastery on mount Olympus in Bithynia (he became Abbot probably after Alan mission and maybe even as a reward for it³¹); he was entrusted not only by the enlightening mission in Alania, but also by the diplomatic mission in Bulgaria caused by the Byzantine defeat at Acheloon on 20th August 917. In addition, Euthymios is, very likely, even the recipient of one of the patriarchal letters (letter 148³²) — he, obviously, was an agent of Nicholas and was therefore sent by him in Alania. It should be noted that Alan mission had also a political character: its purpose was closer to bind the strategically important Alania to Byzantium (see also below, I.3).

Such a significant figure was destined to become illuminator of Alania. Judging by the fact that two different letters repeat twice the words “sowed the seed of doctrine/faith”, Euthymios was the first baptist of the Alans. From letter 79 it is clear that in 912, the mission had already worked for some time, having had to baptize a number of converts. It is not excluded that Euthymios, agent of Nicholas Mystikos was sent by him in Alania during his first patriarchate (901–907), however, there are no evidence to assert that, as V. A. Kuznetsov does³³. S. N. Malakhov³⁴ points out as a counter-argument the absence in letter 79 (912 AD) of any apologies for the five-year silence (which, in general, is characteristic for Nicholas Mystikos, see below) – however, this argument is based only on the fact that we know all the letters of the patriarch to the missionaries in Alania (see below). It is not clear why, according to Malakhov, “the correspondents clearly parted recently.”

The hypothesis of Yu. A. Kulakovsky³⁵ that Nicholas’ letter 106 to the archbishop of Cherson about the preparation of the bishop for a “nation, so nearly ravished from the bosom of

²⁶ Ibid. P. 334–335.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 559–560.

²⁸ Иванов С.А. Византийское миссионерство. Москва, 2003. P. 178-223; see also below.

²⁹ Nicolaus Mysticus. Epistulae... P. 442–443.

³⁰ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 266–267. However, it should be noted that this person is not named in the letter by name and is identified by Jenkins and Westerink (Ibid. P. XXI) exactly on the basis of his participation in the mission to the Alans.

³¹ Ficker G. Das Epiphanius-Kloster in Kerasus und der Mitropolit Alaniens // Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher, 3, 1922. S. 100.

³² Moreover, as the publishers believe (Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 582), due to the similarities with the letter 134 (see below), this letter could be also sent in Alania.

³³ Кузнецов В.А. Ук. соч. С. 40-41.

³⁴ Малахов С.Н. Христианизация Алании в 912-925 гг. (по письмам Николая Мистика) // Мир православия, 3. Волгоград, 2000. P. 30.

³⁵ Кулаковский Ю.А. Избранные труды по истории аланов и Сарматии. Спб. 2000. P. 173-174; see также Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 182-183.

piety by the evil demon”³⁶ speaks about Alania, is unsubstantiated (the same applies to letter 68³⁷). Moreover, we have no information about the attempts of the Alans to denial from Christianity in the patriarchate of Nicholas Mystikos (see below). It would be clever to suppose, that the archbishop of Cherson, as the senior hierarch of Zekchian eparchy, could ordain a bishop for Alania, which could enter into the same, once, apparently, missionary diocese. But in the *Notitia episcopatum* 7 and especially 8 (901–912) the unified Zekchian eparchy no longer exists³⁸. No more convincing looks and a link to the Crimean Alans: firstly, it is hardly so confidently, as S.A. Ivanov does³⁹, to equate the southern Crimea to Khazaria, and secondly, it is absolutely incorrect to affirm that “in the conversion of the Alan participated the metropolis (sic! — *D. B., A. V.*) of Cherson and helped the Abkhazian king⁴⁰,” since here we have explicitly different Alans, Caucasian and Crimean. The only known assistant of Byzantium in Christianization of Alania was the Abkhazian Kingdom, and the archbishop Peter of Alania went to his diocese from Constantinople (see below). The characteristics of the people in letter 106 is more reminiscent of the description of the Chersonites themselves by Epiphanius the Monk (815–843): “Unstable is the people of Chersakoi up to this day and not firm in the faith, liars, carried about by every wind of heresies.”⁴¹

At first glance, letter 79 leaves a dual impression: on the one hand, the Patriarch calls missionaries to “perform your proper task with yet greater zeal,” and on the other hand, he tells them to “hand them over... and return.” What can do and, moreover, “with yet greater zeal” the monks who have an imperative to return back? The key here, apparently, is the mention of the coming arrival of change (“those who will, in your stead, by their doctrine guide them to the sure path and lay hold on their salvation”) – until this moment the missionaries should continue their important work, and only then will return to Constantinople with the mission report. It is possible that Nicholas Mystikos, who returned to his throne, needed exactly Euthymios and his diplomatic talents, but there is not to exclude another reason for this change, about which we say below.

Quite reasonable is publishers’ assumption⁴² that Euthymios was replaced immediately by the archbishop Peter: letter 133, addressed to Peter, says that the latter departed from Constantinople leaving the patriarch “in hell.”⁴³ This trouble that befell Nicholas, it is most logical to associate with its 22-day exile in St. Sofia in February 914⁴⁴. Thus, Peter departed from Constantinople in the early 914 – this does not mean that he was made archbishop in the spring of this year, as S. N. Malakhov believes⁴⁵: then he left the capital, and he could be consecrated earlier. A small time gap between letter 79 (912 AD) and the departure of the archbishop from the capital in the early 914 indicates a direct replacement of the monks-missionaries by the archbishop. Although it was executed in 914, change of the monks-missionaries (see above) and creation of the archbishopric of Alania was conceived probably already in 912: returning to his patriarchal throne Nicholas Mystikos (possibly linked yet before with the mission in Alania, see above) raised the status of the young Alan Church. The above-mentioned small chronological gap proves that this first archbishop of Alania was exactly Peter.

³⁶ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 390–391.

³⁷ See Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 183.

³⁸ *Notitiae episcopatum Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* / ed. J. Darrouzès. Paris, 1981. P. 78, 87, 273-274, 293-294. In the *Notitiae* 1–5 all three sees of Zekchia followed each other // the *Notitia* 6 they are separated, and in the *Notitia* 7 the diocese of Zekchia is not mentioned more.

³⁹ Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 183.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 184.

⁴¹ Греческие... С. 313-314. F. Tordarson (Op. cit. P. 216) identifies, without any explanation, this people with the Khazars.

⁴² Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 559.

⁴³ Ibid. P. 432–433.

⁴⁴ Ibid. P. XXII, XXIX.

⁴⁵ Малахов С.Н. Ук. соч. С. 31.

It is unclear on what basis S. N. Malakhov believes that “a titular archbishopric was formed, directly subordinated to the Patriarch, but not yet listed in the *Notitia*”⁴⁶ – it would be an odd exception to the rule of the Byzantine bureaucracy. About the date of the appearance of Alania in *Notitia* we shall speak below (see I. 4), but, on the other hand, the archbishopric of Alania definitely was not present at least in the first patriarchate of Nicholas Mystikos (901–907), when *Notitia episcopatum* 8 was composed, where this see is not mentioned⁴⁷.

However, in addition to the Patriarch and the archbishop in the baptism of the Alans took part another force. In his letter 51 Nicholas Mystikos “open correspondence” with the “renowned prince of Abasgia.”⁴⁸ Based on the fact that to the Abkhazian king George II (922–957) are addressed two other letters (46 and 162), and the letter 46 was written immediately after his accession on the throne, Toumanoff⁴⁹ identified the recipient of letter 51 as his father Constantine III (898?–922)⁵⁰.

Praising as custom the Abkhazian king for his piety, the Patriarch, however, goes directly to the point – thanks for his helping the archbishop of Alania, for manifestation of “the hospitality, the attention, and the general comfort, as much as could be provided, which you have manifestly bestowed, with all good will and heart, on my Son, the Archbishop, most beloved by God.”⁵¹ S.A. Ivanov⁵² believes that even the idea of baptism of the Alans belongs to the Abkhazian king, but against this speaks an important circumstance: Euthymios’ mission is dated to 912 AD, while the first patriarchal letter to Constantine III (see above) was sent two years later, under the archbishop Peter⁵³. But it is clear that Constantine had to solve problems of the archbishop of Alania and to give him something that, apparently, was impossible to find in the barbarian country. The patriarch asks the exousiastes of Abasgia to help the archbishop of Alania also in the future to “receive the reward many times over from our abundantly giving God,” i.e., promising to him the same reward as to the missionaries (see above). Thus, the Abkhazian king appears not just as a random assistant to the Archbishop on his way from Constantinople in Alania, but as his patron. Most likely, king’s position was influenced not only by the pressure of Constantinople, but also by old friendships between Abkhazia and Alania: the Kartlian king Adarnase IV (888–923) broke in 888 the allied forces of the Abkhazian king Bagrat I (886?–898?), the Kartlian prince Nasr, his brother-in-law, and an Alan prince (mtawari) Bakatar, who died in this battle⁵⁴ (however, Ibn Ruste⁵⁵ (ca. 903–913) says that B.gay.r, i.e. Bakatar, is a

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 30

⁴⁷ Notitiae... P. 87. Note 1. It is obvious that the absence of Alania in *Notitia* 8 contradicts to its re-dating by C. Zuckermann to the time after 920 (Zuckermann C. Byzantiums Pontic policy in the *Notitiae episcopatum* // *La Crimée entre Byzance et le Khaganat kazar* / ed. C. Zuckermann). P. 2006. P. 228). So he proposes to identify Alania with the archbishopric of Sebastopolis, which // his opinion // the 10th century could not be subordinated to Constantinople, because it was on the territory of the Abkhazian Kingdom, where was its own hierarchy. However, he completely ignores the coexistence of the archbishoprics of Alania and Sebastopolis in *Notitiae* 11 and 12, what excludes such identification. There are reasons to believe that the later existed in the 10th century (see Виноградов, Гугушвили ???).

⁴⁸ Ibid. P. 278–279.

⁴⁹ Toumanoff C. Chronology of the kings of Abasgia and other problems // *Le Muséon*, 69, 1956. P. 80-81.

⁵⁰ On the dating the reigns of Abkhazian kings see Martin-Hisard B. Constantinople et les archontes du monde caucasien dans le *Livre des cérémonies*, II, 48 // *Travaux et mémoires*, 13, 2000. P. 460; Виноградов, Белецкий ???.

⁵¹ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 278.

⁵² Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 180-181.

⁵³ Meanwhile, one page below Ivanov (Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 182) already states that “the Abkhazians only helped the Greeks”.

⁵⁴ Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 416. After “Bakatar, the mtavar of the Ovses” follow “and the eristav of the Abkhazians”, what Yu. S. Gagloiti refers to Bakatar (Галойти Ю.С. Ук. соч. С. 159-160. Прим. 53); however, the latter term is quite strange, because the eristavs (or rather, mtavars) of Abkhazia disappeared in the late 8th century becoming kings – therefore its application, especially, to an Alan, is quite unlikely. The events of 888 can be considered as the cause of the appearance in a burial in the North Zelenchuk church of a ring with the name of the Armenian king Ashot I (886–891; Гутнов Ф.Х. Аристократия алан. Владикавказ, 1995. P. 77–78), which passed, apparently, from generation to generation, until it came in this burial. It could be a military booty of the Alan-Abkhazian troops which fought against the Armenians or a conciliatory gift of the Armenian king to the Alans after Bakatar’s death in 888. Less likely is the assumption (Гутнов Ф.Х. Горский феодализм. Ч. I. Владикавказ, 2007. P. 262) that it was the consequence of the Armenian-Abkhazian reconciliation, because the later happened not under Ashot III, but under Smbat I.

⁵⁵ Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 343.

common name of Alan rulers, and, although the Zelenchuk inscription shows that among the Alans it was also a personal name⁵⁶, it is possible that originally this was indeed a title).

Apparently, the baptism of the Alan ruler took place in the reign of Constantine III (i.e., between 912 and 922⁵⁷). In letter 79 from 912 AD, Nicholas Mystikos says simply about “those in whom it [the faith – *D. B., A. V.*] has lately been fixed” as the merit of the missionaries (see above), while in letter 51 from 914–915 AD, the Patriarch thanks the king Constantine for the baptism of archon of Alania: “For I learn from various persons who know your achievements that you have, under God, devoted much care to the enlightenment of the prince of Alania and of all those who with him have been found worthy of holy Baptism.”⁵⁸ One can easily imagine how Constantine convinced by letter or in person (maybe with the aid of certain political arguments) his Alan neighbour showing him the benefits of entering into Christian oecumene. This Alan ruler was, apparently, a relative and heir of the above-mentioned Abkhazian ally Bakatar (died in 888).

In letter 51 the merit of Alan ruler’s baptism is ascribed only to the Abkhazian king. Also in the letters to Peter, the patriarch nowhere attributes the merit of prince’s conversion to the archbishop – however, as to Euphemios too – although a reason for this Nicholas had at least three times (in letters 79, 135 and 9). Thus, only one, who is mentioned by the patriarch in connection with Alan ruler’s baptism, is the Abkhazian king Constantine III. Does it follow from this that Alan ruler was baptized only on the initiative of the Abkhazian king and possibly by the hand of an Abkhazian cleric⁵⁹? This assumption is based only on the consistent mention of prince’s baptism and the help to the archbishop in letter 51 – however, this order was produced rather by the epistolary (and partly diplomatic) etiquette: from a gratitude for the support the patriarch had easier to come to his request for the future, and in fact namely the requests conclude most of Nicholas’ letters. In addition, if the Alan prince was baptized not by a Greek cleric, so Euthymios had not executed the instructions of the patriarch to wait for the arrival of his successors. Do not say anything about an “Abkhazian baptism” also the Arab authors – for them, the only initiator of the Christianization is Byzantine Emperor (see I. 3). Therefore, this hypothesis has yet to give up.

On the contrary, the mention of prince’s baptism parallel to the archbishop Peter’s activities in Alania leads to the assumption that this act was executed by the hand of the hierarch. It is provoked, in our opinion, by the status of prince’s baptism. Its execution required a Byzantine ecclesiastical rank corresponding to the rank of Alan ruler, i.e., a bishop⁶⁰. And this was not just a bishop, but an archbishop – it put Alan Church in the Byzantine hierarchy on the same level with the Abkhazian one. It is this necessity that probably triggered the replacement of the lucky (and possibly no-one based) monks and missionaries by the hierarch with his clergy, forced to seek help from neighbouring Christian king.

But how such a hypothesis is consistent with the testimony of Ibn Ruste, who wrote his work in 903–913, i.e., when it was no Archbishop in Alania yet: “The king of the Alans is a Christian at heart, but all the people who inhabit his kingdom are heathens worshipping idols”⁶¹? Let us

⁵⁶ «... son Bakatar, Bakatar’s son Anbalan» (Абаев В.И. Осетинский язык и фольклор. Том I. М.-Л. 1949. P. 265; Zgusta L. Old ossetic inscription from the river Zelenčuk. Wien, 1987); see also a number of other sources (Белецкий Д.В. Заметки о Нузальском храме // Историко-филологический архив, 2. Владикавказ, 2004. P. 33. Прим. 52). The oldest bearer of this name is Bakatar, an 5th century Ovsian giant from the Georgian Life of Vakh tang Gorgasali (Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 414); however, such name of this legendary person hardly appeared before 8th (?) century (by the way, exactly at the time of the conclusion of Alano-Khazar alliance, see above), when the eldest part of the Life was written (reviewed in the late 11th century). Therefore, as the first historical Bakatar should be considered the above-mentioned Alanian prince (mtavar) of the late 9th century.

⁵⁷ It is unclear why Kuznetsov (Кузнецов В.А. Ук. соч. С. 42) selects as the date of ruler’s baptism exactly 916 AD.

⁵⁸ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 278–279.

⁵⁹ Догузов К.Г. Византийско-аланские отношения. Дисс. Тбилиси, 1987. P. 113-116.

⁶⁰ Kuznetsov, on the contrary, for some unclear reason believes that ruler’s baptism was the not fulfilled purpose of the first mission (Кузнецов В.А. Ук. соч. С. 45).

⁶¹ Alemany. Op. cit. P. 260; if we take Zuckermann’s dating (Цукерманн К. Про дату навернення хозар до іудаїзму й хронологію князювання Олега та Игоря // Ruthenica, 2, 2003. С. 68-69. Прим. 56), this problem does not occur at all, but his

see how we can interpret this important evidence⁶². It is impossible to understand the expression “a Christian at heart” as “a clandestine Christian” – otherwise, it would be that the Muslim writer is informed about Alan ruler better than the Alans themselves. More plausible would be the assumption that Alan ruler accepted Orthodoxy as a “private person,” not positioning himself as a Christian as head of state (otherwise the words “a Christian at heart” would be not understandable), but it is unlikely that such a complex differentiation was peculiar to the Arabs, and especially to the Alans. Therefore, it remains to suggest that the Alan ruler was inclined to Christianity and made room for the missionaries, but did not take baptism yet (hence comes his designation as “a Christian at heart”) and did not force to accept it his subjects. In any case, the addition of the words “at heart” hardly allows us to speak about the baptism of the Alan ruler in 903–913, as was suggested by V. Grumel⁶³.

Let us return to the tradition of the Abkhazian patronage over the archbishop of Alania. This tradition (dictated, possibly, by the Imperial letter from Constantinople) has found its continuation in the reign of Constantine’s son George II (922–957). In his letter 46 Nicholas Mystikos expresses his condolences over the death of his father and congratulates George for his accession to the throne. However, this letter was dictated not only by the official etiquette (it is accompanied by a gift – himation), but it contains also a specific request. The latter concerns again the archbishop of Alania: “But, as touching the Archbishop of Alania (my Son), I do not know what to write. You, as an intelligent, sensible man, and as one who knows that the Archbishop’s work is devoted to the salvation of men and the glory of God’s mighty Name, will, I am sure, without my writing, and for the reward which is reserved in Heaven for those who love God, both lend your aid to him and assist his labors. And if in that foreign nation and strange land he is in need of anything essential or tending to bring comfort to his life, you will provide it willingly, if God gives you power to do so. And may you be yet more plentifully supplied with that power, so as to help those who are in need of it!”⁶⁴ Strangely, the Patriarch even appeals to similar acts of George’s father – his help to the archbishop of Alania appears as though the duty of the Abkhazian king. But when under Constantine III the difficulties of the head of Alan Church could be related to the novelty of the whole event, then his troubles continuing under George II did not indicate a difficult situation, in which there was Christianity in even essentially pagan Alania (let us remember Ibn Ruste’s evidence) and Alan ruler’s attitude toward the head of the local Church?

The reason for patriarchal request to the Abkhazian kings were, evidently, the letters of the archbishop Peter, apparently, filled with complaints about the difficulties of the mission in Alania (it is possible that it was an exile for Peter). These letters have not survived, but survived have 5 response letters of Nicholas Mystikos (52, 118, 133–135).

Letter 51, addressed to the Abkhazian king Constantine III, follows letter 52, which was directed to Peter. This proximity suggests that the latter was sent with the same courier and belongs, respectively, to the same time (914–916)⁶⁵. The Patriarch received a letter from the archbishop, which describes, probably, the help of Abkhazian king (whom Peter, in all probability, met on the way to Alania) and the difficulties, which the archbishop had to face in a

re-dating is based only on indirect evidences, the date of Islamization of the Volga Bulgars, and of “baptism” of the Alan ruler – on the ambiguity of this interpretation, see below.

It is unclear whether the words “the king of the Alans is Christian; all the inhabitants of his Kingdom are pagans and idolaters” by Gardizi (1050–1053) are a quotation of Ibn Ruste or a description of the realities of the mid-11th century (Бартольд В. В. Сочинения. Т. IV. М. 1966. P. 61).

⁶² A. Alemany believes that the mysterious words “a Christian at heart” is simply a reference to the baptism of the Alan ruler, not trying to understand this very important characteristic (Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 257), and S.A. Ivanov simply misses it (Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 190).

⁶³ See Martin-Hisard B. Op. cit. P. 472. Her argument concerning the creation of the see of Soteriupolis for the baptism of the Alans in 901–907 is unjust, because we know that it was merged with the see of Alania only two centuries later.

⁶⁴ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 266–267.

⁶⁵ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. XXIX.

new place. As a consequence, Nicholas writes two letters: one to Constantine, thanking for his help, and another to Peter, with consolation and response to his complaints and questions.

Most part of the letter consists of rhetorical exhortations – few actual data are in its end. From the words of the archbishop, it follows that, firstly, among the Alans was a social stratification, and, secondly, they were polygamists — facts, well known to ethnographers⁶⁶. The last problem Nicholas Mystikos resolves as follows: “As for what you write of matters respecting marriage which are opposed to the Church order, and of other habits which conduce to the more pagan character of those who indulge in them, your Wisdom is aware that so sudden a conversion of pagan life into the strictness of the Gospel is not easily achieved. You should therefore continually apply your doctrine and salutary exhortation in a paternal and generous spirit; and where you find them obedient, give thanks unto Him Who giveth grace by your teaching; but where you find them recalcitrant, bear it with long-suffering, especially if the disobedient belong to the upper class of the nation, and are not governed but governors. Toward their subjects you may perhaps be able to carry yourself rather more austerest and despotically, and refuse on any account to put up with the irregularity; but toward the powerful ones, who have great power to counteract the salvation of the whole nation, you must reflect whether, if we behave too harshly to them, we may not unawares exasperate them the more, and thus turn everything upside down.”⁶⁷ So, the tactics of the Patriarch is meekness to new converts and, especially, to the rulers, from which depends the success of the mission.

However, important evidence is contained also in the beginning of the letter: Peter accuses the Patriarch that this forgot him in the wilderness, – Nicholas says that he wrote to him at least three times: may, the letters, as usual, did not reach Alania. This apology seems to be true: one of them was letter 133, which contains the original version of the patriarchal response regarding marriage: “As regards the lawless marriage, if you can by advice and instruction dissolve the union, all thanks to God! But if the case is too strong to be opposed, then see at least that the evil goes no further, and in future do not permit the tribe to be polluted by such marriages. This you may do by continual advice to the chief of the nation and to the man whose union is condoned because of its previous consummation.”⁶⁸

Since letter 133 is, obviously, the first Nicholas’ epistle to the archbishop after Peter’s departure from the capital, it turns out that letter 52 is a summary of letter 133, which is not reached the addressee. The neighbourhood of letter 52 with letter 51 (914–916, see above) causes date it to the same period, – it seems logical that the patriarch has repeated his answer to Peter soon after missing the first letter, sent in 914, but with some changes. From the comparison of letters 133 and 52 it is clear that the basis of patriarchal tactics is to find the best way out of a difficult situation: at the beginning (letter 133) he proposed to restrict polygamy only by the marriages, concluded before the baptism, hoping that over time they will disappear; but after (letter 52) he softened his position in relation to the nobility. Changing patriarchal position should be viewed as a concession to the traditional customs of the barbarians, since the rigorism⁶⁹ in this issue, as correctly says S.A. Ivanov⁷⁰, damaged already before the mission of Cyril and Methodius.

Letter 118 and 134 are just a brief exhortation to Peter not to despair. Unfortunately, their exact dating is difficult, but we should agree with their publishers that they are sent after letter 133, but also in 914–916. Indeed, in this case, it turns out that before letter 52 Nicholas Mystikos, indeed, “wrote... three times,” to Peter (letters 133, 134 and 118).

⁶⁶ See Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 258.

⁶⁷ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 284-287.

⁶⁸ Ibid. P. 284-286.

⁶⁹ Although the original position of the patriarch, which allowed a saving already existing second, third, etc. marriages, can hardly be called adamant, as S.A. Ivanov does (Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 189).

⁷⁰ Иванов С.А. Ук. соч. С. 189.

Last letter 135, besides the usual encouragements of always depressing Peter through some examples from sacred history, adds another interesting detail to the picture of Christianization of Alania. The Patriarch sent help to the archbishop – Abbot Euthymios, the first baptist of the Alans (see above). It is unclear, from whose letter Nicholas learned about the strife between them, but he writes to Peter as following: “I exhort and urge you now more than ever to make use of your invariable and characteristic mildness and generosity and your humility for Christ, to see to it that the evil one can sow no tares between your Virtue and my most pious Son, your brother, Master Euthymios, nor may (as is his wont, for he is resourceful in malice and has from the beginning introduced enmity between God and His creation) devise some hidden obstacle to your unity and love in the Lord; but, as truly a man of God, who knows how to win over all men, pray make it a resolve of the first importance to conciliate *Euthymios* and his companions, so that no excuse for quarreling or division shall occur anywhere. The man is in any case pious and a worker of virtue, and for this reason should be treated with all respect and honour; but especially so because he was your predecessor⁷¹ as herald of piety to that nation, and himself sowed the seed of doctrine, and has undertaken the journey to you to be your collaborator and—God willing—to lighten the burden of your labors by participating in your spiritual endeavor.”⁷²

The formal reason for sending such a help in the person of Euphemios could be just the persistent complaints and requests of the archbishop in his letters to the patriarch. It is not excluded, however, that the archbishop was unable to achieve success not only in his ecclesiastical mission (for example, to resolve the problem of polygamy), but also in its political component. In any case, Euthymios had to assume some archbishop’s functions that could cause the displeasure of the latter. In addition, Euthymios, who had his own long experience with the Alans, could have his own view on the tactics of Christianization, not coinciding with the position of Peter. It is important that in this conflict Nicholas Mystikos, using conciliatory tone, clearly supports Euthymios: he calls the archbishop to humility and reverence regarding the lowest dignity of abbot, calls the latter “my most pious Son, your brother,” highlights his achievements in the illumination of the Alans. It is unclear just how the second Euthymios’ arrival in Alania should be dated: before or after his trip to Bulgaria, which took place soon after 20 August 917 (see above). If it happened before the summer of 917, all almost known events of Christianization of Alania should be concentrated in a narrow space between 912 and 917. However, because this conflict is not mentioned in the earlier letters of Nicholas Mystikos to the archbishop Peter (written after 914), thus it leaves a very little time for this struggle (915 – 1st half of 917)⁷³. But if Euthymios’ arrival took place after 917, the problems faced by the archbishop Peter and the abbot Euthymios, move closer to the end of Nicholas’ patriarchate, i.e., to 918–925, shortly before the tragic events about 932 (see I. 3).

Finally, let us state an opinion about another possible date for the early history of Alan Christianity. S.N. Malakhov’s suggestion⁷⁴, that in letter 23 (922 AD) the Alans are mentioned among the “nations who dwell in paganism”⁷⁵ is based on a literal interpretation of the Byzantine epistolary rhetoric (this participation of the Alans in the anti-Bulgarian coalition drew special attention O. Pritzak⁷⁶). This definition Nicholas Mystikos really uses, however, not in direct connection with the Alans, but at the end of the next paragraph, drawing dramatic tension in the description of the impending war of the Bulgarians against the above-mentioned big coalition (consisting of the Russians, Pechenegs, Alans and Western Turks). With the same reason we could attribute to this coalition the words before their enumeration: “the cessation of bloodshed

⁷¹ Probably the word “your” (ὁμοῦν) here refers to Peter’s staff, the Byzantine priests, who shall be cast out in 932 (see below).

⁷² Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 440–443.

⁷³ Although we cannot exclude that Euthymios could be revoked by the Patriarch exactly for the Bulgarian mission (see also above).

⁷⁴ Малахов С.Н. Ук. соч. С. 33.

⁷⁵ Nicolaus Mysticus. Op. cit. P. 440–442.

⁷⁶ Golb N. Pritzak O. Khazarian Hebrew documents of the tenth century. Ithaca, London, 1982. P. 136. Note 57. The bibliography of this campaign see in Savvides. Op. cit. P. 49–50.

which has been practiced by Christians on Christians.” What has prompted S.N. Malakhov to this re-dating, we will see below. Now let us turn to the political component of Christianization of Alania.

Conclusion

Let us summarize our observations on the history of Alan Christianity in the 10th century (now without detailed guidance on the degree of probability of certain details). Somewhere before 912, perhaps even in the first patriarchate of Nicholas Mystikos (901–907), in Alania begin the activities of the monks-missionaries, headed by his agent, Euthymios. Returning to the throne in 912, Nicholas recalls these missionaries for the report in Constantinople (perhaps he needed Euthymios personally) and instead creates for Alania an archiepiscopal see, not just improving the position of Alan Church, but also adapting it to the new status of Alania as a Christian state (like Abkhazia). This change was invented in 912, prepared in 913 and, finally, realized in 914⁷⁷. Archbishop Peter parts from Constantinople in the early 914 and, obviously, in the same year arrives in Alania. His helpers, at least at the initial stage, were the old allies of the Alans, Abkhazian kings Constantine III (up to 922) and his son George II (from 922): with requests to them addresses the Patriarch himself. Archbishop Peter in Alania was not only restricted in necessary things (this puts into question the possibility of a large Church building in this period), but also forced to encounter resistance against some aspects of his policy from Alan nobility. The main stumbling block was the traditional problem of barbarian polygamy, which Nicholas Mystikos tried to resolve twice, in few different ways, in the letters to his protégé, but not all of them arrived to the addressee. Difficulties in the ecclesiastical and possibly diplomatic activity which occurred before Peter, prone to depression, was required to allow Abbot Euthymios, sent for the second time in Alania. However, his intervention in the affairs of the archbishop caused a new conflict, which the Patriarch tried to settle, supporting rather Euphemios. This discord is last known event in the history of Alan Church before its crash about 932 – the expulsion of the bishops and priests from Alania.

⁷⁷ On this date see also Martin-Hisard B. Op. cit. P. 472-473.

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