



NATIONAL RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Andrey Yu. Vinogradov

INTERNATIONAL POSITION OF CHRISTIAN ALANIA IN THE 10TH CENTURY

BASIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

WORKING PAPERS

**SERIES: HUMANITIES
WP BRP 147/HUM/2017**

Andrey Yu. Vinogradov¹

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The article is dedicated to the international position of Christian Alania in the 10th century, including defeat by the Khazars after 932 and expulsion of the clergy, and re-Christianization about 950. Narrative, sigillographic, epigraphic and archaeological sources are used. As result the international position of Christian Alania in the 10th century is reconstructed.

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

JEL Classification: Z.

¹ National Research University Higher School of Economics. School of history, Associate Professor; Email: auvinogradov@hse.ru.

Данное научное исследование (№15-01-0011) выполнено при поддержке Программы «Научный фонд НИУ ВШЭ» в 2014–2015 гг. Работа выполнена при финансовой поддержке Правительства РФ в рамках реализации «Дорожной карты» Программы 5/100 Национального исследовательского университета «Высшая школа экономики».

The goal of this paper is to consider the history of Alania after the Christianization about 914 in the context of Eastern Christianity.

I.1 1st half of the 10th century

The fate of Christianity in new converted Alania for decades has become hostage of political games of the great powers. So let us now consider how the conversion to Christianity of the Alan prince influenced the positions of Alania in international politics. Again, we are faced with the problem of sources: almost all information about participation of the Alans in international politics contains only one Hebrew text of the Khazar origin – the so-called *Cambridge document* (also called *Schechter Letter*)². This manuscript of the 12th century found in Cairo geniza is a fragment of a letter, sent by a Khazar Jew who lived during the reign of the king Joseph. There is also another problem: the data of the *Cambridge document* not always concords with the so-called *Khazar correspondence* between Cordoba's Jew Hasdai ibn Shaprut and above-mentioned king Joseph.

This chronological ambiguity produces controversies about the date of the military alliance of the Khazars and Alans, which was signed in the not well dated time of Khazar king Sabriel, and of its war against the Byzantine-Turkish coalition, mentioned in the *Cambridge document* (lines 49–54): “[But in the days of Benjamin] the king, all the nations were rose up against [Khazaria] and they brought them into straits [according to the counsel] of the king of Macedon. And the king of Asia and Turkey went into battle [...] and Painil and Macedon; only the king of Alan was in support of [the people of Khazar], for some of them were observing the Torah of the Jews. [All] these kings waged war against Khazaria; but the king of Alan went against their land and [smote them with skaughter], so that there was no recovery.”³ C. Zuckermann⁴ dates this campaign to ca. 920, AD completely ignoring the fact that in it on the Khazar side took part the Alans, who immediately after their baptism would hardly have changed his pro-Byzantine political orientation; on the contrary, in 922 the Alans became a part of the Byzantine anti-Bulgarian coalition (see I. 2). Thus, there is no reason to abandon the traditional dating of this war by the late 9th – early 10th centuries – in any case, by the time before 912⁵ (see also below); we should remember here typically Turkish titles of the Alan rulers: *bakatar* in the early 10th century (see I. 2) and *K.rk.ndāğ*, i.e., *kār-kündāğ* (?), mentioned by al-Masudi in the mid-10th century⁶ (see also below).

Let us note another important point: Alan aid is explained here by the fact that “some of them were observing the Torah of the Jews.” The presence of Jewish proselytes among the Alans does not seem completely impossible⁷: Benjamin of Tudela reports that in the 2nd half of the 12th century to Daniel Ben Hasdai, the exilarchos of Israel, obeyed also Jewish communities of the “country of Alania,”⁸ although there it could be ethnic Jews in Alania (while all Arab authors unanimously call the Alans pagans before their Christization; the only evidence about the Alans-Muslims by Yakut al-Rumi is relatively late⁹). However, it is also possible that the author of the

² Schechter S. An unknown Khazar document // The Jewish quarterly review, 3, 1912-1913. P. 206-209; Golb N. Pritzak O. Khazarian Hebrew documents of the tenth century. Ithaca, London, 1982. P. 112-115.

³ Cited after Alemany A. Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation. Leiden, 2000. P. 333.

⁴ Цукерманн К. Про дату навернення хозар до іудаїзму й хронологію князювання Олега та Игоря // Ruthenica, 2, 2003. С. 69-70; cf. below on Pritsak's attempt to change the date of another, hostile contact between the Alans and Khazars: both Zuckermann and Pritsak try to invent dates, which correspond their chronologies of the Khazar history.

⁵ Also against Artamonov (Артамонов М.И. История хазар. Л. 1962. P. 358). An overview of the dating Benjamin's reign see in Новосельцев А.П. Хазарское государство и его роль в истории Восточной Европы и Кавказа. М. 1990. Прим. 325-327.

⁶ See Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 363. In general, the question of Turkization of the Western Alania requires a separate study. Here, the researchers can easily go to extremes: from the assumption of exclusively Turkic character of this region (mostly by Karachay and Balkar studies) to its complete negation (in some Ossetian studies). The most balanced we believe the average approach.

⁷ See also the comments of V. Ya. Perukhin in Голб Н. Прицак О. Хазарско-еврейские... С. 218.

⁸ Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 431.

⁹ Ibid. P. 352-353. Прим. 85. А. Ю. Погребной. Особенности христианизации западной Алании во второй половине VII – XIV вв. Дисс. Ростов-на-Дону, 2009, puts no direct arguments in favour of Zoroastrism among the Alans.

Cambridge document, describing the events which passed, at least, two generations ago, could transfer the realities of his own time (i.e., of the military and dynastic alliance of the Khazars and Alans, see below) to the past (if not simply invent this reason of Alans' friendliness).

The only more or less clear chronological reference gives the reign of the king Joseph, when the *Cambridge document* was composed: he was a contemporary of "Romanus, the evil one," i.e., the Byzantine emperor Romanos I Lakapenos (920–944)¹⁰. Joseph's father was Aaron, who is mentioned in the *Cambridge document* (lines 55-60) in a following way: "But also in the days or Aaron the king, the king of Alan waged war against Khazar, for the king of Greece incited him. But Aaron hired against him the king of Turkey for he was his friend], and the king of Alan fell before Aaron, who captured him alive; but [the king] honoured [him greatly], and took his daughter as a wife for his son Joseph. Then the king of Alan [swore] fealty to him and Aaron the king sent him [to his house]. And from that day on, the fear of Khazar fell upon the nations which were around them."¹¹

To the same event can be attributed the mention of the Alans among the peoples conquered by the Khazars, in the large version of the king Joseph's letter (see below). As indirect evidence can serve a passage from the Georgian *Lives of the Georgian kings*: "Much time has passed since then; all these tribes [the Ovses and Durduks — *D. B., A. V.*] remained tributaries of the Khazars"¹²; although its author Leonti Mroveli confuses the Khazars with the Scytho-Sarmatian tribes, his reports of later events are relatively correct. So, a peace treaty between Aaron and the Alans was reinforced by the marriage of his son Joseph with a daughter of the Alan ruler. Partly this peace was a renewal of the old alliance under the king Benjamin (see above). With this marriage, one can link also the increase of the Turkic title of Alan ruler from bagatar to k.rk.ndāg (see above; cf. I. 4)¹³.

Without going into details of Byzantine-Khazar relations, we note only that still under Leo VI (886–912) the Khazars were allied of the emperor, helping him in the war against Bulgaria in 896¹⁴. But since in the reign of the same emperor, apparently, falls also the Byzantine-Khazar war under the king Benjamin (see above), then under Leo VI the Empire was at various points an ally and an opponent of the Khazars. It seems more logical that the conclusion of the Byzantine-Khazar alliance was a result of the defeat of the Empire in the war against Benjamin (i.e., before 896), than vice versa. In this case, the institution of the archbishopric of Alania in 912–914 (parallel with Leo's VI death and Nicholas' Mystikos return) and the subsequent baptism of Alan ruler has violated the geopolitical balance in favour of Byzantium – the Empire get an important and mighty ally in the Caucasus.

Now, to understand the logic of the events, we must decide whether to equate the return movement of the pendulum of Alan policy towards the Khazars after this war with the expulsion of Christians from Alania about 932¹⁵. The only source that tells about this fact are the *Meadows of gold and mines of gems* by al-Masudi. The Arab geographer died in 956 and was a contemporary of the above-mentioned events, so that its information has a high degree of reliability and, in addition, is indirectly supported by data from other sources (see below).

First, let us analyze the information of al-Masudi¹⁶ about the conversion of the Alans to Christianity. The words "after the spread of Islam during the Abbasid" indicate, apparently, at the time when the power of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad began to weaken, starting from

¹⁰ His contemporaneity with another historical person, the Russian prince Oleg, remains a subject of debate (see Цукерманн К. Ук. соч.).

¹¹ Cited after Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 333.

¹² The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia), Tbilisi, 2014. P. 18.

¹³ Кодзаев К.М. Верховная власть алан I–X вв. Владикавказ, 2008. P. 132.

¹⁴ Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium. Vol. 2 / ed. A. Kazhdan. New York, Oxford, 1991. P. 1127.

¹⁵ Cf. Цукерманн К. Ук. соч. С. 70-71; Петрухин В.Я. Раевский Д.С. Очерки народов России в древности и раннем Средневековье. Москва, 2004. P. 228.

¹⁶ Cited after Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 347.

830ies¹⁷. Christianization of the Alan rulers before 932 is confirmed by Nicholas Mystikos and Ibn Ruste (see above). Mention “of bishops and priests, sent to him by king Rum” (i.e., the Byzantine Emperor) among the Alan after their Christianization is linked with the institution of the archbishopric of Alania about 912 and confirmed by the letters of Nicholas Mystikos (see I. 2). The question of several bishops in Alania before 932 remains open (contrary to some researchers who insist on the arrival of several hierarchs in Alania¹⁸), since we have no other evidences of their existence, and al-Masudi hardly understood the details of the ecclesiastic structure of the archbishopric. Characteristically, the Arab author considers the sending of the clergy from Byzantium as an initiative of the Emperor – this phenomenon we will meet again later, by analysis of Senty inscription of 965. Yet again, we note that a full coincidence of al-Masudi’s data with independent Greek sources¹⁹ demonstrates a high degree of his reliability.

Let us turn, finally, to the tragic expulsion of Christians from Alania. About dating of this event it should be noted that, firstly, it is unclear when exactly after the year 320 of Hijra it occurred; secondly, it is possible that al-Masudi takes year 320 as a round date, i.e., a conventional chronological marker²⁰. So this expulsion occurred, apparently, somewhere shortly after 932.

The background of this events as described by al-Masudi is in good agreement with *Cambridge document*. According to al-Masudi, the baptism of the Alans was initiated by the “king of Rum”: it was either Leo VI, in which reign the missionaries, very likely, already worked among the Alans (see above), or his heirs – Alexander (912–913) and Constantine VII with his Regents, Zoe Karbonopsina and Nicholas Mystikos. The latter, judging by his letters, was the mastermind behind the whole enterprise. Guide of anti-Khazarian policy (likely, in alliance with the Alans) became Romanos I Lakapenos (920–944), named in *Cambridge document* “evil Romanos”. So, as a result of the Christianization of the Alans, the Byzantine Empire get them as allies and hinder them, therefore, from the Khazars²¹. O. Pritzak²² believes that such a step of the Alans was provoked by the fear of defeat by the Byzantine-Pecheneg alliance, but there is no evidence in favour of this interpretation of the events: firstly, it should be recalled the recent victories of the Alan ruler over anti-Khazarian coalition (see above), and secondly, the initiative of the Christianization, judging by Nicholas’ letters, came exactly from Byzantium, which leaned on his ally, the Abkhazian king. However, rather the military power of the Alans, who defeated the Greeks in the above-mentioned Byzantine-Khazar war in the late 9th – early 10th centuries, forced the Empire to seek alliance with them, which led to the Christianization of Alania in 910ies. Push the Empire to it could also an easy way of achieving this goal – long-standing alliance of the Alans with Abkhazian kindom, Christian state loyal to Byzantium.

The apogee of this policy was the war between the Alans and Khazar, inspired by the Empire, under Aaron, mentioned in the *Cambridge document*. Let us recall that the only solid chronological marker here is the simultaneity of Aaron’s son Joseph and Romanos Lakapenos (920–944). Thus, if we assume that Joseph (who lived until 955²³) he succeeded to Aaron between 932 and 944, it is quite possible that the defeat of the Alans in the war against Aaron and the dynastic alliance with the Khazar king caused the rejection of the Byzantine (i.e., hostile at the moment to the Khazars) Christianity and the expulsion of the Greek clergy.

C. Zuckermann²⁴ quite logical supplied in connection with this event the persecution of the Jews in the Byzantine Empire under Romanos Lakapenos²⁵. In his opinion, it was the response of

¹⁷ Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium. Vol. 1 / ed. A. Kazhdan. New York, Oxford. 1991. P. 2.

¹⁸ Martin-Hisard B. Op. cit. P. 473.

¹⁹ Ibn Ruste’s work was, apparently, known to Al-Masudi.

²⁰ Pritzak’s conjecture (Golb N. Pritzak O. Op. cit. P. 136), who corrected the 320 year of Hijra by al-Masudi to 310, was not caused by the internal textual problems, but is simply an attempt to circumvent the date inconvenient for his reconstruction of Khazar history (see similar example above, I. 2). Therefore, Malakhov’s attempt (Ук. соч. С. 34) to re-date on this basis (see I. 2.) Alans’ refusal from Christianity looks unconvincing.

²¹ Cf. Golb N. Pritzak O. Op. cit. P. 135.

²² Ibid. P. 135-136.

²³ Цукерманн К. Ук. соч. С. 56.

²⁴ Цукерманн К. Ук. соч. С. 70-71.

the Empire on developments in Alania, by analogy, however, twice hypothetical²⁶, with the persecution of 860ies. But for such a sequence our sources give a very short time: the letter of the Venetian Doge Peter II, which mentions the decree of Romanos Lekapenos about the persecution of the Jews, was read at Erfurt council in the summer of 932²⁷ – therefore, all previous events (the expulsion of Christians from Alania, the news about it in Constantinople, Emperor’s decree, the news about it in Venice, and finally, sending a letter to Erfurt) have to be enclosed in a narrow space of the late winter – spring of 932: year 320 of Hijra began on 18 January 932 AD (especially that al-Masudi says about the expulsion of the clergy “after year 320 of Hijra”, see above). Let us also not forget that the initiator of the conflict between the Alans and Khazars was Byzantium, and therefore the logic of events here may be the reverse²⁸: the persecution of the Jews by Romanos was part of a campaign launched against Khazaria (then for all the above-mentioned events we have, at least, twice more time), and the expulsion of the Christians from Alania was a response action of the Khazars.

We could expect that the expulsion of the Christian clergy from Alania about 932 must be accompanied by the destruction of the churches erected by it. Church no. 6 (the early 10th century) on the Ilyichevskoe settlement was destroyed soon after its construction, apparently by the inhabitants themselves, and nearby, in Gamova Gully, the church plates were found, reused for pagan burials²⁹. Let us also recall the assumption of V. Kuznetsov³⁰ that the not excavated semicircular stepped stone masonry, oriented to the East, under Senty mausoleum, is the base of the apse of the earlier church. Then this church could also be destroyed about 932: an indirect evidence of this may serve a passage of Senty inscription about the “renovation” of the church (see III.3.A).

Here we should recall also an unusual evidence of the contemporary of this event, al-Masudi (§ 22), on the supremacy of the Alan ruler over the Abkhazians. It is likely that in 930-940ies the Alans, in alliance with the Khazars, who stood on the peak of their power (see above and I. 4), began an expansion to the West and South-West – to the Black sea coast, subordinating Adygian tribes of the North-Eastern Black sea region (see I. 5) and, in some measure, also Abkhazia: not a chance in the long version of his answer king Joseph says: «все аланы до границы Аф-кана [вероятно, Абхазии]... платят мне дань»³¹. This dominance was closely linked to the power of their allies, the Khazars, and therefore was very short³², but it is not surprising that after this, the Emperor, returned the Alans into his sphere of influence, enhanced the status of the Alan ruler, but not Abkhazian (see I. 4). In any case, untenable is the opinion of B. Martin-Hisard³³, who suggests the resumption of Alano-Byzantine alliance in the late 930ies, based on Ber’s

²⁵ Pritzak (Golb N. Pritzak O. Op. cit. P. 136) in accordance with his chronology of Khazar history shifts the date of this persecution to the early 920-ies (see above).

²⁶ Hypothetical is Zuckermann’s dating of the Judaization of the Khazars and also hypothetical is its relationship with Jewish persecution under Basil I.

²⁷ *Gesta Berengarii Regis* / ed. E. Dümmler. Halle, 1871. P. 158.

²⁸ Cf. Golb N. Pritzak O. Op. cit. P. 104.

²⁹ Каминский В.Н. Каминская И.В. Новые исследования христианских храмов малых форм в Западной Алании // Историко-археологический альманах. Т. 2. Армавир, 1996. P. 172-180; their conclusion about similar “voluntary” destruction of the church no. 3 is based only on the analogy with the church no. 6 and is not confirmed by archaeological material, and therefore does not seem to be very convincing.

³⁰ Кузнецов В.А. Зодчество феодальной Алании. Орджоникидзе, 1977. P. 83.

³¹ Коковцев П.К. Еврейско-хазарская... С. 101-102. Прим. 13).

³² Yu. S. Gagloiti (Ук. соч. С. 164-166. Прим. 64) proposed a hypothesis of a long-term presence of the Alans in Abkhazia. However, most of his arguments are not very convincing: it is unlikely that the Alan Bakatar was the eristav of Abkhazia (see I. 2); no evidence in early sources finds also Vakhushti’s mention that king Leo I (late 8th century) gave to his second eristav “Anakopia with the Alans.” Characteristically, John Tzetzes in the 12th century puts the Alans in third place after the Iberians (i.e. Georgians) and Abasgians (Chiliades 5, 17, 590). A very mysterious passage “the country of the Alans, i.e. Abkhazia” in the Georgian History and Eulogy of Monarchs (early 13th century) is excluded in the last critical edition: “The king [George III (1156-1184) – D. B. A. V.] ... hunted all over Abkhazia” (The Georgian Chronicles of Kartlis Tskhovreba (A History of Georgia), Tbilisi, 2014. P. 233; <http://www.science.org.ge/books/Kartlis%20xovreba/Kartlis%20xovreba%202012%20Eng.pdf>).

³³ Martin-Hisard B. Op. cit. P. 473.

campaign, which has nothing to do with the Alans³⁴, and on sigillography: we have no precisely dated Alan seals from this period (see I. 4).

I.2 2nd half of the 10th century

How long has preserved the alliance between Alania and Khazaria (obviously anti-Byzantine), which meant ipso facto the refusal of the Alans from Christianity? Unil now³⁵ lives a hypothesis of H. Geltzer, according to which *Notitia episcopatum* 9, not mentioning Alania, was created about 940; meanwhile, J. Darrouzes³⁶ already showed that it is impossible to specify the location of this document within the 10th century (as well as of the *Notitia* 10). If, for example, this notice refers to the time before 940, Alania could not be there, because there are no autocephalous archbishoprics (such as Cherson and Bosphoros), to which category the see of Alania belonged in 910–920ies. Thus, this significant argument that was repeated by many scientists, including ourselves³⁷, simply does not exist.

Perhaps in our search helpful will be the participation of the Alans in the raid against Berdaa in 944/5. Bar-Hebraeus³⁸ says about the participation of the Alan, Rus' and Lesgs, and Nizami³⁹ – of the Rus', Burtas, Alans and Khazars. This campaign of the Rus', recently defeated by the Khazars⁴⁰, was, in all likelihood, authorized by the latter⁴¹, and, therefore, the participation of the Alans could be considered as an act of compliance with their treaty obligations to Khazaria⁴². Then it becomes clear the fact that the author of the *Cambridge document* (ca. 949) says nothing about the violation of the Alano-Khazar alliance of one or the other party. However, as an *argumentum ex silentio*, it may not be considered as a solid proof that the *status quo* of 932 remained about 949: anonymous Khazar author reports only of the wars (and only about victorious), and not about all the changes in the political situation – from his silence follows only the fact that there were no more the armed clashes between the Alans and Khazars in 932–949. So, we take the raid against Berdaa in 944/5 as last evidence for the existence of Alano-Khazar military alliance. Thus, for its break remains only a narrow gap between 945 and, at the latest, 950 (see below).

The first one, which albeit indirectly, signals the return of the Alan ruler to Christianity, is the encyclopedic treatise “De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae.” This text was created by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus for his son Romanos II, and revised in the reign of Basil II⁴³. But ch. II, 48, which will be discussed further, contains the names of Constantine and Romanos and was created between 945 and 959. Here we find the formula for letters to various foreign rulers: Alan prince stays, characteristically, on the first place among all the North Caucasian rulers⁴⁴. The appeal “spiritual son” goes back to the Byzantine tradition, when the emperors

³⁴ According to Asolik (Histoire universelle par Étienne Asolik de Tarôn (deuxième partie), traduite... par F. Macler, Paris, 1917. P. 26–27), Abas put an end to the invasion of the Iberians and Sarmatians, by which he understands the inhabitants of the Abkhazian Kingdom: “Un jour, à la tête d'innombrables troupes, Bêr, le prince des Aphkhaz... venant du pays des Sarmates, qui est au delà des montagnes du Caucase...” The fact that the Caucasus mountains mentioned here Asolik are Meskheta (or Arsiani) ridge, and the land of the Sarmatians is Abkhazian Kingdom, is clear from another Asolik's passage (Ibid. P. 134–135): “C'est pourquoi le fils de Gourgen, roi des Aphkhaz, marcha avec des forces considérables, du pays des Sarmates, contre Dawith (David) le curopulate, et son aïeul Bagarat. Ayant franchi la chaîne du Caucase, il vint camper sur les bords du fleuve Kour.”

³⁵ See, e.g. Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 259.

³⁶ Notitia. P. 92-94, 117.

³⁷ Белецкий Д.В. Виноградов А.Ю. Фрески Сентинского храма и проблемы истории аланского христианства в X в. in PA, 2005. № 1. P. 140.

³⁸ See Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 500.

³⁹ Ibid. P. 473.

⁴⁰ See Цукерманн К. Ук. соч. С. 71-84.

⁴¹ Полевой Н.Я. О маршруте похода русских на Бердаа и русско-хазарских отношениях в 943 г. in ВВ. Т. 20. М. 1961. P. 90-105.

⁴² It is also likely that this strengthening of the Eastern activity of the Alans is linked with the dynastic union of the rulers of the Alans and Avarians (Sarirs), which, as a recent, mentions al-Masudi (943-947 гг.; see Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 347).

⁴³ ???

⁴⁴ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus. De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae libri duo. Vol. 1 / ed. J.J. Reiske // Corpus scriptorum historiae Byzantinae, 10. Bonn, 1829. P. 688.

became godfathers of the barbarian chiefs, i.e., their “spiritual fathers.”⁴⁵ But even if the Alan ruler was not baptized in Constantinople (such a baptism would be very significant and simultaneous with the baptism of the Russian Princess Olga in the Byzantine capital), by the name of “spiritual son” the Emperor could be called only a Christian. In addition, this appeal had high status: Constantine gives it only to the rulers of Bulgaria and Great Armenia.

The second eye-catching point here is an unique title of exousiokrator that got Alan ruler⁴⁶, who was an usual archon during his first Christianization. However, the appeal ὁ τῆς Ἀλανίας ἄρχων in letter 51 of Nicholas Mystikos is hardly to be understood as *terminus technicus*: this designation received from the Byzantines as almost all the rulers in the Caucasus, including those who were far from any subjection to the Empire. Meanwhile, exousiokrator stays on the first place in the list of the titles of barbarian rulers in *De ceremoniis* II, 46⁴⁷ and is attached only to Alan ruler both by Constantine Porphyrogenitus and by Anna Komnena in *Alexias* 13, 6, 2⁴⁸, who is the only one of the writers, except Constantine, mentioning this title. It turns out that the highest title for barbaric rulers was created *ad hoc* for Alania⁴⁹. Such a growth of Alan ruler’s status could be caused by its similar increase through the Khazars shortly before it, about 932 (see I. 3). Finally, Ju. Kulakovskiy noted that Alan ruler is only one in the Caucasus, to whom the Emperor speaks not with a κέλευσις, i.e., an order, but as to an independent sovereign⁵⁰.

Byzantium interest in Alania Constantine Porphyrogenitus stresses thrice also in his treatise *De administrando imperio*, 10–11 (late 940ies): “The Uzes can attack the Chazars, for they are their neighbours, and so can the ruler of Alania. Nine regions of Chazaria are adjacent to Alania, and the Alan can, if he be so minded, plunder these and so cause great damage and dearth among the Chazars: for from these nine regions come all the livelihood and plenty of Chazaria... If the ruler of Alania is not at peace with the Chazars, but thinks preferable the friendship of the emperor of the Romans, then, if the Chazars are not minded to preserve friendship and peace with the emperor, he, *the Alan*, may do them great hurt by ambushing their routes and setting upon them when they are off their guard, in their passage to Sarkel and the Regions and Cherson. And if this ruler will act zealously to check them, then Cherson and the Regions may enjoy great and profound peace; for the Chazars, afraid of the attack of the Alans and consequently not being free to attack Cherson and the Regions with an army, since they are not strong enough to fight both at once, will be compelled to remain at peace.”⁵¹

Clear is an interest, almost flattery of the Byzantines to Alania (“the ruler of Alania... *thinks preferable the friendship* of the emperor of the Romans”), as a threat to the Khazars, hostile at the time of the Empire⁵², but what made Alan themselves once again to change the political orientation? It is not excluded that also here it was made not without clever Byzantine diplomacy. However, it is typical that Constantine did not consider it necessary to initiate Alan against the Khazars, pointing the hostility of Alan exousiokrator with the latter as the real political factor, the same as the proximity of these two peoples. Thus, chronological period for the break of the Alano-Khazar alliance (see above) narrows even more: it is the gap between 944/5 and late 940ies.

⁴⁵ ???

⁴⁶ The title of exsiastes in the text of the bulla should be considered an error of the scribe of the 12th century-manuscript, since Constantine himself uses the title exousiokrator regarding Alan ruler other three times. Perhaps this error was caused by the rarity of this title, which the scribe was replaced with the more frequent, from the text of the neighbouring bulla. However, it is possible that it could be an error of Constantine himself, who gave accidentally the text the old an bulla (see below).

⁴⁷ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus. *De cerimoniis*. P. 679.

⁴⁸ Anna Comnène. *Alexiade*. Vol. 3 / ed. B. Leib. Paris, 1945. P. 108.

⁴⁹ Alemany A. *Op. cit.* P. 242.

⁵⁰ Кулаковский Ю.А. Аланы по сведениям классических и византийских писателей. Киев, 1899. P. 53.

⁵¹ Constantine Porphyrogenitus. *De administrando imperio* / ed. G. Moravcsik. 2nd edn. (*Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae* 1 (= *Dumbarton Oaks Texts* 1)). Washington, D.C. 1967. P. 62-65.

⁵² Purest scholastic exercise in geopolitics considers this text only A. Toynbee (*Toynbee A. Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his world*. L. 1973. P. 507-508); cf. Alemany’s right indication on the witness of the Cambridge document on at least one Byzantine-Khazar war (*Alemany A. Op. cit.* P. 242).

Quoting al-Masudi, all researchers are focusing on the above-mentioned (see I. 3) evidence about the expulsion of the Christian clergy from Alania about 932 – meanwhile, no one pays attention that this author, who wrote his work in 943–956, is silent about the return of Alan ruler to Christianity. This could be attributed to the desire of the Muslim writer to talk only about the facts positive for Islam, but this is contrary to the generally accepted notion of al-Masudi’s objectivity. In favour of the existence of Alano-Khazar alliance in the time of al-Masudi speaks also the fact that he apply to Alan ruler the Turkic Khazar title K.rk.ndāğ (see I. 3). How do we reconcile al-Masudi’s silence with the description of the ongoing hostility of the Alans against the Khazars and their friendship with Byzantium by his contemporary Constantine (944–959)? In reality, the *Meadows of gold and precious stones* date back to the first half of this period (completed in 943, expanded in 947)⁵³, and *De administrando imperio* should be dated to its second half (947–959), and, most likely, to the late 940ies (see above). Therefore, the resumption of Alano-Byzantine alliance occurred somewhere between 943/947 and 950.

The most likely cause of the next change of Alan political course in the late 940ies was Alans’ desire to get out from Khazar control imposed on them as a result of defeat about 932. In addition, this rupture could be due to the possible death of the Alan princess, the wife of Khazar king Joseph (Joseph lived until 955), and of the old Alan ruler, who was Joseph’s father-in-law. In any case, this rupture passes on the background of the gradual decline of the Khazar Empire: after victories over the Russians in the early 940ies it suffers from them three defeats, from Svyatoslav in 965 and 967 and from Vladimir in 985⁵⁴.

Thus, the interest in the conclusion of an alliance between Byzantium and the Alans was mutual: the first sought to strengthen its North-Eastern frontier (primarily against the Khazar), while the latter sought support in deliverance from the Khazar dependency, which was a result of the military defeat. In this context, the return to Christianity marks not only the confirmation of an alliance with the Empire, but also an anti-Khazar gesture, because exactly the Khazars forced the Alans to destroy their own Church.

To strengthen this alliance with the Alans, Byzantium not only raises the status of Alan ruler to unprecedented heights of exousiokrator; simultaneously it increases also the status of the resurrected local Church: the archbishopric of Alania became the metropolis. This political background explains also the titular status Alan metropolis, without suffragans (on the possible existence of several bishops in Alanya before 932, see I. 3): Kuznetsov, suggesting presence of several bishoprics within the metropolis of Alania, has not cited any actual argument in favour of their existence, except a very late evidence (14th century) of the bishopric of Kaucakia⁵⁵. According to the *Notitia episcopatum*, where are always mentioned all suffragans of a metropolis, the 10–12th centuries the metropolitan of Alania has no suffragans, and *Notitia* 13 (12th century) confirms it *expressis verbis*⁵⁶.

Until recently, the first known metropolitan of Alania was Nicholas, in 997/8⁵⁷. But in recent years there have been appeared two new sources. Firstly, a seal of Metropolitan of Alania Ignatius from Zacos collection, which J.-C. Cheynet attributed to the turn of the 10–11th centuries⁵⁸, W. Seibt dated to the mid-10th century or even earlier⁵⁹ (it can lead us to an early dating of the “re-Christianization” in the 1st half of 950ies). If Seibt’s opinion is correct⁶⁰, it is quite likely that it was the first metropolitan of Alania, who arrived there after the restoration of

⁵³ ???

⁵⁴ Oxford... Vol. 2. P. 1127.

⁵⁵ Кузнецов В.А. Ук. соч. С. 82. The critics see in Каштанов Д. Указ. соч. P. 200–201.

⁵⁶ Notitiae.. P. 367.

⁵⁷ Ficker G. Op. cit. S. 93-94.

⁵⁸ Cheynet J.-C. Sceaux de la collection Zacos. Paris, 2001. P. 13f.

⁵⁹ Зайбт В. Византийские печати из Алании «μητροπολιτης Ἀλανίας» и «ἐξουσιοκράτωρ Ἀλανίας» // Новое в византийской сфрагистике. СПб. 2003. P. 14.

⁶⁰ Cheynet in a private letter to us doubts that the seals of this type can be dated as precisely as Seibt does, although he recognizes the possible dating to the 10th century.

Christianity⁶¹. He could be the direct predecessor of metropolitan Theodore, mentioned in another newly discovered text, inscription from Senty church of 965.

The inscription is on the south wall of the eastern arm of the cross this cross-domed Church, at a height of more than 2 m above floor level. It was both a building inscription, and official document about the dedication of the church. “Consecrated, renewed is the church of the very holy Mother of God during the reign of Nicephorus, Basil and Constantine, and of David, the exousiokrator, and of Mary, the exousiokratorissa, on 2 April, the day of the Holy Antipascha (?), by the hand of Theodore, the sacred metropolitan of Alania, in the year 6473 from the creation of the world. Written by the hand of ..., apokrisiarios and patrikios” (for more details see III.3.A.). The inscription is made with paint on a layer of the original plaster and is simultaneous to consecration date – 2 April 965.

“Emperor Nicephorus” is undoubtedly the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (963–969), who ruled together with young Basil II and Constantine VIII; David and Mary are the first known by the name exousiokrators of Alania, apparently, the husbands. Let us note diplomatic subtlety of the wording: David, of course, is not called Emperor, but he reigns like Nicephorus, Basil and Constantine: “during the reign of Nicephorus, Basil and Constantine, and of David, the exousiokrator.”⁶² The reference of metropolitan Theodore, who personally consecrated the church, is the first dated evidence of the revival of the see of Alania. The word “patrikios” is abbreviated as ΠΑΤΡΣ⁶³, and, therefore, indicates here not a proper name (unfortunately, lost in the inscription), but the high Byzantine title, which in the 8–10th centuries wore the most important strategoi of the themes and military commanders. The secular nature of this title makes think that also the apokrisiarios is here not a Church official, but Emperor's envoy⁶⁴ – it is unlikely that the Alan state had such a well-developed bureaucratic system. Consequently, our anonymous was a high-ranking envoy of Nicephorus Phocas, who in the winter and spring of 965 was on winter flats in Cappadocia⁶⁵, not so far from Alania. Emperor's interest to Alania was probably twofold: on the one hand, the latter served as a security guarantee against Khazar invasions at that time, when Nicephorus was at war with the Arabs; and on the other hand, he could also rest in his campaign on the help of Alan troops, consisting then, according to al-Masudi⁶⁶, of 30 000 horsemen. Let us recall also that in the same year a campaign against the Khazars took the Russian prince Svyatoslav – obviously, a trip of Emperor's envoy in Alania was provoked not only by the dedication of a church (for this would be enough the Byzantine metropolitan), but had, apparently, as its purpose the resumption of the military alliance with the Alans.

Next to Senty church is a unique vaulted mausoleum of the 10th century, and in the church itself the richest burials with the Byzantine objects were found⁶⁷. It was, apparently, a patrimonial necropolis of Alan nobility, perhaps even of exousiokrator's family, and the consecration of the church was of special significance. Moreover, if the “apse” under the mausoleum belongs, indeed, to an early church, destroyed about 932 (see I. 3), the ideological value of the event is bigger: in light of the recent Khazar dominance Alan Christianity was more closely intertwined with the alliance with Byzantium. In this context, sending a special Emperor's apokrisiarios who, moreover, executed the dedicatory inscription, looks not accidental at all.

⁶¹ The fact that Ignatios was Metropolitan before 932, seems unlikely, if only because of the uncertainty of Seibt himself in his dating.

⁶² Cf. also below, on Senty frescoes and altar screens from Zedazeni.

⁶³ Preiser-Kapeller J. ???, P. 16, note 2, suggests that we should read here ἀποκρισ(αρίου) πατρ(αρχικού), but such a title is mentioned nowhere; on contrary, cf. Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, De cerimoniis II, 79 (70): τελεσθείσης τῆς προσκυνήσεως τῶν πατρικίων, <ἀποκρισ(αρίου)?> εἰ τύχῃσι, καὶ στρατηγῶν.

⁶⁴ Oxford... Vol. 1. P. 75, 136, 1600.

⁶⁵ Leo Diacon. Chronography III, 11; IV, 1.

⁶⁶ See Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 348.

⁶⁷ Марковин В.И. Исследование Сентинского храма и некрополя у реки Теберды в Карачаево-Черкессии // Историко-археологический альманах. Т. 2. Армавир-Москва, 1996. P. 180-202.

965, the year of the consecration of Senty church, is very significant for the history not only of Alania, but also of the entire North Caucasus. Under this year "the Tale of bygone years" reports the following: "6473. Svyatoslav sallied forth against the Khazars. When they heard of his approach, they went out to meet him with their Prince, the Kagan, and the armies came to blows. When the battle thus took place, Svyatoslav defeated the Khazars and took their city of Bela Vezha. He also conquered the Yasians and the Kasogians."⁶⁸ So, this was the first severe blow to the Khazar Empire, a foe of the Alans. However, from the victory of Svyatoslav over the Khazars and the Yasians we cannot make a conclusion about the existence of an Alano-Khazar alliance in 965. Firstly, against the Yasians the Russian prince parts only after the capture of the Khazar capital Bela Vezha/Sarkel, i.e., after the end of the campaign against Khazars, i.e., what means that in this war were no united Khazar-Alan troops. Secondly, although Yassians in Russian sources is a common name for the Alans, at the same time we know⁶⁹, that some Alan tribes (and, most likely, not of Caucasian, but Asian origin) roamed in the southern Russian steppes (and even served, according to al-Masudi, in the Khazar army). However, since the Russian chronicles called all of the Alans and Ases by the name of Yasians, it cannot be excluded that Svyatoslav defeated exactly the Caucasian Alans, moreover, that together with them are referred their immediate neighbours – Kasogians.

We know nothing more about Theodore, the metropolitan of Alania (not to be confused with another Theodore of Alania from 13th century). One of his successors is mentioned under 997/8 (see I. 5). It is unknown how many hierarchs were on the see of Alania in 32 years between 965 and 997, but it's surprising that we know during the 10th century about four hierarchs (though the only ruler's name surfaced only recently): 4 names for 70 years (914–932 and ca. 950–999) is quite a lot.

In 982/3, the anonymous author of *Khudud al-Alam* reports that the king of Alania is Christian, and among his subjects are both Christians and pagans⁷⁰ – this, apparently, objectively reflects the spread of Christianity in Alania (see also below). Also the constant raids of the Alans against the Zekhians, mentioned in the 10th century by Constantine Porphyrogenitus (*De administrando imperio* 42) and by al-Masudi (*Meadows of gold and mines of gems* 2, 40), probably gave the opportunity to the author of *Khudud al-Alam* (3, 6) to consider the Black sea as the western border of Alania, although it is possible that the Alans had somewhere in the 3rd quarter of the 10th century to capture a part of the coast and carry out Maritime trade from there (see also I. 3). In this regard, we should recall the strange testimony of Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) about the country Alania and its main settlement Savtali on the Black sea⁷¹. Perhaps the Arabic author has confused Alania with Abkhazia, and then Savtali is probably Sebastopolis (modern Sukhumi), but it is also possible that here we see some traces of Alan penetration on the Black sea coast.

It is not necessary to perceive literally also the passage from Ibn Hawqal (10th century): "The Byzantine possessions contains the borders of the Slavs and neighbouring Russes, Sarirs, Alans, Albanians and Armenians."⁷² It is obvious that here we see a description of the "Byzantine Commonwealth" – characteristically, however, that the Arabs perceived Alania as a part of Byzantium.

It should also be noted that in the late 10th century, under Catholicos Arseni of Mtskheta (955–980) probably began the Georgian mission from the bishopric of Kvetera (in Northern

⁶⁸ Cit. after The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text. Translated and edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor. Cambridge, MA: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953. P. 84.

⁶⁹ Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 491; see также комм. В.Я. Петрухина в: Голб Н. Прицак О. Ук. соч. С. 219.

⁷⁰ Alemany A. Op. cit. P. 467

⁷¹ Ibid. P. 341.

⁷² On the problem of the mentioning the Alans in this text, see Полосин В. В. Об арабском названии Кавказской Албании (Аррана) // Письменные памятники Востока, 1973. P. 165.

Kakheti) in mountainous Ingushetia, on the Eastern border of Alania⁷³. However, it is not known if it reached Eastern Alania itself.

Conclusion

Let us summarize our observations on the international position of Alan state in the 10th century. The expulsion of the bishops and priests from Alania about 932, mentioned by al-Masudi, was probably a consequence of the defeat by the Khazars, who were attacked by the Alans, according to the *Cambridge document*, through Byzantine instigation. A result of Khazars' victory was the conclusion (or rather, restoration of the old) military and dynastic alliance between king Aaron and Alan ruler and, accordingly, the rupture between Alania and Byzantium, automatically accompanied by rejection of Christianity, expulsion of the Greek clergy and probably destruction of the churches. This Alano-Khazar alliance survived surest until 944/5, when they go together on a raid against Berdaa, and was splitted somewhere between 945 and 950, when Constantine Porphyrogenitus says about constant enmity of these two peoples and calls Alan ruler his own "spiritual son" – hence, the latter became again Christian. The Alans looked for support in the struggle for deliverance from the Khazar dependence, and the strong Byzantine interest on Alania as an ally against the Khazars resulted in improvement of the status of Alan ruler (from archon to exousiokrator, an extraordinary title, the highest among barbarian rulers) and Alan hierarch (from archbishop to titular metropolitan). In the 2nd half of the 10th century, we know the names of three metropolitans: Ignatius, Theodore and Nicholas, as well as of exousiokrators, spouses David and Mary, an aid to whom in the construction of their memorial Senty church gave the Emperor Nicephorus II Phocas (to the same period we attributed also all the large Church building in Alania). This new Byzantine-Alan convergence and "rechristianization" of the country was, in all probability, not only a result of rupture of dynastic ties and of Alan desire to be freed from the Khazar control, but also a result of the general weakening of Khazaria, which suffered, in 965, the first significant defeat by the Russian prince Svyatoslav. In the same campaign Svyatoslav faces also some Yasians, but their relationship with the Alan state remains as unclear, as all political and ecclesiastical history of Alania in the 10th century. In political spotlight comes a new formidable force which overcomes both the Khazars, hostile to the Empire (at least, in 955), and possibly the pro-Byzantine minded Alans, but which in the next generation will also go the same way to Christianity, like its Caucasian neighbour.

⁷³ Гамбашидзе Г.Г. Три лапидарные надписи епископа Георгия (X в.) из христианского храма Ткобя-Ерда (Ингушетия) // Археология, этнология, фольклористика Кавказа. Тбилиси, 2004. С. 47-48.

Andrey Yu. Vinogradov

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). School of
history, Associate Professor
Email: auvinogradov@hse.ru

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