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Abstract

The international handbook is devoted to a detailed analysis of Caucasian Albania, focusing on an intricate analysis of Caucasian Albania. The investigation is particularly attuned to the extent of activation of Azerbaijani revisionist tendencies subsequent to the Second Karabakh War in 2020 concerning the historical narrative, cultural nuances, and cultural heritage of the Caucasus region.

Within the expanse of this handbook's discourse, a meticulous examination is undertaken of the various pivotal junctures characterizing the phenomenon of historical revisionism surrounding the relatively lesser known "Caucasian Albania" and its populace, the "Caucasian Albanians," both within the purview of academic scholarship and public discourse. Comprising sixteen in-depth chapters, this scholarly compendium rigorously scrutinizes and elucidates the primary factors underpinning the process of "Albanianization" as espoused by the Azerbaijani government and affiliated scholars, particularly regarding the Armenian civilizational heritage entrenched within Nagorno-Karabakh.

The conceptual underpinnings of historical revisionism are methodically substantiated within this handbook. The post-Second Karabakh War landscape is delineated as a fertile ground where the Azerbaijani state apparatus and associated intellectual circles fervently advocated the "Albanianization" theory. This theory seeks to interconnect the historical trajectories of Azerbaijanis and Albanians, thereby positioning the Azerbaijani nation-state upon a shared historical bedrock alongside Armenia and Georgia. Against this backdrop, the conceptual framework of "Albanization" or the so-called "Albanian myth" emerges as a salient paradigm

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during and subsequent to the First and Second Karabakh Wars. This paradigm functions as a strategic instrument for discrediting the Armenian historical lineage vis-à-vis the disputed Karabakh territory.

Keywords: First Karabakh War, Second Karabakh War, post-Soviet ethnogenesis, Azerbaijanian revisionism, historical revisionism, Albanianising theory, Caucasian Albania, Caucasian Albanians, nationalist attitudes, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia.

The pivotal book that carried substantial influence within Azerbaijan and solidified a prevailing stance was Ziya Bunyatov's work titled "Azerbaijan in the 7th-9th Centuries," published in Baku in 1965. This book explored the historical events of the Arab period in Caucasian Albania, which Bunyatov directly linked to Azerbaijan. Within this work, Bunyatov referred to "authors who used Armenian," indicating early medieval figures from Caucasian Albania who wrote in the Armenian language. However, Armenians consider these cultural figures as significant contributors to the Armenian literary tradition. Bunyatov's interpretations were contentious to Armenians, as they viewed them as encroachments on their cultural heritage.

Scientific discourse in Armenia also highlighted Bunyatov's omission of crucial historical facts. Specifically, while he portrayed a narrative of the Armenian-driven destruction of Albanian literature, he neglected to mention the actual events of the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage and manuscripts by the Seljuk Turks. Caucasian Albania is a modern exonym for a former state in ancient times in the Caucasus, mainly in what is now Azerbaijan. The modern endonyms for the area are Aghwank and Aluank, among the Udi people, who regard themselves as descended from the inhabitants of Caucasian Albania (Hewsen 1982, 27-40). The name "Caucasian" is used solely to avoid confusion with modern Albania of the Balkans, which has no known geographical or historical connections to Caucasian Albania. The name "Albania" is derived from the Ancient Greek name "Ἀλβανία" and Latin "Albania". Caucasian Albania acknowledged the Sasanian Empire's dominance in 252, and Shapur I listed it among the empire's provinces in his inscription at the Ka'ba-ye Zartosht. The kingdom would support the realm to its demise. The Greek and Latin authors began to deal with Albania when the territories of the South Caucasus became the theatre of the Mithridatic Wars, shortly before the middle of the 1st century BCE, thus marking the entry of Albania into Rome's geographical and political horizon; from that moment on and for several centuries to follow, the narration of the military operations carried out by Lucullus and Pompey in the Caucasus (75-63 BCE) and the campaigns of the first Roman emperors to the eastern borders of the empire were the contexts in which a series of quick references to Albania and the Albanians found their place (Bais 2023, 3).

The Christianisation of the South Caucasus in the first half of the 4th century brought the three neighbouring kingdoms of Armenia, Iberia (East Georgia), and Albania strategically and culturally closer and thus also determined their common history in the following centuries (Dum-Tragut and Gippert 2023, 53). For Albania and Armenia, and to some extent also for Iberia, that was the beginning of a long epoch of

the shared history of foreign domination, of constant struggles for liberation from the mostly non-Christian foreign rulers (Dum-Tragut and Gippert 2023, 53).

Commencing from the latter half of the 1950s, Azerbaijani historians engaged in a concerted endeavor to dissociate the early medieval population of Karabakh from Armenian origins. Their efforts extended beyond highlighting the linguistic affinity shared by the original inhabitants with the highland populace of Dagestan, a claim largely substantiated. Additionally, they sought to establish the notion that the Christian Albanians either employed Turkic languages or formulated the Syunik language, positing it as a distinct Syunik dialect of the Albanian linguistic framework. In response, Armenian scholars countered this by underscoring that the peripheral dialects in Syunik and Artsakh were essentially variations of the Armenian language.

A divergent approach was adopted by Bunyatov, who, firstly, considerably reprojected the process of Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh, attributing it to as far back as the 12th century. Secondly, following a trajectory already established within Azerbaijan, he shifted the focus from linguistic discourse to cultural traditions. Bunyatov contended that Artsakh never held status as a hub of Armenian cultural vitality. Some of his contemporaries advanced this notion even further, accentuating that until the 18th-19th centuries, local denizens maintained a distinctive identity detached from the broader Armenian national identity. Subsequently, Bunyatov deliberately undertook efforts to expunge Armenian historical presence from other territories encompassed by contemporary Azerbaijan. In essence, historical Azerbaijan was portrayed as an exclusively Islamic realm, systematically erasing recollections of Armenian and Christian influence, despite the protracted endeavours of Azerbaijani scholars, often termed “Albanists,” who have sought to affiliate ancestral Albanian Christians with the Azerbaijani lineage.

The resurgence of independent Armenian statehood in the early 20th century was met with threats posed by the Turkish-Azerbaijani coalition, becoming the focal point of their hostile actions. Both the dawn and dusk of the 20th century witnessed Armenia subjected to unwarranted aggression by the Republic of Azerbaijan, escalating into a latent conflict. Within this protracted confrontation, the fundamental matters of autonomy, sovereignty, and the very survival of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia hung in the balance, bearing pivotal significance.

Interest in the subject of Caucasian Albania underwent a resurgence subsequent to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, a development extensively discussed by Bais (2023, 3). During this juncture, Azerbaijan asserted itself as the exclusive inheritor of the heritage of Caucasian Albania. However, discerning a legitimate kinship between the Turkic-speaking Azerbaijani populace, primarily composed of Oghuz Turks, and the historical Caucasian Albanians proves elusive. This contention rests on the absence of substantiating historical evidence and is based solely on coincidental name resemblances. Furthermore, the establishment of a nation-state named Azerbaijan in 1918 conveniently aligns with the geographical terrain historically occupied by the ancient Caucasian Albanians. Nevertheless, a significant portion of these ancestral Albanians endured large-scale casualties and displacement, instigated by the advent of Islam and subsequently exacerbated by the influx of nomadic Turkic tribes.

Russian historian and anthropologist Victor Shnirelman write in his article “The Albanian Myth” that Azerbaijani academics have been “renaming prominent medieval Armenian political leaders, historians, and writers, who lived in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia into ‘Albanians’. According to Schnirelmann, these initiatives were originally started in the 1950s with the intention of “cleansing Azerbaijan of Armenian history” and “ripping the population of early medieval Nagorno Karabakh off from their Armenian heritage”. By unilaterally claiming “Caucasian Albanians” to be the progenitors of contemporary Azerbaijanis, Azerbaijan made a move in the 1970s from disregarding, dismissing, or hiding Armenian historical legacy in Soviet Azerbaijan to misattributing and mischaracterizing it as instances of Azerbaijani culture (Shnirelman 2003). Regarding the political setting of Azerbaijan’s historical revisionism, Thomas de Waal, a researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, writes: “This rather bizarre argument has the strong political subtext that Nagorno Karabakh had been Caucasian Albanian, and that Armenians had no claim to it” (de Waal 2010, 107). According to Schnirelmann, one notable revisionist technique employed by Azerbaijani academics was the “re-publishing of ancient and medieval sources, where the term “Armenian state” was routinely and systematically removed and replaced with “Albanian state” was frequently and methodically eliminated and replaced with “Albanian state” (Shnirelman 2003). Buniyatov, who went by the moniker “Azerbaijan’s foremost Armenophobe,” is cited by American author George Bournoutian as an example of how this was accomplished (Jalaeants 2009, 9-21).

According to de Waal, “Buniatov’s scholarly credentials were dubious. It later transpired that the two articles he published in 1960 and 1965 on Caucasian Albania were direct plagiarism. Under his name, he had published, unattributed, translations of two articles, originally written in English by Western scholars C.F.J. Dowsett and Robert Hewsen” (de Waal 2004, 152). According to Hewsen, a historian from Rowan College and the acknowledged authority in this field, wrote in his volume *Armenia: A Historical Atlas*, published by the University of Chicago Press, “Scholars should be on guard when using Soviet and post-Soviet Azeri editions of Azeri, Persian, and even Russian and Western European sources printed in Baku. These have been edited to remove references to Armenians and have been distributed in large numbers in recent years. When utilizing such sources, the researchers should seek out pre-Soviet editions wherever possible” (Hewsen 2001, 291).

De Waal continues that a disciple of Buniatov, Farida Mammadova, has “taken the Albanian theory and used it to push Armenians out of the Caucasus altogether. She had relocated Caucasian Albania into what is now the Republic of Armenia. All those lands, churches, and monasteries in the Republic of Armenia had been Albanian. No sacred Armenian fact was left un-attacked.” De Waal describes the whole thing as a sophisticated end to what “in Azerbaijan has become a very blunt instrument indeed” as both Buniatov and Mammadova are known for their anti-Armenian public statements and pamphlets. In this context, this study traces the chronology of Azerbaijani distortions of the history of Armenia, fixes the methods and techniques, as well as the process of their implementation in practice, thematic coverage, historical and cultural scope, etc. The issues considered and analyzed by the authors of this book are the product of the implementation of the Azerbaijani programs of distortion of the

history of Armenia and Azerbaijan (Bais 2023, 1-32; Dum-Tragut and Gippert 2023, 33-92; Gippert 2023a, 95-166; Gippert and Schulze 2023, 167-230; Schulze and Gippert 2023, 231-260; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2023a, 261-264; Renoux 2023, 267-284; Dum-Tragut 2023, 285-332; Drost-Abgaryan 2023, 333-336).

The prevailing indicators strongly suggest that the official stance adopted by Baku is one characterized by a deliberate course of action aimed at eroding or effecting the “Albanization” of Armenian religious landmarks and cultural legacy within the regions under their control. As observed by Thomas de Waal, Azerbaijani propagandist efforts have adeptly appropriated the Albanian historical narrative to further the agenda of displacing Armenians from the entirety of the Caucasus (de Waal 2004, 153).

Historical revisionism within Azerbaijan has lent support to a range of policies, encompassing a particularly disconcerting aspect of cultural desecration directed towards Armenian architectural legacies situated in both Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijani territories (Shnirelman 2003). This unsettling trend becomes particularly evident in the case of Armenian memorial stone crosses, commonly referred to as “khachkars,” existing on Azerbaijani soil. These sacred artifacts were consistently misattributed as representatives of “Caucasian Albanian” heritage both prior to and subsequent to Azerbaijan’s attainment of independence (Karny 2001, 376).

Furthermore, the mischaracterization of Armenian khachkars as ostensibly non-Armenian emblems of Caucasian Albania corresponded with instances of cultural despoliation inflicted upon Armenian historical monuments located within the region of Nakhichevan. The incident involving the destruction of khachkars in Nakhchivan pertains to a methodical campaign orchestrated by the Azerbaijani government aimed at the obliteration of the Armenian cemetery near the locale of Julfa (known as Jugha in Armenian) in Nakhchivan. The campaign witnessed thousands of Armenian khachkars being subjected to demolition. Initial claims asserting that Azerbaijan was engaged in a systematic endeavour to dismantle and erase these monuments surfaced towards the end of 1998. These allegations were subsequently renewed in 2002 and 2005 (Pickman 2007).

Adam T. Smith, an anthropologist and associate professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, called the removal of the khachkars “a shameful episode in humanity’s relation to its past, a deplorable act on the part of the government of Azerbaijan which requires both explanation and repair” (Smith et al. 2006). Smith, other scholars, and several United States Senators signed a letter to UNESCO and other organizations condemning Azerbaijan’s government (Smith et al. 2006). Azerbaijan instead contends that the monuments were not of Armenian but of Caucasian Albanian origin, which, per Thomas de Waal, did not protect “the graveyard from an act in the history wars” (de Waal 2010, 107-108).

The editors and authors of this handbook, with the help of facts, refute and reveal parts of the Azerbaijani unscientific and anti-scientific historical concept, demonstrating its scientific inconsistency and thereby helping objective historical science to cleanse itself of the damage caused to it (Tchekhanovets 2023, 337-350; Kazaryan 2023, 353-386; Donabédian 2023, 387-432; Petrosyan 2023, 433-472; Hakobyan 2023, 475-488; Vacca 2023, 489-514; La Porta 2023, 515-536; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2023b, 537-570; Gippert 2023b, 571-580; Tchilingirian 2023, 581-610).

This handbook argues that certain postulates of Azerbaijani historiography in general and in the field of Armenian studies and Albanian studies are considered and criticized from the point of view of objective historical science; however, far from everything has been said and written (Dum-Tragut and Gippert 2023, 33-92; Dum-Tragut 2023, 285-332; Drost-Abgaryan 2023, 333-336). Insufficient knowledge of them in the proposed broad context, as well as the relationship of these processes with each other, makes their further development still a very urgent task (Petrosyan 2023, 433-472; Hakobyan 2023, 475-488; Gippert 2023b, 571-580; Tchilingirian 2023, 581-610).

The dispersion of answers and solutions across various works, coupled with inaccurate and obsolete interpretations, underscores the need for a comprehensive synthesis of these matters. The creation of a consolidated work is necessary to gather the advancements in addressing these crucial concerns. It can shed fresh perspectives, propose innovative resolutions, and simultaneously expose the shortcomings inherent in the Azerbaijani historiographical approach, which diverges from scholarly standards.

The primary objective of this handbook resides in conducting a comparative investigation, scholarly analysis, and critical assessment of predominant tendencies within Azerbaijani historiography, where key elements of Armenia and Azerbaijan's historical narratives are subject to distortion. This inquiry chiefly pertains to issues such as the origin and formative history of the Azerbaijani populace as well as the inception of its statehood. Across various chapters, this publication undertakes the following academic problems were addressed:

- Identification, categorization, and comparative evaluation of the principal distortions concerning key historical aspects of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan within Azerbaijani historiography. This assessment is juxtaposed against factual accounts, thereby unveiling the contours of objective historical actuality.
- Articulation of the scholarly incongruities inherent in both the “classical” and “new” conceptual frameworks encompassing the origins and early history of the Azerbaijani people and its establishing statehood.
- Compilation of pertinent achievements that contribute to the exploration of this pertinent subject matter while exposing distortions within Azerbaijani narratives concerning the history of Caucasus ethnic groups and nations.
- Proposition of overarching principles to counter the challenges posed by Azerbaijani historiography and its propagandistic tendencies. This includes neutralizing their detrimental impact and subsequently fostering the advancement of Azerbaijani studies.

In sum, this compendium strives to engender a rigorous academic discourse that not only highlights the distortions embedded within Azerbaijani historiography but also offers a scholarly framework to counter such distortions, fostering the advancement of knowledge within Azerbaijani studies.

The scholarly and academic importance of this handbook stems from its capacity to address a notable gap in understanding within a comprehensive framework of the subject matter. The issues under consideration, which hold international significance, have thus far eluded specialized investigation within both Armenian and Albanian

academic domains. Throughout the diverse chapters of the manuscript, a series of pivotal theses and theoretical propositions are advanced and substantiated. These constructs not only enrich the depth of comprehension concerning the matters at hand but also serve to broaden the scope of knowledge pertinent to these subjects.

This handbook undertakes an examination of the predominant patterns characterizing the misrepresentation of pivotal aspects across ancient, medieval, and modern and recent eras within the historical narratives of Armenia and Azerbaijan, as adopted by Azerbaijani historiography. Simultaneously, it examines the prevalent methodologies consistently employed by Azerbaijani historians. An argument is advanced that the dominant trends of distortion, observable within the historical portrayal of Armenia and Azerbaijan within Azerbaijani historiography, are intricately intertwined. These trends comprise integral elements of a multifaceted and interconnected process, characterized by its systemic nature. Its overarching objective is to ideologically and propagandistically lay the groundwork for the future evolution of Armenia's ethnocultural realm and historical narrative.

A comprehensive evaluation reveals that the purported notion of "Albanianization" as applied to the origins and foundational history of the Azerbaijani public and their emergent statehood stands on frail scientific grounds. This research effectively demonstrates that the trajectory of Azerbaijani studies in the immediate future holds substantial potential to serve as an efficacious pipe for effectively addressing the primary research question around which the handbook is centered.

The distortions present within Azerbaijani historiography pertaining to the history of Armenia have resulted in a notable erasure of Armenian identity, designating them as "Albanized" Armenians or "Armenized" Albanians. This phenomenon effectively questions the authenticity of the Armenian population in Soviet Armenia and various regions of Soviet Azerbaijan. This development is a consequence of unscrupulous inclinations within historiographical endeavours.

In terms of scholarly merit, this work makes a substantial contribution to both Armenian studies and Albanian studies. Moreover, the findings and insights presented here hold relevance for social and humanitarian studies, as well as researchers engaged in the historical examination of Caucasian peoples, their nation-building and state-building processes, historical geography, ethnography, and the intricate concerns surrounding historical distortion.

The applied value of this handbook is rooted in the methodological implications of its conclusions, especially concerning the critical analysis of purportedly scientific Azerbaijani publications and literature pertaining to the histories of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Additionally, the intent of this research extends to fostering a positive influence on European integration and enhancing awareness levels within international organizations, political factions, civil society, the media, and other entities. These efforts aim to underscore the pertinence of the discussed matters. To address the question of characterizing the erroneous historical concepts concerning Armenia, a preliminary observation is pertinent: these concepts lack any semblance of scholarly rigor. The primary contention remains that these concepts are devoid of scientific foundation. It is our firm conviction that readers engaging with this volume will discern the distressing implications of historical distortions within Azerbaijani

historiography. These distortions not only affront the Armenian and Albanian communities but also cast a shadow upon the neighboring Azerbaijani population.

The scholars engaged in this compendium underscore a discernible inclination among certain Azerbaijani scholars to Azerbaijaniize Armenian personal names, a phenomenon that serves to substantiate Azerbaijan's assertions concerning Nagorno-Karabakh.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.46991/JOPS/2023.2.5.157>

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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