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THE ROLE OF CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN NAKHIDJEVAN IN THE XVII–XVIII CENTURIES

Аннотация: католицизм был внедрен в провинцию Нахичевани в начале XIV века французскими и бенедиктинскими праведниками. Расположившись на пересечении торговых путей Востока и Запада, они создали великую армянскую католическую общину, что сильно повлияло на развитие экономических, политических и культурных связей в Нахичеванской Республике. В середине XVIII века часть армянских католиков, живущих в провинции Нахичевани, приняло мусульманскую религию, остальные вынуждены были покинуть страну ввиду нестабильной системы управления государства Персидского залива, высоких налогов, отсутствия защиты жизни и имущества, а также посягательства на достоинство человеческой личности.

Ключевые слова: Армения, Нахичевань, католическая община, история, государство Персидского залива.

Abstract: catholicism penetrated into the province of Nakhijevan at the beginning of the XIV century by French and benediktyan religious men. Being situated in the trading crossroads of East and West it created a great Armenian catholic community and made deep influence on developing economic, political and cultural links in Nakhijevan region. In the middle of XVIII century a part of Armenian catholics living

in Nakhijevan province adopted muslim religion, others moved away because of unstable governing system of Persian state, heavy taxes, absence of security for life and property and the violation of dignity.

Keywords: *Armenia, Nakhidjevan, catholic community, history, Persian state.*

Beside Armenian apostolic church the ultimate goal of other religions and beliefs today also takes essential place in the scientific and social spheres. So in this context the problems concerning the activity of catholic preachers in the Armenian reality, as well as the history of Armenian communities, formulated in the result of preaching, gained great significance. Catholic movement originated in the result of political and economic fight between western and eastern Rome. Catholic church was fighting to increase the number of its followers not only with pagans but also with the people who had already accepted Jesus' s belief. Only if Armenians consider their church heretic would it be possible to involve them. In comparison with Bjuvand church who fought against Armenian apostolic church without agreement and aggressively, the catholic church of Rome was acting much milder, taking into account the unsuccessful example of Bjuvand. Hoping to get Kilikia's support during the crusade invasions, Catholic church of Rome suggested spiritual baptism to the local kings and spiritual leaders.

The political elite of Kilikia accepted the fact that baptism was the basis for the military -political union which wouldn't interfere the national character of Armenian apostolic church. The activity of catholic preachers among Armenians within the kingdom of Kilikia spread at the end of the 18th century and the first half of the 14th century. Under the pressure of Levon 4th (1305–1308) Armenian church adopted some confessional and ceremonial principles, which actually brought to the formation of unia. Surrounded by muslims and being attacked by invasions Church of Rome considered that it would be right if Armenians recognized either the dominance of Pope or its beliefs and ceremonies. The Armenian supporters of unia thought the salvation of Armenian kingdom of Kilikia blindly accepted the demands and help of Latin church, trying to implant catholic beliefs and ceremonies in Armenia [1].

The activation of catholic church of Rome during 17–18 centuries was happening simultaneously to strengthen the economic links between the Osmanian Empire. During the last decades of the 17th century Armenian preachers were also involved in the process of spreading catholicism [2, 436].

From this point of view both the intellectuals of the Mkhitaryan Union founded in St. Ghazar island played a significant part and the representatives of the Armenian brotherhood centers in Vienna and Libanan. Catholicism also spread in Nakhidjevan. It penetrated into the region of Nakhidjevan at the beginning of the 14th century by the religious people who started wide preaching in Armenian villages of Azat-Jiran and Darashamb in Nakhidjevan and are known as unitors in bibliography. Being situated at the crossroads of East and West trade roads Armenian catholic community had a great influence on the creation and development of the economic, political and cultural links of Nakhidjevan. At the beginning of the 17th century (1587–1629) before the forced re-settlement organized by Shah Abas I, there were 1780 families or 19400 catholic Armenians in the territory of Nakhidjevan in the villages Azat-Jiran and Darashamb. During the 17th century Armenian catholics appeared in the centre of attention of diplomatic relationships between the Persian court and western states. In the result Armenian catholic settlements immediately obeyed Shah. Therefore, in the middle of the 18th century, under the pressure of Persian unstable administrative-political system, demand of heavy taxes, absence of security, violence of dignity a part of armenain catholics living in Nakhidjevan took the religion of muslims the other part of them emigrated. Catholic Armenians first of all got their favour from Pope, in comparison with their compatriots. Catholic monarchs of the west sent their ambassadors to Persian Shahs with special letters, asking them for their support and favour. From the given evidence of Ogostinos Badjesi during the great re-settlement the, ambassador of the «franks» to take the solicit from the Shah for the Armenian Catholics living in Nakhidjevan. The Persian shah wanted very much to ally with West-European states against the Osmanian Empire, so he couldn't refuse their request, especially as it refers to only a small part of Armenians. There wasn't any plea for the armenian apostolic majority. They thought that Armenian church wasn't linked with

the catholic one and its followers suffer the hardships of the slavery, being punished by the Christian God. In this way Catholic church explained its actions towards the representatives of Armenian apostolic church. It preached that Armenians were obliged to accept the catholic religion as their compatriots were relatively in defended and wealthy [3, 251–252].

At the beginning of the 17th century Armenian catholic community in Nakhidjevan was rather crowded and there were ten acting churches [4, 148]. According to Alishan the number of Armenians in the above mentioned regions was 19000. The population was settled in 3 towns, 12 villages and the total number of families was 1830 [5, 522]. But according to Alishan there was a little misprint and it was repeated in other researchers works. According to the report of Azaria-Friton, the archbishop of Armenian catholics in 1601 there were 1780 armenian families in the province situated in different villages of Nakhidjevan: Aparaner, Aprakunis, Krna, Saltagh, Khoshkashen, Metsshen, Gandzak, Shahapunik, Gharaghush, Tsghna and neighbouring villages: Ketsuk and Artaz in the region Maku. In 1604–1605 King Shah Abas of Iran realized an emigration of Armenians. The role of Armenian catholic community especially increased in the 17th century. The fixed attention of catholic church in Nakhidjevan first of all was connected with the fact that all trade roads passed through that region and the majority of the settlements were the most important links for the international trade (Nahkidjevan, Jugha, Agulis and Ordubad) a great number of goods was coming here from the East and West. Sefyian Shahs were also interested in catholic Armenians, as they wanted to fight against Osmanian Empire with the help of West-European states. They send Armenian Christian leaders to the west for diplomatic activity. In 1502–1524) according to the European plea, Shah Ismael I gave some privileges to Armenian catholics in Nahkidjevan. But in the result of systematic changes of Shahs, the grants of the former ones were losing their powers. So they need to be re-established. By the solicit of Pope and other west-European kings, during the governing of Shah Abas (1587–1629) some old privileges were re-established [5, 522].

The great number of catholic Armenian communities announced the rights for the immunity towards the local tax collectors. Preventing diplomatic relations with the

Persian court was an excellent chance for the Pope and other west-European monarchs to favour Armenian catholics in Nakhidjevan. Very often delegations from these countries came to Spahan. All of them carried letters of recommendations.

The Pope and the monarchs turned to Shah to favour and defend their religious brothers. In 1615 December 13, when monarch Pogos Chitadini [3, 517] a special delegate appointed by Pope Pogos V, accompanied by Dominikyan, Ogostinyan and Carmelitakans was presented to Shah Abas, the latter gave a number of privileges to the Catholic Armenians of Nakhidjevan, particularly forbade the meetings, returned the seized property. Armenian governor was appointed the leader of catholics in the center of Azat-Djirani Mahal [1, 2305].

After the migration in 1616 Ankhel Maria Chitadini sent a report from Rome, according to which the total number of catholic families in ten villages of Nakhidjevan was 305, one in Konay, Two in Saltagh, four in Gandzak in comparison with the former number. In 1601 there were 70 in Konya, 120 in Saltagh, 70 Armenian families in Gandzak [6]. The attention toward catholic Armenians in Nakhidjevan increased in the first quarter of the 17th century, when the Christians of the East became the center of attention of Rome and set up serious methods to make them obey. In 1622 Grigor XV Pope of Rome established a large institution, called «St. Unity of Belief Propaganda» which was known in Armenian catholic literature as «St. meeting propaganda fide».

In 1627 Urbanas VIII Pope of Rome established a multilingual school in Nakhidjevan to prepare catholic preachers [1, 318]. Numerous monarchs who were sent from Vatican taught catholic Armenians at school. One of them was Dominikyan Pogos Piromali, who had been settled in Armenia in 1632. He was the archbishop of Nakhidjevan from 1654–1664 and governed the community of catholic Armenians [1, 606]. In 1669 by special mission which was organized by Kghemes IX Pope, King of France, Ludovikos XIV, Great Duke of Tos-kanay and the Senate of Vatican, Matevos Hovanisents, the archbishop Nakhidjevan was sent to Spahan to gain some privileges in honor of Armenian catholics [7,64–67]. Armenian catholics of Nakhidjevan had had those rights during the governing of Shah Abas I, but the Persian officials despised Shah's orders and each new Shah had to re-establish the personal

obligations of the former ones. The relationship of catholic church with the Persian court had special importance in the second half of the 17th century, during the governing of King of France Ludovikos XIV. So Nakhidjevan became a significant junction for the political relationships between the Persian court and the West because Armenian catholics of Nakhidjevan had the support of the King of France [3, 323]. Ludovikos XIV pointed out that both catholics and Christians were subdued to the rule «Imam Dgafar» which was acting in Persia, according to which every Christian who had admitted muslim could possess the property of Christian relatives [6].

The king asked to abolish that law and added that it only concerned Christian-catholics and didn't refer to the others. In spite of the numerous letters and applications sent from the West [3, 323], the conditions of catholic Armenians still remained very hard. According to the petition of Ogostonios Bajents directed to the people on 21 May, 1630, those who deflected Christianity adopted by Persian law could possess their relatives' property, asked to send gifts and a letter to the Persian Shah to avert the law, as people easily deflect their belief and lose their property. On June 1, 1632 from Aparanner monastery, later on July 2, in his letters sent from Yerevan a famous missionary Pogos Piromali made a report «Against the destructive law on Christianity, especially Armenian christianity and Armenians». Pirmoli asked for the immediate mediation of the supreme authorities of Rome to avert the active law [6]. If there were 5–7000 armenian catholics in Nakhidjevan in the middle of the 17th century, at the beginning of the 18th century there were only a few thousands [8]. Catholic Armenians lived under hard conditions though they had the support of West-European states and the Pope of Rome. The result was an unstable administrative-political system of Persia: the orders of the Shahs either didn't reach the local governors or were despised by them. Such diplomatic interferences couldn't influence or avert all those illegitimations originated from the rotten state system.

Despite the assistance of West-European states and the support of the Popes of Rome to the catholic Armenians, they stopped their activity in the middle of the XVIII century. In 1746 thousands of Armenian catholic families in Nakhidjevan emigrated to the Turkish territories of Small Asia particularly to Zmurnia [5, 406–407]. By another

petition on October 22, 1722 there was an application «150 people emigrated from the town of Persia to Nakhib, Abraneroy Tgahkoy and Khoshkayshini» settled in the towns «Gozal Hesar, Tiray and Izmir». According to petition on April 15, 1764, nearly 700 dominikians sheltered in Izmir, announced that there were only 60–70 people remained there and asked to send a confessor Tomas Isaverdensi who was in Ankona. Armenian population who had admitted catholicism, Being apart from the church had an invaluable role in the defense of Armenians, abandon their national culture, easily became the victim of assimilation policy of muslim authorities

So in the middle of the 18th century one part of the catholic Armenians became muslims, others emigrated because of the unstable administrative-political system, heavy taxes, absence of security for the life and property, violation of dignity, according to one report introduced to the Havataspyur meeting, from the villages of Krna and Aparraner» Last brutal wars of Khulikhan (Shah Nadir 1736–1747) Armenians were ecicted [9, 21].

According to Gh.Alishan's datas after those events Italian missioniers who visited Nakhidjevan met there only 60–70 catholics. the excalation of the last part of the Armenian catholics living in province ended in 1752, when nearly all Armenian villages were destroyed by Azat Khan Afghan and those who didn't manage to emigrate were imprisoned [63].

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