

**ASHOT MELKONYAN**



**JAVAKHK**  
**IN THE 19th CENTURY AND THE 1st**  
**QUARTER OF THE 20th CENTURY**

**YEREVAN 2007**

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA  
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**JAVAKHK**  
**IN THE 19th CENTURY AND THE**  
**1st QUARTER OF THE 20th CENTURY**  
**(A HISTORICAL RESEARCH)**

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**ASHOT A. MELKONYAN. JAVAKHK IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THE 1<sup>ST</sup>  
QUARTER OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY (a historical research)  
Summary**

Javakhk was originally one of the nine districts of Gugark province of Great Armenia. The district is mentioned by the name of Zabakha in Araratian (Urartian) King Argishti's (786 to 764 B.C.) inscriptions. From the 6th to 3rd centuries B.C., it was within the Ervanduni (Orontid), Artashesian and Kingdoms of Great Armenia. Since time immemorial Javakhk has been inhabited by the Armenians, which is attested to by various Armenian, Georgian, Arab and other sources. According to Georgian historian Leonti Mroveli, early in the 4th century, when St. Nune (Nino, as referred to by the Georgians) was preaching Christianity in Javakhk, the local population's vernacular was Armenian. It is mentioned as the family estate of the Vardzavuny princely family.

After the fall of the Armenian Arshakuni Kingdom (428 A.D.), the region, as a part of Eastern Armenia, became a part Marzpanutium of Sassanid Persia. At the end of the 7th century, it was conquered by the Arabs. In the 10th century Javakhk formed part of the kingdom of the Armenian Bagratids. In the late 12th century, Javakhk, including its fort of Tmka (Tmuk) and Akhalkalak, was among those districts of Northern Armenia that were bestowed upon the Armenian princely house of the Zakarians as their hereditary family estate; its spiritual center was the township of Zresk. After the overthrow of the Mongol yoke in 1266, the region formed part of the principality of Samtskhe-Javakhk. In 1587 the Ottomans annexed it to Chldr (later Akhaltskha) eyalet (also known as vilayet), later to be known as a separate sanjak (district).

The Ottoman tax lists, dating back to the 16th to 18th centuries, reveal that the Armenians inhabited most of the settlements in Javakhk and the adjacent districts. This is also confirmed by the famous geographers, Vakhushti Bagrationi and Ghukas Intchitchian, a member of the Mkhitarist Congregation, and others.

Together with a number of other districts Javakhk appeared in the sphere of the foreign policy of the Russian Empire in the early 19th century. In July 1828, General I. F. Paskevich's troops occupied its center, Akhalkalak. In 1830, 7,300 Armenian families from Karin-Erzrum, Basen, Baberd, Derjan, and other districts of Western Armenia resettled in Akhaltskha, Akhalkalak, and Tzalka (Treghek District of Gugark province) under the leadership of Archbishop Karapet Bagratuny. The newcomers reconstructed and founded more than 60 villages and 50 churches, thus restoring Javakhk's former ethnic Armenian make-up: about 58,000 Western Armenians became the neighbors of 1,716 Armenian families (about 10,000 to 11,000 people), as well as 639 Muslim and 179 Georgian households.

In 1840 Akhalkalak District was included in the Georgian-Imeretian Province. In 1846 it became part of Tiflis Province and turned into an independent district in 1874.

From 1841 to 1843, the Dukhobors, Russian sectarians banished from different



regions of the Russian Empire, settled down in the south of the district (the present-day district of Ninotzminda) and founded 8 and 9 villages there. In 1886 Javakhhk had 110 villages comprising 10 communities with a total population of about 63,800, of whom 46,386, i.e., 72.7 %, were Armenians, the Muslims constituting 10.7 %, the Russian Dukhobors 10.4 %, and the Georgians only 5.8 %.

Akhalkalak District enjoyed a considerable socio-economic and cultural boom under Russian rule. Akhalkalak City became a crafts center, and the villages started playing an important role in the production of wheat and meat in Transcaucasia. In the early 1830s, Archbishop Karapet initiated the founding of parish schools for male pupils. Among them can be mentioned Karapetian and Mesropian Schools in Akhaltskha and Akhalkalak respectively.

In 1856, through the efforts of benefactor Karapet Yaghubian, the restoration of Sourb Khach Church was accomplished. In 1870 Sandkhtian Female School started functioning, followed by the establishment of some Russian schools in the early 1880s. In 1889 a City College was founded and a Theatrical Circle was organized.

In the late 19th century, through Jalal Ter-Grigorian and Poghos Abelian's endeavors, a Liberation Group was set up in Akhalkalak., Most of Akhalkalak Armenians were from Karin-Erzrum in origin, so they took an active part in the movement launched for the liberation of Western Armenia. Javakhhk gave birth to such prominent personalities and figures as Hovhannes Kajaznuny, Hamo Ohanjanian, Ruben Ter-Minassian, Ruben Darbinian, writers Vahan Terian and Derenik Demirjian, national singer Jivani, and others.

In the aftermath of the Turkish invasion of Akhalkalak District in May 1918, the overwhelming majority of the local population, amounting to 80,000, emigrated into the woods of Bakurian and Tzalka, 35,000 to 40,000 of them perishing there. After the Turkish army units had left the district in late November, Georgia's Menshevik Government made territorial claims on Javakhhk. Failing to arrive at any agreement over the problems of Lori and Akhalkalak, the sides engaged in hostilities in December. The Armeno-Georgian war was terminated only through the mediation of the British. Georgia temporarily gaining control over Javakhhk as a result of the pressure the British High Command exerted on the Republic of Armenia, which did not abandon its efforts to regain it throughout its existence between 1918 and 1920.

Meeting Akhalkalak Armenians' desire to be reunited with their Homeland, the authorities of Soviet Armenia (Alexander Bekzadian, Alexander Myasnikian, Arshak Mravian, and others) demanded to return the district and Tzalka to Armenia. In July 1921, however, the Georgian and Azerbaijani Bolsheviks, who formed a majority and acted in unison, achieved the annexation of both Akhalkalak and other Armenian territories to Georgia and Azerbaijan. On November 6, 1921, Soviet Armenia and Georgia signed an "agreement" on the Armeno-Georgian line of demarcation, which has

been preserved up till today with certain changes. After the November 6 “agreement”, the discriminatory policy against the Armenians of Akhalkalak assumed a new form.

Expressing the will of the people, in 1925 37 Village Councils sent petitions to the supreme authorities of the Soviet republics of Armenia and Georgia, and the USSR; they also sent special delegations to Yerevan and Tiflis. The just demands of the Armenians of Akhalkalak were not met. In the subsequent years, with the fortification of Stalin’s tyranny and aggravation of political repressions, the problem was consigned to total oblivion. Moreover, the approach that it should be settled within the bounds of “international friendship” involuntarily became dominant among the population. The attempts to introduce any changes in the frontier lines gradually became unacceptable and highly dangerous; the majority of those raising that question received jail terms or were sent into exile in the 1930s.

The unfavorable functioning of the political and socio-economic leverage in the Soviet years marked the beginning of mass emigration from Javakhk, gradually becoming one of the characteristic features of the demographic situation in the district. In this respect, it was by no means accidental that in the years of World War II, Akhalkalak suffered a greater number of losses than the other Armenian territories. Suffice it to say that out of the 12,684 enlisted Akhalkalak Armenians, 7,788, i.e., 61.4 % were killed (this number also includes those that were lost during the hostilities).

From 1946 to 1949 a considerable number of Armenians were exiled from the Armenian-populated localities of Soviet Georgia, including Javakhk, to Altai and Siberia.

From 1950 to 1970, due to the economic and political conditions, the number of Armenians emigrating from Javakhk grew still larger. That is why in 1989 the total population in Akhalkalak and Bogdanovka Districts (together they mainly constituted the territory of the former district of Akhalkalak or historical Verin Javakhk), which had always been distinguished by a high birth rate and large families, plummeted to 105,000, i.e., the same number as in 1917.

The earthquake that struck Adzharia in April 1989 rendered a great number of people homeless and inflicted damage upon others. The Georgian government did not hesitate to resettle them in several Georgian villages in Akhalkalak (Kotelia, Hokam, Gogashen, Chunchkha, etc.) and the Russian Dukhobors’ settlements in Bogdanovka. Moreover, they embarked upon constructing two-storey houses for the newcomers, the scale of that work being unprecedented in both Akhalkalak and Bogdanovka throughout the seventy years of Soviet rule. Nevertheless, that action of the Georgian government, aimed at altering Javakhk’s demographic picture, did not yield any results; moreover, a considerable part of the Adzhars proved unable to endure the severe natural and climactic conditions typical of the district and were obliged to return to their former settlements.

Under the Soviet rule, the region was completely ignored by the Georgian

authorities. After Georgia declared independence, national discrimination against the Armenians in Javakhk and the entire Republic of Georgia grew even more severe. At present Javakhk and the adjacent Armenian-inhabited localities live in rather harsh conditions. This is particularly true of the early 1990s, when Zviad Gamsakhurdia was the president of the country. In Tbilisi and other large cities the Armenians were entrusted with high ranks only provided that they change their surnames to Georgian ones, ultimately becoming Georgians. In order to break the homogeneity of Javakhk's ethnic make-up, the districts of Akhalkalak, Akhaltskha, Ninotzminda, Aspindza, and Adigen were joined into a single administrative province with its center in Akhaltskha City, which was gradually being Georgianized. Consequently, Akhalkalak and Ninotzminda ceased representing independent districts, while Javakhk Armenians lost direct ties with Tbilisi. Most of the administrative bodies were moved to Akhaltskha. The electoral law, which provided for the proposal of the candidacy of Parliament deputies only on the basis of party-affiliation, put the Armenian population, who did not have any organizations officially registered, in rather unequal conditions.

Nowadays Javakhk's economy is in a particularly grave situation. The widespread unemployment, national discrimination, the deepening mistrust towards the Georgian authorities, and the poor power supply are forcing thousands of Armenians to abandon their homes to resettle in the Republic of Armenia, or emigrate to Russia and other countries.

Javakhk's educational and cultural life is not enviable either: most of the local Armenian schools are semi-destroyed. It has become a commonplace for the teachers not to receive salaries for years. We can hardly speak of any spiritual-ecclesiastical life there: there are only two priests in Akhalkalak and Ninotzminda. The pensioners and fighters for the liberation of Artsakh are in a severe financial predicament.

At present Javakhk with its two districts is the most homogeneous Armenian territory outside the borders of the Republic of Armenia and the Artsakh Republic (NKR). It has about 100 Armenian villages: their inhabitants amount to more than 100,000, the Armenians constituting 95% of them. The neighboring districts of Akhaltskha, Aspindza, and Tzalka consist of about 30 Armenian villages, with a population of 60,000.

The harsh socio-economic and political conditions are now endangering the life of the native Armenian districts of Javakhk, which still preserve their true Armenian spirit despite all the aforementioned.

It is of the utmost importance to study the problem of Javakhk on an objective scientific basis, to realize the modern political reality, and to resolve the problem in a fair, just and civilized manner.