

## THEORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF POLITOLOGY & HISTORY

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/2592-8813-2026-1-28>

### “INTERPRETING THE PAST” IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA IN SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

*Abdulla Abdullayev,*

*Postgraduate Student, Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology  
of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan (Baku, Azerbaijan)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2056-1035*

**Abstract.** During the Soviet era, Marxism and autochthonism exerted a profound influence on the archaeological research conducted in Azerbaijan, shaping its theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and interpretations. By emphasizing the materialistic interpretation of history, Marxist archaeology focused on economic and social structures as the primary drivers of social change. For instance, archaeological studies frequently highlighted the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural communities, aligning with the Marxist stages of historical development, such as primitive communism and feudalism. Soviet archaeologists in the South Caucasus often interpreted archaeological finds through the lens of class struggle, a core tenet of Marxism. Furthermore, archaeological research was frequently driven by state programs aimed at legitimizing Soviet ideology and promoting the concept of a shared socialist heritage within the USSR. As a political and social ideology emphasizing self-determination and local autonomy, autochthonism also influenced archaeological research in the region, particularly during the transition to the post-Soviet period. Competing claims over cultural heritage occasionally hindered collaborative research and led to biased interpretations of archaeological data. While Marxism provided a unified, materialistic framework for understanding the past, it often imposed significant ideological constraints on archaeological interpretations.

**Key words:** Azerbaijan, Soviet, Marxism, Autochthonism, Archaeology, Albania.

**Introduction.** Research into the influence of the Soviet political structure and its governance mechanism on the scientific environment is generally weak, and in post-Soviet countries, such research is almost nonexistent. Neglect of the Soviet sphere was institutionally based, as postcolonial studies depend on the interests of specific scholars in concrete regions (Annus, 2011, p. 25).

Opinions regarding this period became polarized after Perestroika. For Soviet archaeologists close to the political establishment, the Soviet era was a successful period (Lozny, 2017, p. 80). The same problem persists in Russia itself. Ewa Tompson writes that, "The politics of interpretation still informs imperial thinking. Russian history must be reworked in contemporary terms" (Tompson, 2008, p. 417). Therefore, it becomes necessary to illuminate the political and ideological conditions under which historical and archaeological research was conducted during the period in question, and to evaluate the processes within the era's own code. Soviet Marxism (i.e., Leninism, Stalinism, and post-Stalin currents) was not simply an ideology advanced by the Kremlin to rationalize and justify its policies, but also expressed the realities of Soviet phenomena in various forms (Markus, 1985, p. 1).

**Discussion.** The influence of this political center on scientific research and archaeological interpretations in the countries dependent on it has also been documented previously. Due to ideological pressure, some problems were interpreted from the perspective of the dominant conception (AMEA, 2007, p. 130). Jerzy Gąssowski, in assessing the state of archaeology in the Soviet Union, notes that, "Soviet Russia significantly influenced the archaeologies of other countries politically dependent on it" (Lozny, 2017, p. 1). Soviet archaeology is divided by L. Kleyn into two stages: 1917–1934 (archaeology of the revolution period) and 1934–1991 (archaeology of the Soviet period). Marxism's genuine penetration into Soviet archaeology began in the mid-1920s (Lozny, 2017, p. 62).

Artsikhovskiy and Ravdonikas, along with other young archaeologists, developed a "Marxist" approach to the interpretation of archaeological data between 1926 and 1929 (Trigger, 2006, p. 328, 330). In Leningrad, Vladislav Iosifovich Ravdonikas criticized pre-revolutionary Russian archaeology as empiricist and "artefactology," viewing its orientations as conditioned by class interests (Lozny, 2017, p. 68). According to the "Marxist" approach, the archaeologist's goal was not the analysis of artifacts, but rather the reconstruction of societies based on ideological concepts. In the early 1930s, two main ideological paradigms were introduced into Soviet archaeology (Trigger, 2006, p. 327). Trigger groups them under the Cultural-Historical Approach. Stadialism (the stages theory), primarily elaborated by Vladislav I. Ravdonikas and Sergey N. Bykovskiy, was based on the hypothesis that ethnic history could transition from one social stage (such as slavery or feudalism) to another without any external influence. Inspired by Marr, the faculty of GAIMK (State Academy for the History of Material Culture) in Leningrad—S. N. Bykovskiy, V. I. Ravdonikas, E. Y. Krichevskiy, and others—introduced the idea of the "new language teaching" into archaeology and built the "stadial theory" (the stages theory) upon it.

According to this theory, societies everywhere developed stage by stage through revolutionary leaps, reorganizing their social organizations under the influence of the economy (Lozny, 2017, p. 69). In the early 1920s, Russian scholars V. Bartold and A. Pakhomov gave lectures on the history of Azerbaijan in Azerbaijani schools. In these lectures, A. Pakhomov claimed that the national formation process for the Azerbaijani people was long and unstable, changing against the backdrop of differing religious affiliations (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 97). He noted that the local inhabitants continued to live on their lands in the eastern part of the Caspian Sea, regardless of linguistic and cultural changes (Pakhomov, 1923, pp. 9-21). Russian historian-archaeologist Sysoev stated that the Khazars living in the territory of Azerbaijan were included in the Achaemenid Empire during the reign of Cyrus the Great, and were previously mentioned in Urartian inscriptions by the names Etiuni and Uluanili. Sysoev wrote that the original Albanians differed from the Turks in their language and were related to some Caucasian peoples. Relying on the archaeological data known at the time, Sysoev located the Albanian culture in the southwestern part of Soviet Azerbaijan (Sysoev, 1925b, p. 29).

Starting in 1920, I. M. Meshchaninov and A. Alekberov conducted research on numerous cup graves (küp qəbirlər) and other monuments in the territories of Mirbashir, Shaki districts, and the Mil plain (Göyüşov, 1986, p. 72). Academician Meshchaninov, who studied the cup graves between 1927 and 1935, was interested in the Urartu period. He recommended that Azerbaijani researchers learn cuneiform to search for traces of Urartian invasions and conduct archaeological research in the Azerbaijani territory between the Kura and Aras rivers (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 96). Another Soviet scholar involved in the ancient and early medieval history of Azerbaijan, Academician A. Krymskiy, divided Caucasian Albania into two parts with the Kura River as the border. The term "Arran" was associated only with the right bank of the river, while the left bank is now called Shirvan (Krymskiy, 1934, pp. 289-295). He also used this division in the study of Christianity in the region, claiming that Byzantine Orthodoxy spread on the left bank of the Kura River, while the Armenian Monophysite sect spread on the right bank. Around 700 AD, the Albanian-Armenian Church on the right bank of the Kura River cursed the Orthodox Church, which held a firm position on the left bank (Krymskiy, 1934, pp. 294–295, 299).

The archaeologist F. Osmanov wrote that the names of the mentioned settlements and cities had no direct analogue in modern toponymy (Osmanov, 1984, p. 17). R. Vahidov noted that the territory of Azerbaijan had not been thoroughly studied from the historical-geographical and toponymical point of view until that time (Vahidov, 1961, p. 15).

In 1925, archaeologist S. Qazıyev conducted reconnaissance work in Gabala. In 1926, I. Jafarzadeh and D. Sharifov carried out excavations in the Yaloylutapa area (Ismizade, 1956, p. 9). These studies were the first in a series of complex investigations reflected in Ö. İsmizadə's 1956 book, Yaloylutapa

Culture. Although Lalayan had conducted archaeological excavations in this area before the Soviet period in 1915, Ö. İsmizadə noted his low professional level (İsmizade, 1956, p. 7). In the 1930s, influenced by N. Marr's autochthonist views, Azerbaijani archaeologist A. Alekberov argued against seeking ancestors for the Armenians and Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan's territory elsewhere, stating that they were historical locals. He claimed that both peoples originated from local Garabagh and shared the same culture (Alekberov, 1932, pp. 191–192).

In the spring of 1939, the first version of the History of the Azerbaijan SSR was completed and discussed at a scientific session of the History and Philosophy Department of the USSR Academy of Sciences in May. The book identified the ethnic identity of the Azerbaijani population as Azerbaijani and presented the Armenians as the local population of Garabagh (AzFAN, 1939, pp. 35–36, 72–74). In the book, S.T. Yeremyan wrote a section superficially reflecting the pre-feudal history of Albania, based on minimal information from ancient sources and without using archaeological data (Osmanov, 1984, p. 13). During the war years, no large-scale archaeological research was conducted in Azerbaijan; only reconnaissance work related to accidental finds was performed (Khalilov, 1985, p. 16). After World War II, the Soviet empire began to pursue a victorious state policy. On June 7, 1945, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov informed Turkey's ambassador in Moscow that the USSR demanded a review of the Soviet-Turkish border (Suny, 1993, p. 225).

To settle Armenians in the claimed territories, the Soviet government organized the repatriation of Armenians living abroad (Gal et al., 2010, p. 123). Between 1946 and 1948, 90,000–100,000 Armenians moved to Soviet Armenia from various countries (Liberedian, 2007, p. 25). Simultaneously, the mass displacement of the Azerbaijani population of the Armenian SSR began between 1947 and 1950, with 100,000 Azerbaijanis being deported (Saparov, 2003, pp. 187–188). In 1950, the rise of Russian nationalism, inspired by Stalin, ended Marr's entire theory, including stadialism. Stalin declared that N. Marr was not a Marxist and that his teaching was wrong. The "stadial theory" was rejected (Lozny, 2017, p. 76). In 1950, V. N. Leviatov's article attempted to shed light on a number of socio-economic problems in the history of Albania (Osmanov, 1984, p. 13). Extensive stationary archaeological research was carried out in Mingachevir for seven years (1946–1953) under the leadership of S. Qazıyev (Khalilov, 1985, p. 16).

From the 1950s onwards, the southwestern part of the Azerbaijan SSR's territory was presented in the Armenian SSR as part of ancient Armenia. Armenian historians claimed that the ethnogenetic process resulted in the emergence of a Greater Armenia composed of a single language people (Yeremian, 1951, pp. 49–50; Arakelian & Ioannisian, 1951, pp. 35, 38). S. Yeremyan was an ardent defender of the autochthonist conception of Armenian ethnogenesis (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 50). R. Hewsens noted that the majority of the population living there were neither Armenian nor even Indo-European (Hewsens, 1982, p. 33). In the publications of the period, the idea that the population of the Arshakid kingdom consisted only of Armenians became common (Shnirelman, 2001, p. 8). Generally, archaeological research in the claimed territories was very weak until that period (Melikset-Bek, 1966, p. 6).

One of the leading figures in Albanian studies in the 1950s was undoubtedly Z. Yampolski. In 1957, he claimed that the temple built in Gis was located in the village of Kish in Shaki (Yampolski, 1957, p. 156). Since 1959, archaeological expeditions have been organized to the Gabala, Shamakhi, Aghdam, and Gakh regions (Göyüşov, 1986, p. 72). Albanologist researchers considered K. Trever's book, published in 1959, to be the first significant scientific work reflecting general historical and archaeological research on Albania (Shukurov, 2023, p. 12). In 1962, Z. Yampolski noted that researchers were unable to definitively describe the social structure that existed in Albania (Yampolski, 1962, p. 11). In the 1960s, Z. Bunyadov determined the foundations of the Azerbaijani Albanology concept (Shukurov, 2023, p. 13).

Between 1958 and 1973, archaeological excavations were carried out in Khınıslı, where more than 3,500 artifacts were discovered (Khalilov, 1985, p. 19). Prior to this, no archaeological excavations

had been conducted in the Shamakhi region (Jafarzadeh, 1985, p. 13). Permanent archaeological excavations began in the city of Gabala in 1959. Material culture samples belonging to the Antique period were discovered (Khalilov, 1985, p. 21). As a result of these studies, the historical borders of Albania were equated with the borders of the Azerbaijan SSR (Khalilov, 1985, p. 11; Göyüşov, 1990, p. 177). Archaeologist R. Goyushov noted that the population living in the plain part was subjected to Islamization, the population of the southeast of the Lesser Caucasus to Gregorianization, and the population of the southwest of the Greater Caucasus to Georgianization (Göyüşov, 1984, p. 145). The research of historian F. Mammadova on the political-geographical history of Albania was the last comprehensive work that fully reflected the ideological concept of Soviet Albanology (Mammadova, 1977, 1986).

**Conclusion.** The study demonstrates that the archaeology of the ancient period in Azerbaijan during the Soviet era was directly dependent on the political and ideological conjuncture of the central government. This dependency significantly shaped the direction of scientific research and the interpretation of findings. Based on the analysis, the following generalizations can be made:

**Ideological Paradigms:** Between the 1920s and 1950s, archaeological data were interpreted through the lens of class struggle and within the framework of N. Marr's theories of "stadialism" and "autochthonism."

**Political Conjuncture:** Following Stalin's intervention in linguistics in the 1950s, "stadialism" was rejected. However, archaeology subsequently became a new arena for imperial interests and territorial claims by neighboring republics.

**Ethnogenetic Disputes:** The territorial claims put forward by the Armenian SSR regarding the southwestern lands of Azerbaijan were accompanied by attempts to "Armenianize" the archaeological heritage. In response, Azerbaijani Caucasian Albanian studies developed its own defensive concept through the work of scholars such as Z. Bunyadov, I. Aliyev, and F. Mammadova.

**Expansion of the Material Base:** Despite ideological pressures, large-scale excavations in areas such as Mingachevir, Gabala, and Khinisli enabled the collection of rich factual material regarding Azerbaijan's ancient period.

In conclusion, Soviet archaeology served not only as a science studying the past but also as a tool for rationalizing the state's official ideology. Re-evaluating the research of this period by purging it of imperial thought is one of the primary tasks facing modern Azerbaijani historiography. The influence of Marxism and Autochthonism on archaeology in Azerbaijan reflects the broader historical and political changes in the region. While Marxism provided a materialist approach to understanding the past, Autochthonism localized the view of tangible cultural heritage. Both ideologies have left lasting imprints on the study and interpretation of the region's rich and complex history.

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