

< 068 > **1139 September 30 Ganzak [Azerbaijan]**

▷ **landslides, the obstruction of streams, the formation of lakes,
oil rising to the surface and burning** ◁

- sources 1 Step'annos, in Alishan (1893, p.232); colophon in Yovsep'ean (1951, no.166, cols.351-354); Sam. An., *Comp.*, p.132; Nezami Gan., *Iskandar-nama*, p.33; Bar Hebr., *Chron.*, pp.302ff.; Mxit. Gosh, *Chron.*, p.361; Kyr. Gan., *Hist.*, pp.108ff.; Step. Orb., *Hist.*, II, p.87
- sources 2 Mxit' Ayrv., *Hist.*, p.63; Vard. Ar., *Hist.*, p.123; Yovh. Imast., *Work*, p.133; Ibn al-Athir, *al Kamil*, XI, p.77; al-Isfahani, *Rec.*, II, p.190; al-Suyuti, *Kashf*, p.24
- historiography Incicean (1822); Brosset (1870-71); Minorsky (1951); Dowsett (1958); Cuneo (1988)
- literature Abich (1882); Taher (1979); Nikonov and Nikonova (1986); Nikonov (1987); Nikonov (1991)
- catalogues d. von Hoff (1840); Perrey (1850); Mallet (1853) Kostaneanc' (1902); Sieberg (1932a); Step'anyan (1964); *Ambraseys and Adams (1989); Zeyt'unyan (1991); Guidoboni and Traina (1995)
- catalogues p. Poirier and Taher (1980); Kondorskaya and Shebalin (1982); al-Hakeem (1988); Bektur and Alpay (1988); Karapetian (1991); Shebalin and Tatevossian (1997); Berberian (1997); Piroussian (1997)

On 30 September 1139, a disastrous earthquake destroyed the city of Ganzak (also called Elizavetpol' or Kirovabad; now Ganca) in Azerbaijan, causing widespread destruction in its province of Arjax. At that time, the city of Ganzak was occupied by the Seljukids. It was almost completely destroyed, and the churches of St.Gregory and St.Sargis suffered total collapse. According to various sources, there was a very large number of victims at Ganzak: reports give figures varying between 230,000 and 300,000. These figures are exaggerated, however, for they do not fit the population levels for the area, and must therefore simply be taken as an indication that the death toll was very high.

The earthquake also caused the total collapse of the church at Halbat and the collapse of the roof of the church at Tat'ev. A number of other towns were also destroyed in the ancient cantons of P'arisos and Xac'en, which became the province of Arjax.

The earthquake also had substantial environmental effects: we are told that there was a landslide at Ganzak, causing the collapse of the church of St.Gregory and that of St.Sargis; and oil was seen to rise to the surface and burn near the city. The earthquake triggered a massive landslide on Mt. Alharak which obstructed a river, thereby creating an expanse of water still in existence a century after the earthquake, as reported by the 13th century chronicler Kyriakos of Ganzak (Kirakos Ganjakeci).

The earthquake is recorded in primary Armenian sources of the time, and made a deep

impression outside Armenia as well, for it is also recorded in Arab chronicles of that century and later.

There is fragmentary information about the reconstruction of the city of Ganzak in a 12th century Persian poem entitled *Iskandar-nama*. In the dedication at the beginning of the second part of the poem, the author, Nezami of Ganza, recalls the rebuilding of Ganzak by Prince Pixin, son of the *atabek* (local lord) Abu Bakr.

Our primary evidence for the earthquake comes from Bishop Step'annos (12th century), whose account of the event is quoted by Alishan (1893, p.232):

"Earthquake at Ganzak in the year 587 [15 February 1138 – 14 February 1139]: the earth trembled to its foundations, and the earth flew up over St. Gregory and over the *gavit* [a hall in front of monastic churches], and it then collapsed".

շարժն Գանձակայ ի ՇՁԷ Թուականին, և դողաց երկիր ի հիմանց. և շրջեկան թռեալ ի անկաւ ի վերայ Ս. Գրիգորոյն և գաւթին որ ի դեանն գայր, և փլոյց առ հասարակ.

Another account of the event — unfortunately fragmentary — is to be found in the colophon of a 12th century Armenian religious manuscript, perhaps contemporary with the event, and now preserved in Venice (San Lazzaro ms. 352, in Yovsep'ean 1951, no.166, cols.351-4):

"Many bodies of the saints and others were buried by this earthquake; they entered into the entrails of the earth, which you can contemplate with bitterness and fear. Famine [...] sword [...] enemy attacks and enslavement of the countryside".

Վասն որոյ շարժմունք երկրի... սրբոց եւ անսրբոց յոլովից Թաղեցան մարմինք ի սիրտ մտանելով երկրի խորոց, զի հայիս սաստիւ եւ դողայ: Սովբ... սուր... յարձակումն թշնամեաց և գերումն աշխարհաց.

However, the most accurate descriptions of the event were left by historians who were for the most part of later times. Samuel of Ani (12th century, p.132) reports:

"1121 [sic]. In the year 588 [15 February 1139 – 14 February 1140], on 17 *Areg* [29 September], the city of Ganzak was destroyed in an earthquake. And the [churches of the] great saints Gregory and Sargis were engulfed. And the church of Halbat collapsed".

և ճիա: ի շճը Թւին` ի ժէ արեգ ամսոյ շարժմամբ կործանեցաւ Գանձակ քաղաք. և սուրբ վարդապետքն` Գրիգոր և Սարգիս` ընկղմեցան. եւ եկեղեցին Հաղպատայ փլուզանի

For the monastic complex of Halbat see Cuneo (1988, pp.302-307, no.147).

The reliable Syrian historian Bar Hebraeus (1225–1286) also tells us the number of victims at Ganzak:

"And in the year five hundred and thirty-three of the Arabs [1138], in the second month [i.e. *Safar* = Oct.-Nov.], there was a severe earthquake in Ganzak, a city in Persian territory. And two hundred and thirty thousand souls perished there, and the whole city was completely engulfed, and black waters burst up from the ground; and those who escaped went out and took up their abode in the cemeteries and bewailed their [dead] relations". [Budge's transl.]

Եւ ի շրջոց Գանձակ քաղաքի արեւելոյ կողմէն շարժեցաւ երկիրը. և շրջեցաւ ի վերայ Ս. Գրիգորոյն և Սարգիսի. և ի վերայ ի քաղաքի շարժեցաւ երկիրը. և շրջեցաւ ի վերայ ի քաղաքի շարժեցաւ երկիրը. և շրջեցաւ ի վերայ ի քաղաքի շարժեցաւ երկիրը.

Mxit'ar Gosh (12th-13th century, p.361), one of the historians of Caucasian Albania (a region of Armenian culture between Armenia and Azerbaijan), provides important evidence about the extent of the earthquake:

“On 18 *Areg* [1 October], during the night of Friday to Saturday, on the day of the feast of St. George [30 September], the fury of the wrath of God fell upon the world; the violence of the earth and powerful destruction came with terrible shocks which reached this land of Albania, in accordance with which it is written: ‘Who moves this our nether [world] to its foundations, and the pillars thereof tremble’ [*Job*. 9:6]; and similarly in another [passage]: ‘Who looks at the earth and makes it tremble’ [*Ps.* 103/104:32]. This earthquake caused much destruction in many places in the cantons of P[’]arisos and Xac[’]en, as well as in the fields and mountains. It also caused the capital Ganzak to be dashed into Hell, swallowing up its inhabitants; for on all sides of its surface it hugged them to its bosom, and in the mountain regions many fortresses and villages were demolished together with monasteries and churches, which collapsed on the heads of their inhabitants, and innumerable people were killed by the destruction of buildings and towers. And this came to pass in the year 588 of the Armenian era [15 February 1139 – 14 February 1140]”.

Յամսեանն արեգի որ օր ութուտասան էր ամսոյն, ի գիշերի ուրբաթու ի լուսանալ շաբաթուն, յորում աւուր տօն էր Սրբոյն Գէորգայ, զարթեալ ցասումն բարկութեան Աստուծոյ ի վերայ աշխարհի՝ ի բռնութենէ հողմոց, և շարժեալ անհնարին դողմամբ սաստիկ կործանումն հասուցանելով աշխարհին Աղուանից, ըստ գրելումն, թէ, “Ո շարժէ զառ ներքոյն երկրի ի հիմանց, և սիւնք նորա դողան. և ըստ միւսումն, Ո հայի յերկիր և տայ դողալ սմա”: Որով շարժմամբ բազում աւերուած լինէր ընդ բազում տեղիս ի գաւառիս Փառիսոսոյ և Խաչինոյ, առ հասարակ ի դաշտս և ի լեռնս. յորում և մայրաքաղաք Գանձակ առ հասարակ յանդունդս կործանիցի, խորասոյգ առնելով զբնակիչս իւր. քանզի չորս կողմ երեսաց նորա ամփոփեաց զնոսա ի ծոց իւր. և ի լեռնակողմանս բազում դղեակք և գիւղք տապալեցան հանդերձ վանորայիւք և եկեղեցեօք, որք փլան ի վերայ գլխոյ բնակչաց իւրեանց. յորում և անթիւք սատակեցան ի կործանմանէ շինուածոց և աշտարակաց. և լինէր այս ի ՇՁԴ, թուականին Հայոց.

P[’]arisos and Xac[’]en are the ancient names of cantons in the province of Arjax, which corresponds in large part to the present-day Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh in southern Azerbaijan (*Lrnayin Larabal*, cf. Dowsett, 1958, p.482, nos.3 and 4).

Kyriakos of Ganzak (13th century, p.108ff.) reports:

“In the year 588 [15 February 1139 – 14 February 1140], there was a strong earthquake which destroyed the city of Ganzak, and its buildings collapsed on top of its inhabitants. Demetrius, king of Iberia, father of David[’] and Geworg, came and took away the gates of the city to his country. The mountain of Alharak collapsed in the earthquake and blocked a stream which crossed it, turning it into a lake which still exists to this day. Excellent fish are to be found there”.

Ի ՇՁԴ թուականին եղել շարժ սաստիկ և կործանեցաւ քաղաք Գանձակ, և տապալեցան շինուածք որ ի նմա, ի վերայ բնակչաց իւրոց. և եկն թագաւոր վրաց Դեմետրէ հայրն Դաւթի և Գէորգեայ, և տարաւ զդրունս քաղաքին յաշխարհն իւր. փլաւ և լեռնն Ալհարակ ի շարժմանէն և արգել զձորակն որ անցանէր ընդ մէջ նորա. և եղել ծովակ, որ է մինչեւ ցայսօր. լինին ի նմա ձկուք ազնիւք.

He repeats this information a little further on, and also quotes the report of the earthquake given by Samuel of Ani.

Step[’]annos Orbelean (13th century), records the earthquake as occurring in the year 587 [15 February 1138 – 14 February 1139], at the time of Ter Grigor, patriarch of Siwnik[’], and states:

“The roof of the large church of Tat[’]ev collapsed entirely and fell on St. Gregory, and hence on the *gavit*[’] which stood in front of its door, causing it to collapse”.

և գմբէթն մեծ եկեղեցւոհն ի Տաթեւ բոլորապոյր շրջեկաւն թռեալ ի վերայ սուրբ Գրիգորոյն և գաւիթ որ ի դրանն կայր. և փլոյց առ հասարակ:



1139
September 30

fig. 31

Further on, Orbelean mentions the restoration of the dome of the church of the Holy Apostles at Tat'ev in the second half of the century; but it is not certain whether the damage in question was caused by an earthquake. Mxit'ar Ayrivanec'i (13th century, p.63) dates the earthquake to the year 590 (1141-1142), whereas Vardan Arewelc'i (13th century, ch.72, p.123) gives the date as 588.

The event is also reported by Yovhannes Imastaser (13th century, p.133). The Arabic chroniclers al-Isfahani (12th century, II, 190 = 533 H.) and Ibn al-Athir (12th-13th century, 11/77) do not agree as to the number of victims. The former gives the date as 8 September and records 300,000 victims; the latter, like Bar Hebraeus, reports 230,000 victims. There is information about the sources in Dowsett (1958). Taher (1979, p.308) dates an earthquake at "Janza" to March 1143 on the basis of al-Suyuti (*Kashf*, p.24).

As for the Persian poem *Iskandar-nama*, the reference to the earthquake is reported in the (non-critical) edition by V.Dastgard (p.33) where the poet seems to refer to a prince called "Pisxin", who is said to have restored the city of Ganza, struck by an earthquake "on the eve of Saturday". The poem was in fact dedicated to the *atabek* Abu Bakr, who died in 1210, but the final verses glorify a third prince, who is not easily identifiable. Minorsky (1951) argued that this part of the poem had been rewritten, but that in any case the original version referred to the *atabek* Abu Bakr and his son Pishxin, who can be identified as the "Beshken the Brave" of the *Georgian Chronicle*.

▲	1139 09 30 at night	★ = 40 24 46 14	I ₀ = X	Me = 6.3	Sites: 5	EE: 2	
localities	lat.	long.	I	localities	lat.	long.	I
Ganca AZ	40 40	46 19	X-XI EE	Halbat ARM	41 06	44 43	A (IX)
■ Parisos area AZ	40 29	45 48	X	Tat'ev ARM	39 23	46 14	C (VII-VIII)
■ Xac'en area AZ	40 03	46 35	X	Mount Alharak AZ	40 23	46 14	EE