Twitter Thread by Patrick Chovanec



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1. Let's talk about Albanians. No, not THOSE Albanians, in the Balkans. The Caucasian Albanians, the pre-Turkish inhabitants of the land now known as Azerbaijan. ■■



2. Yeah, I know, there's also an "Iberia" there, which should cause even more confusion (with Spain), but let's focus on "Albania".

3. This ancient church in the village of Nij (or Nic), just south of the Caucasus Mountains, belongs to the Udi people, a Christian minority in Azerbaijan descended from the area's pre-Turkic Caucasian Albanians. ■■



4. Nearby are the ruins of the Caucasian Albanian capital of “old” Gabala (Qebele), where I was given a personal tour by one of the resident archeologists (just for showing up). ■■



5. Only a very tiny portion of the extensive site has been excavated. “Every place you dig,” the archeologist told me, “you will find artifacts.” This whole field is a city waiting to be uncovered.



6. Several different layers have been uncovered in this trench: pre-Christian (around 1AD), Christian (around 300-400AD), and later Islamic, in graves leading up to the city wall.



7. The Caucasian Albanians were quite tall, and had blond hair and green eyes. These pre-Christian burials at Gabala include grave goods to accompany the dead into the afterlife. ■■



8. Why are all European-descended white people called "Caucasians"? Because two German racial (and quite racist) theorists in the 1700s and 1800s admired the "fair" features of Georgians, Udi, and other Caucasian people and saw them as a "pure" example of a certain racial type.



9. These theories have largely been debunked, but it's true that the ancient Caucasian Albanians would probably have looked more "European" to us than most present-day Azeris. Not unlike the ancient mummies found in western China, or some tribes in the far north of Pakistan.

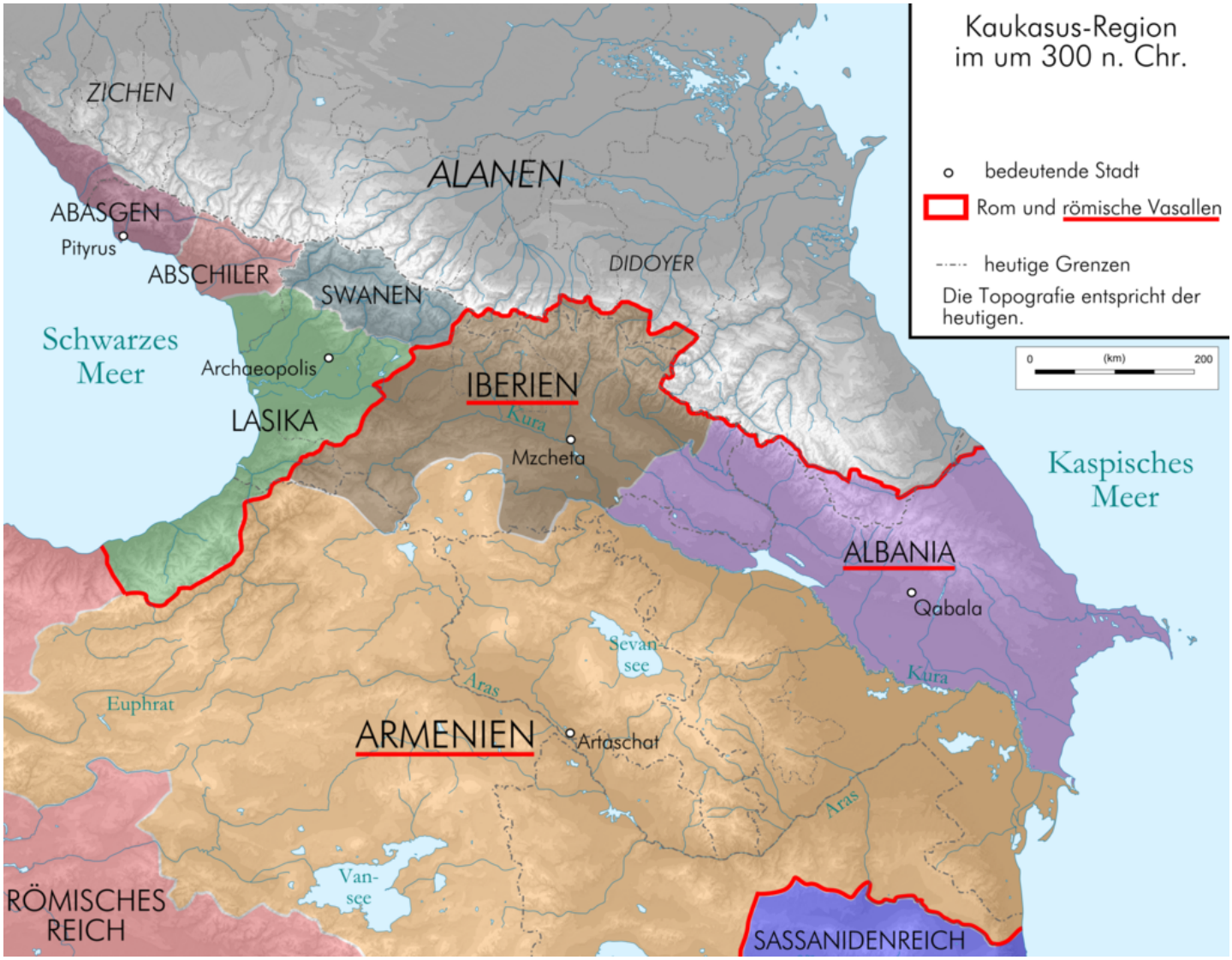


10. And why "Albanian"? First of all, it wasn't the name these people used for themselves. It was what the ancient Greeks and Romans called them. Herodotus even mentions Albanians from the Caucasus fighting on the side of the Persian Empire at Marathon.



11. "Albania" probably derives from the Indo-European root "alb", for hill, which lives today in the name "Alps". So it meant these were people who lived in the mountains. The same etymology may be true for today's Balkan Albanians, though this is disputed.

12. In later Roman times, the kingdom of Albania, like Armenia, was a client state of the Roman Empire, a buffer between it and Sassanid Persia, with its capital at Gabala (see map).



13. Though the most prominent ruins on the site, the gates of Gabala do not date from this period, but much later Muslim rule (the archeologist told me).



14. The ancient (and strikingly beautiful) Christian church at Kish, just north of Sheki, Azerbaijan, also has deep links to the Caucasian Albanians. ■■



15. This is a very ancient site of worship. Beneath the main altar lie the remains of pre-Christian animal sacrifices.



16. Down a inside well, and out in front of the church at Kish, lie the remains of burials dating back to the 2nd Century AD.



17. So as you walk the streets of Kish, in the foothills of the Caucasian “Alps”, perhaps you get an even better feel for the Caucasian Albanians than the ruins of their capital at Gabala. ■■



18. So just remember, there once was another country called Albania, far away from present-day Albania. Now it's called Azerbaijan. (And another country called Iberia, far from Iberia. But that's a story for another day.) ■■


SCALE
0 50 100 150 km
0 50 100 miles
Armenian lands
Georgian lands
Albanian lands and border territories
Line of 387
Line of 591
Black Sea
Caspian Sea
CAUCASUS MOUNTAINS
ABKHAZIA
LAZICA
SUANIA
IBERIA
GOGARENE
ARRAN
ALBANIA
SHIRWAN
ROMAN EMPIRE
ARMENIA
UPPER ARMENIA
SOPHENE
ARZANENE
MOXOENE
GARDMAN
SIUNIA
VANAND
TAO KOLA
CHOLARZENE
ATROPATENE
ALBAK MAJOR
ALBAK MINOR
Ts'khimi (Dioscurias)
P'ot'i (Phassis)
R. Rioni (Phassis)
Kutais
Petra
Artanuji
Mts'khet'a
Armazi
Tiflis
Samshvilde
Ujarma
(CHOSROID) KAHETIA
Bolnisi
Qabala
Lori
Kars
Ani
Ereruyk'
Bagaran
Valarshapat
Dvin
Avan
Artaxata
Partav (Bardha'a)
Smbatavan
Sper
Theodosiopolis
Bagavan
Dariunk
Tat'ev
Nakhchevan
Avarayr
Archesh
Manazkert
Arsamosata
Khlat'
Mush
Van
Balesh (Bitlis)
Ostan
Martyropolis
Amida
Tigris
Araxes
Euphrates
Hrazdan
Sevan
Urmia
(BAGRATID) SYSPIRITIS
(MAMIKONID) ACILISENE
(MAMIKONID) TARAUN
(MAMIKONID) BAGRAVNDENE
(BAGRATID) KOGOVIT
(ARTSAUNI) MARDASTAN
(BAGRATID) TAMORITIS
(ARTSRUNI) ANDZEVATS'IK
(KAMSARAKAN) ARSHARUNIK'
ERUSHET'I (GUARAMID)
JAVAKHET'I
ARTANI
ASHOTS
TASHIR
AMATUNI
SIRACENE
RSHTUNIK'
(GUARAMID)
(MAMIKONID)
TAYK
(Boas)
R. Chorokh
R. Kur (Cyrus)
R. Alazani
R. Iori
38°E
40°E
42°E
44°E
46°E
48°E
50°E
42°N
40°N
38°N